

CHAPTER THREE

Oratorical Culture and the Teaching of English

I remember that men were divided as Carlyleists or anti-Carlyleists, Coleridgeans or anti-Coleridgeans, and so on, and that literary, historic, and philosophic theories were as hotly discussed as the current political questions of the day.

JAMES B. ANGELL

The college teaching of English literature in the preprofessional era suffered from the same limitation making the teaching of the classics: the routine of study obscured the theory supposedly justifying it. This was not surprising, since the earliest methods of teaching English literature were copied from those used to teach the classics. Literature was subordinated to grammar, etymology, rhetoric, logic, elocution, theme writing, and textbook literary history and biography—everything, a later generation would complain, except a truly literary study. And whatever the emphasis, the recitation method remained in force. Still, the classroom study of English literature connected more creatively than did the classical work with the literary culture of the college and the larger society. English composition writing, declamation, and debate had practical outlets in college literary magazines, oratorical and writing competitions, and literary and debating societies. English courses were usually as drab as classical ones, but the surrounding literary culture provided an enlivening context that the courses themselves lacked.

“ENGLISH SHOULD BE STUDIED AS GREEK IS”

The prescribed course of study left little room for the modern languages and literatures, which were believed to lack the disciplinary rigor of the classics. The Yale Report had dismissed the modern languages as frivolous subjects, “to be studied, as an accomplishment, rather than as a necessary acquisition.” A modern language scholar

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recalled in 1895 that at Yale he had “passed through four years of a college course without once hearing from the lips of an instructor in the class-room the name of a single English author or the title of a single English classic.” The only textbook he had studied under the professor of “English” was “the oration of Demosthenes on the Crown in the original Greek. There had been nothing exceptional in this.”

Outside conservative Yale, courses dealing with English, American, and European literary works had arisen sporadically since the eighteenth century. But these courses were usually optional and therefore unable to compete with the time-consuming classical requirements. Attempts at “parallel” courses of study offering the option of a modern language or scientific program were abortive. Even in the pioneering program in English begun at Lafayette College in 1855 by the philological scholar Francis A. March, students could take “two terms of Anglo-Saxon and Modern English” only after they had “nearly finished their Latin, Greek, French and German.” Where English was required, as one scholar recalled in 1894, its “ill repute was increased . . . by the makeshift way in which time was grudged out to it in the curriculum. Under the name of ‘rhetoricals,’ English declamations, orations, and essays used to be sandwiched in where some little crevice opened between other studies, once a week perhaps, or at some irregular hour supposedly unavailable for anything else.”

One reason for this neglect was that since the modern languages and literatures were considered mere social accomplishments, they were looked upon as feminine preoccupations. This explains why these subjects made earlier headway in the female academies that proliferated in the middle decades of the century. There the young women, as Ann Douglas notes, “were seldom asked to tackle the masculine subjects of mathematics, theology, Greek, and the natural sciences.” Similarly, because the new women’s colleges founded after the Civil War challenged the assumption that women’s minds were incapable of rigorous intellectual tasks, they tended to adopt the classical curriculum. As Earnest says, “the best answer” to the sort of “male paranoia” that claimed women could not do the same kind of strenuous mental work as men “seemed to be a demonstration that women could excel in the sanctified classical curriculum.” The curricula of Vassar, Smith, and Wellesley “derived from the old prewar classical course of study as it had been perfected at such places as Yale, Princeton, Amherst, and Williams.” The decision to give the women of these colleges the standard fare for males “was dictated by the necessity to prove that women could undertake a serious course of

study." The more ornamental the conception of women a college entertained, the more likely that that college featured modern languages and literatures. This reputation for effeminacy would have to be effaced from the modern languages before they could become respectable in the university. One of the attractions of Germanic philology would be that as a hard science its manliness was not in question.

