



"... Could never be expected to produce a modern Pilgrim's Progress"

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discipline, and we have to guard against attributing our troubles to the imperfections of a system rather than the limitations of the individuals who work within it. Had Shakespeare or Bunyan been given a standard modern education, it could not at the very worst have done more than warp their genius; in the same way, if we took the wise step of putting Miss Wilhelmina Stitch in Bedford gaol and giving her only the Bible to read, she could never be expected to produce a modern Pilgrim's Progress."

Teachers Can't Do Everything

In attempting to remedy the state of affairs, we need much more than the school teacher's efforts. It is clear that the community as a whole is affected. Cultural interests generally, are being ignored. Not just one Australian investigator bears witness to it, but a great body of testimony through the English-speaking world. One may mention such books as the Lynds' *Middletown*, Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*, I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism*, F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson's *Culture and Environment*, D. Thompson's *Reading and Discrimination*. Scientifically and mechanically the standards of our civilisation are high and tending all the time to become higher; culturally and emotionally, our standards, as reflected in our literature and use of language are low and tending to become lower. To discuss and account for this is beyond the scope of this article, but the evidence of it is omnipresent: readers of *The Listener* have only to refer to the articles by Joad and C. Day Lewis in the number of August 25 this year.

What is to be done? Should we perhaps incarcerate not only Miss Stitch but also a representative selection of editors, preachers, politicians, radio announcers, and film producers? Should we arrest and shoot as hostages a group of parents and teachers to encourage the others? It scarcely seems profitable. Certainly we have long to wait for democracy's slumbering conscience to awaken. "There was perhaps never such an age as this in which so many unreflective people were so complacent." It may be—it is almost probable—that things must become worse before they begin to be better. But meanwhile, the reflective minority must not be defeatist, but must speak out. To quote Biaggini for a last time: "Our general social environment is increasingly hostile to culture: in the circumstances, nothing else can be done than to make a frontal attack on the evils that beset us."

To conclude, let me make one or two suggestions where the schools and universities in their teaching of English could help (for the school and the teacher are not powerless). In the teaching of English, teachers should be bold enough to go outside the classroom and textbook to the community about them. They should take their examples not just from literary classics, but from the newspaper, the periodical, the film and the radio. They should not hesitate to discuss what is vicious and corrupt in modern English. "No man can embrace True Art until he has explored and cast out False Art," said Blake, and the maxim that a pupil should see only good literary models in school while he is surrounded with corrupt suggestions outside, is sheer nonsense.



Secondly, I would make a plea for the introduction of a greater intellectual content into our English teaching. Many of our teachers who realise that teaching English is something more than teaching grammar, spelling and punctuation, are nevertheless wasting their own and their pupils' time by pursuing the will o' the wisp of the imagination. The ability to write poetry or imaginative prose is rare; it is very little susceptible of being taught and, if present, it is not easily suppressed. To judge by the gruesome results achieved, I fear our teachers equate the imaginative with the whimsical. Lamb has much to answer for in our schools. Instead, we must have more writing of a direct and realistic nature, based on the life about the pupil, on which he can write with knowledge and sincerity. We cannot have too much analysis of the true meaning and rational content of statements. Let us spread a love of reading, but at the same time teach a rational discrimination.

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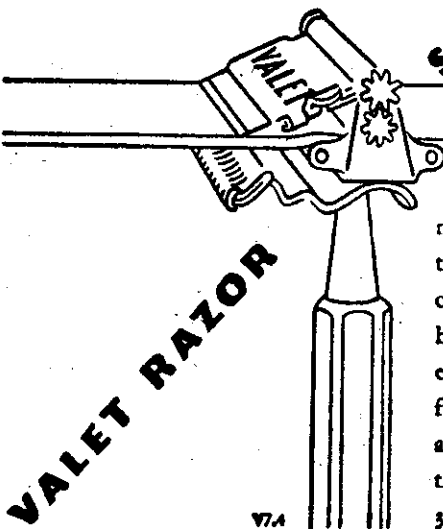
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