The transition from classics to English was probably less dramatic and more gradual than it has generally been taken to be. Following the maxim that "English should be studied as Greek is," early teachers of English copied the dismal methods long used to teach the classics. Francis A. March, describing how he first conceived the "experiment" of an English course at Leicester Academy in 1845, stated that he taught "English like Latin or Greek." Teachers then, he said elsewhere, "were fond of repeating after Dr. Arnold of Rugby, 'What a treat it would be to teach Shakespeare to a good class of young Greeks in regenerate Athens; to dwell upon him line by line and word by word, and so to get all his pictures and thoughts leisurely into one's mind.'" March was an Amherst graduate whose interest in language studies was said to have been inspired by hearing a series of lectures given by Noah Webster. He would become a pioneering figure in the modern languages' dethronement of the classics, but his methods show how strong a link remained between classical and modern philology. For March, dwelling "line by line and word by word" on a literary text merely meant adapting the old formal recitations to English texts. March's classes at Leicester consisted of "hearing a short Grammar lesson, the rest of the hour reading Milton as if it were Homer, calling for the meaning of words, their etymology when interesting, the relations of words, parsing when it would help, the connection of clauses, the mythology, the biography and other illustrative matter, suited to the class."

March's description makes no mention of the meaning of Milton's works. When he adapted his Leicester English courses to college work at Lafayette in 1855, March tried to put things "on a higher plane," assigning "work upon Anglo-Saxon and English texts to read and understand them." By "understand," though, March did not mean the grasp of a work's larger meanings, but a "linguistic study" that did not get beyond the analysis of isolated words and constructions. What this must have come down to in practice is grotesquely illustrated by the textbook March published in 1879, *Method of Philological Study of the English Language*. At the head of each page of March's text appear at most one or two lines from *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Julius Caesar*,

Paradise Lost, and other classics, festooned with an enormous battery of questions entirely on philological points: for example, "On is the sign of a combination between what words? *Lighted* + *on place* is what kind of combination? Does *on place* complete or extend the predicate?"

In principle, March's manual was only an extension of the kind of philological textbook of English that had come into popularity in the schools as early as 1867 with William Rolfe's American version of Craik's *Julius Caesar*. March went Craik one better, for to Craik's ratio of 82 pages of philological notes to 102 pages of Shakespeare's play, March managed a full page of notes for every one or two lines of Shakespeare or Bunyan. Except for its superior pedantry, March's text was typical in the stress it put on material that lends itself to memory work and its assumption that the English studies of undergraduates should consist of memorizing grammatical and literary-historical facts from a manual.

Brander Matthews described having at Columbia "to procure a certain manual of English literature, and to recite from its pages the names of writers, the titles of books, and the dates of publication—facts of little significance and of slight value unless we happened to be familiar with the several authors as a result of home influence, or of private taste." Matthews says his class was "not introduced to the actual writings of any of the authors, nor was any hint dropped that we might possibly be benefited by reading them for ourselves."

How teachers must have used the manuals can be inferred from the suggested examination questions appearing in many of them, always closely keyed to the commentary. Here are some on Edmund Spenser from Cleveland's widely used *Compendium of English Literature* (1857):

Date of birth and death? In whose reign did he flourish? Repeat Thomson's lines. What is said of his parentage? What does Gibbon say? How did he enter Cambridge? What is a "sizer," and why so called? What work did he first publish? What is it? In what capacity did he go to Ireland? What grant did he receive? Where did he go to reside? Who visited him there? What did he style him? What was he persuaded to do? What does Campbell say of Raleigh's visit to Spenser? What is Spenser's great work? Of how many books does it consist? How many is it said he intended to write? Did he probably finish his design? What happened to him in Ireland? Where did he die and when?

We can only speculate whether the students who memorized and recited the answers to these questions actually read any of Spenser's verse. The chances are they did not, if only because texts even of

standard authors were either unavailable or too expensive. The publication of annotated classics in cheap editions was a condition of the growth of high school and college teaching of English literature in the 1880s.

Teachers who deviated from the usual textbook approach to literature tended toward the other extreme of impressionism. This word seems fairly to characterize the popular Harvard courses in Dante given by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1835-54) and James Russell Lowell (1855-86) as well as Lowell's senior course in *Modern Literature*, begun in 1858. According to Lowell's biographer, Horace E. Scudder, "the formalities of academic work were of little concern to Lowell." He found "examinations of his classes . . . wearisome functions," and he often neglected to attend faculty meetings and to read student papers. Lowell "turned the lecture and recitation hour into a *causerie*." In his Dante course, for example,

The actual exercise in the class-room was simple enough and unconventional. The classes were not large, and the relation of the teacher to his students was that of an older friend who knew in a large way the author they were studying, and drew upon his own knowledge and familiarity with the text for comment and suggestion, rather than troubled himself much to find out how much his pupils knew. . . . Toward the close of the hour, question and answer, or free discussion yielded to the stream of personal reminiscence or abundant reflection upon which Lowell would by this time be launched. Especially would he recall scenes in Florence, sketch in words the effects of the Arno, Giotto's Tower, the church in which Dante was baptized, where he himself had seen children held at the same front. . . . Suddenly, glancing at his watch before him,—a time-piece which was as idly whimsical as its owner,—he would stop, bow and walk quickly out of the room, the men rising respectfully as he left.

And the listeners? They went away, a few carelessly amused at the loose scholastic exercise and complacent over the evasion of work, but some stirred, quickened in their thought.

Lowell, with his reputation as a celebrated writer and editor—he edited the *Atlantic Monthly* while at Harvard—was one of the few who could gracefully ignore the standard pedagogical practices. It was only later that Lowell's relaxed style become the badge of a distinctive professorial type.

It is symptomatic, for example, that Lowell's friend, Francis James Child, who joined the Harvard faculty in 1851 and was recognized as a far greater scholar than Lowell, was not able to concentrate on teaching literature courses until 1876—and then only after an offer from the new Johns Hopkins University "led to his being wholly

relieved at last from the burden of correcting undergraduate compositions." In what may be the first case of an "outside offer" improving an English professor's lot, this incident showed the way professionalization would shape the curriculum.

LITERATURE AS RHETORIC

Textbook learning and forced recitations on one side, misty impressionism on the other, and nothing in between: this pattern will emerge even more starkly when we move into the early professional period. Yet in the old college, the rhetorical and elocutionary study of literature provided a certain middle ground. Theme writing, declamations, and the study of rhetorical principles in passages from great literary works were part of a single, undifferentiated process. At Harvard, while Lowell and a few others were teaching European works in a belletristic fashion, "English" as late as the sixties still exclusively meant elocution and rhetoric. "In 1858-59 the Freshmen had Lessons in Orthoepy and lessons in Expression; the Sophomores, Lessons in Expression, Lessons in Action, Themes; the Juniors, Themes, Declamation, Rhetoric; the Seniors, Forensics: nothing more."

Rhetoric courses had their own textbooks, more or less modelled on eighteenth-century British or Scottish prototypes. One type was the anthology of excerpts, suitable for analysis and declamation, from Shakespeare, Milton, and the great orators and statesmen, along the lines of the widely used Lindley Murray's *English Reader* and William Enfield's *The Speaker* (fully entitled *Miscellaneous Pieces Selected from the Best English Writers and Disposed under Their Proper Heads, with a View to Facilitate the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking*). It is possibly Enfield's text, published in England in 1782, that should be blamed or credited with first immortalizing Mark Anthony's funeral oration for Caesar and Burke's "Essay on Conciliation" as standard anthology selections, of which at least the first continued to be in American grammar schools as late as World War II.

The other common type of text was the rhetorical handbook such as Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, a popular book in America before the Civil War. Blair's work epitomized the rhetorical idea of literature governing the college, but it also reflected conflicts between new and old theories of literature that neither Blair nor the college confronted. Blair recognized that in the modern age poetry had become specialized and marked off sharply from other forms of discourse. He said that prose and verse "require to be

separately considered, because subject to separate laws," and he observed that whereas "the historian, the orator, the philosopher address themselves, for the most part, primarily to the understanding" and aim directly "to inform, to persuade, or to instruct," by contrast "the primary aim of a poet is to please, and to move; and, therefore, it is to the imagination, and the passions, that he speaks." But these statements came late in Blair's treatise. Through most of it, Blair treated poetry as a subcategory of rhetorical eloquence, an exemplification of the qualities of "personal character and disposition" expressed by all great writing. Finally, for Blair, "poetry, eloquence, and history" were alike in that all conveyed "elevated sentiments and high examples" that "naturally tend to nourish in our minds public spirit, the love of glory, contempt of external fortune, and the admiration of what is truly illustrious and great."

Blair conceded that poetry's immediate function may be pleasure rather than instruction, but he argued that this pleasure was only a means to an ultimately didactic purpose: the poet "may, and he ought to have it in his view, to instruct, and to reform; but it is indirectly, and by pleasing and moving, that he accomplishes this end." Thus "it is hardly possible to determine the exact limit where eloquence ends, and poetry begins." This rhetorical conception of poetry (and of prose fiction, to which Blair devoted a brief section) was perhaps most revealingly conveyed in Blair's indiscriminate choice of paradigm passages from poets and orators. Blair's assumption that all the kinds of expression form a unity testified once again to the reigning conception of literature as a public or civic discourse fit for socializing future citizens.

Translated into the classroom, this rhetorical approach to literature could degenerate into the same dreary grind as classical grammar and textbook literary history. The student reader of an 1829 American edition of Blair's *Lectures* was evidently expected to memorize not only the passages of oratory and poetry copiously quoted by Blair, but large portions of Blair's commentary itself. This can be inferred from the study questions appended to each chapter, described by the editors as "greatly facilitating the recitations of classes, and, at the same time, . . . compelling each scholar to learn every word of the author" (emphasis mine). Considering the length of the book and the number of questions—the editors boast 5,750—one has to wonder if any unlucky student actually fulfilled the editors' hopes.

Yet when English declamations supplemented the study of rules, the rhetorical approach amounted to something more appealing. According to Walter P. Rogers, the "declamations given by the student

before the assembled student body" and closely criticized by the faculty were perhaps "the most characteristic feature of the old classical college. Here the student felt that he was engaging in an activity which would be of immediate practical value in later life. A large proportion of the students would one day enter law, politics, or the ministry, callings in which oratorical powers were essential." It was exercises in elocution that brought students into close contact with English and American classics for the first time and created a link between technical analysis and appreciation.

Hiram Corson recalled that in school in the 1820s the students "read aloud twice a day; the several classes standing while they read, and toeing a chalk line," from such texts as the New Testament and Murray's *English Reader*. Andrew D. White fondly remembered the preparatory course in English at Syracuse Academy in the forties where "great attention was given to reading aloud from a book made up of selections from the best authors, and to recitals from these. Thus I stored up not only some of the best things in the older English writers, but inspiring poems of Whittier, Longfellow, and other moderns. I only regret that more of the same sort was not done."

White wished that there had been as much literary stimulation when he went on to Yale. Yet Lyman Bagg's picture of oratorical studies there in the sixties puts White's complaints somewhat in perspective. According to Bagg, Yale freshmen were relieved of recitations once a week to read their compositions aloud, on subjects previously announced, to the professor of rhetoric. During the sophomore year, the oral reading of compositions "took the place of the noon recitation on Saturday,—each person furnishing four compositions a term," and "the entire class attended declamations in the Chapel,—each person 'speaking' twice a term." Junior year, "extempore speeches were sometimes called for by the professor of Rhetoric at the recitations in English literature," and also "forensic disputations" in which writers were allowed to choose their own subject. Juniors and seniors engaged in disputes every Monday and Tuesday evening, and "twice a week, five or six deliver a declamation memoriter from the oratorical rostrum. The president makes some observations upon the manner of delivery and sometimes upon the subject, and sometimes gives some small laurel to him who best acts the part of an orator." These exercises were preparation for the exciting public oratorical displays and competitions at which the whole college turned out. For commencement ceremonies, Yale nominated its twelve best speakers of the class, who competed for prizes. Writing competitions were closely tied to oratory, for, as Bagg says,

the "best literary man" elected by each Yale class was designated as "the orator to represent it upon Presentation Day," and the class poet fulfilled a similar obligation. These literary "first-prize men" became "famous through all college, and enjoy[ed] a celebrity far more general and lasting than that accorded to the 'scholars' and 'high-stand men' who are not also 'writers.'"

The establishment of the course called Harvard Composition shows how the study of English literature could evolve from oratory and elocution. Harvard had introduced a requirement in "reading English aloud" in 1865, which it transmuted into its composition requirement in 1873. Instead of orations this early course in English composition required the writing of themes on subjects "to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time." In 1874, for instance, the subjects were to be chosen from among "Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Merchant of Venice*; Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and *Lady of the Last Minstrel*." Arthur Applebee says that "this requirement institutionalized the study of standard authors and set in motion a process which eventually forced English to consolidate its position within the schools," for in the nineties colleges began to require standard works of English literature on their entrance examinations.

LITERARY SOCIETIES

No institution better offset the aridity of the college classroom than the cluster of literary societies, debating clubs, student literary publications, and public lectures and lyceums that impinged on college life. Earnest says that the activities of the literary societies alone refute "the commonly held notion that American colleges were, until recently, ivy-covered retreats from the world." Literary education did not yet depend wholly on the classroom, as it would for most students after the turn of the century, when the literary societies lost their centrality to fraternities, sororities, and athletics.

College literary societies were the formative literary education for numerous nineteenth-century American writers, including Emerson, Hawthorne, Dana, Holmes, Lowell, and Henry Adams. The societies had their own libraries, which "almost everywhere were larger, more accessible, and broader in range of interest than the college libraries." Historians agree that "English literature and American fiction were first welcomed in the American college by the literary societies, their libraries, and the student magazines." Owing to such societies, "outside the classroom a student in the 1840s was doing an amount of reading comparable to that covered in a modern survey course in

literature." "The societies absorbed the free time of students who pursued such extracurricular modern subjects as science, English, history, music, art, literature, and contemporary fiction." At Cornell, the winner of one of the society-sponsored literary competitions "was regarded as a college hero, marked for future eminence."

The work of the societies merged with other forms of local and extracurricular literary activity. After 1810 student literary magazines sprang up on numerous American campuses in imitation of Harvard's *Lycæum* (founded 1810), *Register* (1827), *Collegian* (1830), and *Harvardiana* (1836), and the *Yale Literary Magazine*—or "Yale Lit" (1836). In addition, there were evening lectures on campus to which the whole community was invited, delivered by members of the college faculty or by visiting luminaries. In the 1840s, Amherst sponsored lectures on Chaucer, the ballads, and "Milton's obligation to Cædmon." Andrew D. White called the fifties and sixties "the culminating period of the popular-lecture system." During his tenure at the University of Michigan, White gave "university extension" lectures all over the state and heard lectures in Ann Arbor by such figures as Emerson, George William Curtis, E. P. Whipple, and Wendell Phillips, one of many who disseminated abolitionist sentiments on campuses. Matthew Arnold lectured at Williams on his 1883-84 American tour, though Bliss Perry found his delivery inaudible.

By bringing the local culture into contact with contemporary currents of taste, public readings and lectures and the activities of the literary societies and student magazines had an important influence in breaking down genteel moral opposition to secular literature. It was said that Oberlin students dropped their belief in the wickedness of novels after discussing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on campus. Byron was a particular favorite at colleges like Oberlin, where the male students "hotly debated the propriety of the Ladies' Literary Society Library Association owning a copy of Byron." Emerson and Whitman were invited to campuses by students at a time when both writers were considered suspect by authorities.

The literary societies not only stimulated interest in literature and ideas, they dramatized the central conflicts and controversies of contemporary culture. Burton J. Bledstein points out that in the literary societies students "debated national public issues like slavery—issues which transcended the provincialism of the college and led a few committed students to form antislavery societies on campus." Such actions were significant in a period when "conservative interests suppressed or disciplined antislavery organizations and abo-

litionist teachers and faculty in the academies and colleges." Members of literary societies also "openly discussed religious doubts" and "wrote essays on current heresies like the foundation of divinity in 'nature.'"

In this way the literary societies did far more than formal classes to situate students in relation to the cultural issues of their time. Participating in the societies' debates made possible the experimental trying out of ideas so necessary for intellectual self-definition. Most colleges had rival societies exemplifying opposed cultural, intellectual, and political orientations. James B. Angell recalled the "profound interest in literary culture" at Brown in the 1840s. He noted that students "divided as Carlyleists or anti-Carlyleists, Coleridgeans or anti-Coleridgeans," and that "literary, historic, and philosophic theories were as hotly discussed as the current political questions of the day." Bliss Perry spoke similarly of the rivalry between the Philologian and Philotechnian literary societies at Williams. There should be no question of idealizing the societies, for their success depended on a social homogeneity that created a common framework of interests. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that the societies provided something that was not fully recreated by the later university—a context of cultural debate through which students could make sense of their studies.

THE WANING OF ORATORICAL CULTURE

College writing and declamation competitions and literary and debating societies constituted a link between classroom work and the world outside the college. Yet the heyday of American oratory had passed by the late 1860s, and "elocution was fast fading from respectability in the academic community." Lyman Bagg, whose account of oratorical activities at Yale I quoted at length above, observed in 1871 that "the gift of gab" is thought less of than formerly," so that a "declamation prize counts for but little; and even a successful speaker in prize debate cannot be sure of his reputation as a 'literary man,' until he has strengthened it by winning a prize competition." In 1873 Harvard made elocution an optional subject, substituting as a requirement its new course in English Composition, and the School of Oratory at the University of Texas "included a disclaimer in their catalogs to the effect that their objective was *not* to train elocutionists." Charles Francis Adams, with his characteristic pungency, adverted in 1883 to "that display of cheap learning which made the American oration of thirty and fifty years ago a national humiliation. Even in its best form

it was bedizened with classic tinsel which bespoke the vanity of the half-taught scholar."

Sull, elocution hung on as a central college subject after it outlived its vogue in literature departments and before it was given new life in the 1920s by schools of speech. The final third of the century saw several notable attempts not just to revitalize elocution as a literary study but to advance it as a humane alternative to the scientific philology of the modern language scholars. One of the most famous and controversial teachers to identify himself with this cause was Hiram Corson, who taught English at Cornell from 1870 to 1903. Corson was born in Philadelphia in 1828 and went to Washington as a youth to work as a stenographic reporter in the United States Senate, where he came to admire the oratory of Daniel Webster. The young Corson became a librarian at the Smithsonian, a position that afforded him the leisure to make an extensive private study of English literature. This led to a career as a popular lecturer, which in turn led to teaching posts at Girard College, St. Johns College at Annapolis, and eventually in 1870 at Cornell, where he was offered a position in English by President White despite his never having enrolled in any college.

White at the time "was inclined to scorn pure literary scholarship," thinking that "what is needed is not more talk about literature, but the literature itself." He could not have found anyone better suited to carry out his views than Corson, who believed obsessively that the oral reading of literature was the sole and sufficient form of authentic literary experience, and that mere talk about literature can easily become an obstacle to literary appreciation. One can see, in the primacy Corson attributed to the spiritual realization of literature through oral reading, an echo of earlier Quaker and Protestant evangelical appeals to the authority of faith over the encumbering externals of formal churches, rituals, and doctrinal disputes. Looking ahead, one can also see in Corson the prototype of the disaffected professorial humanist who tries to rescue the spirit of literature by disencumbering it from pedantic analysis.

A trained philologist himself, Corson from his position as chairman of the Cornell English Department in the 1890s vehemently attacked the philologists who had spearheaded the formation of departments of English in the previous decade. His manifesto, *The Aims of Literary Study* (1895), denouncing "German literary and philological scholarship" as "a great obstacle to the truest and highest literary culture" and a "degeneracy" manifesting itself in "a piddling analysis which

has no end but itself," was an American equivalent of the influential English polemic by John Churton Collins, *The Study of English Literature* (1891). But what distinguished Corson from other such opponents of the new philology (who will be discussed in a later chapter) was his passionate defense of "interpretive reading," which—to his credit—he did not merely assert but attempted to justify theoretically.

In *The Voice and Spiritual Education* (1896), Corson argued that the spiritual essence of a poem, which was part of "the non-intellectual, the non-discursive" aspect of man, expressed "*man's essential absolute being*." This spiritual essence was accordingly the true object of teaching, and in Corson's view the only means of capturing it was through proper oral reading. For Corson, "a slovenly articulation" was a presumptive index of "moral slovenliness," and the touchstone of one's understanding of any text was how well one could render the text in oral performance. He recalled his childhood experience reading aloud and being corrected by his father when his enunciation betrayed that he had not understood what he was reading, and he pointed out that Milton had applied this very test to one of his own young pupils. Reading Corson, one becomes convinced at least for the moment that the great writers are indeed on his side, bound together in a tradition in which the speaking voice is the test of spiritual community.

At Cornell, "encouraged by the president, Corson let himself go, thundering Shakespeare to his classes and giving public readings every Saturday morning," some of them in Sage Chapel to the accompaniment of organ music. Corson may have been the first of the spellbinding professors of English who would be credited in generations of reminiscences with inspiring conversion experiences in heretofore indifferent students. One such student in the nineties described how "one day in Corson's class he felt a kind of rapture, almost a mystical experience. He was no longer the sullen undutiful scholar, he was the poet and the poem, he was rapt in beauty, he was plunged in an emotion never suspected. This was the capital experience of his life. Ever after, poetry was his companion, his solace, his hidden joy."

The declamatory style that produced such effects did not seem extravagantly emotional to Corson, who in fact disparaged cheap melodramatic effects. Some of Corson's colleagues thought otherwise, however, and "regarded his popular performances with a jaundiced eye." One of them complained that Corson seemed "half crazy" and thought that Corson's habit of filling the classroom hour by reading

was a pretext for neglecting the teaching of writing. Students, this detractor said, were complaining "that Corson's classes were out of control; the students were disrespectful, read newspapers in class, and so on." One student of the class of 1872 wrote in his diary: "Prof. Corson spouted today and as usual he was not appreciated, and a shoe was thrown over the banister from below and came up near the desk." Corson's later behavior became increasingly erratic. He "became a convinced spiritualist, and held seances with a chair set for Tennyson or Browning, solemnly recording their poetic messages from the other world." However, the division of opinion on Corson bespoke not just his personal idiosyncrasies but the uncertain status of the evangelical, antiscientific style of literary study he embodied.

A second promoter of literary elocution, less well known than Corson, was Robert McLean Cumnock of Northwestern University, who built a divinity school appointment at Northwestern into its Cumnock School of Oratory and Elocution. Cumnock was born in 1840 in Scotland of Presbyterian parents, who shortly emigrated to Lowell, Massachusetts. In 1864 he matriculated at Wesleyan, where the general course work "emphasized public speaking and debate." Cumnock practiced for hours to develop "force and animation" in declamation and won prizes as a junior and senior as outstanding speaker in his class. On graduation in 1868, Cumnock, who had by then embraced Methodism, accepted a teaching position in Northwestern's Garrett Theological Seminary, whose faculty was expected to conform its thinking to "the doctrines held and maintained by the Methodist Episcopal Church, as embraced in her Articles of Religion."

Like Corson, Cumnock immediately became celebrated for his public performances, "which were often readings in Scottish dialect or selections from the Bible and Shakespeare." His classes were soon among the most popular in the university, especially among young women, who had been admitted to Northwestern in 1869 and who were fashionably expected to acquire "at least a minimal exposure" to elocution. One exception to the predominantly female enrollment was the future evangelist Billy Sunday. Cumnock became active in the Chautauqua movement of the midseventies, as both a public reader and an adviser. In 1878 he published an anthology of his favorite pieces, classified by types such as "Solemn Selections" ("Thanatopsis"), "Humorous Selections" ("The One-Hoss Shay"), and "Selections of Bold Address, Anger, Hurry and Commotion, Etc." ("The Charge of the Light Brigade"). He taught courses in literature as well

as elocution, mixing "vocal interpretation" of Shakespeare, "Bain's Rhetoric, Taine's [History of] English Literature," with "special study of Chaucer, the early dramatists and the modern poets."

Describing Cumnock, one former student nicely epitomized the old college literary and social ideal:

He was not interested in and had no part in our present day political and social institutions. He knew little of the literature of his day. He was a heroic figure from an earlier age, an age which expressed itself in scrupulous devotion to duty (to one's work), and to maintaining inviolate the integrity of character inherited from high Scotch tradition, an age that expressed its emotional nature in a formal and noble literature, a literature which found its completeness in bold address and the grand, sublime, and reverential style.

Unlike other elocutionists at the time, Cumnock resisted the scientific spirit that was entering the universities and casting a certain "academic contempt for all that is emotional." Some elocutionists were trying to emulate this new scientific spirit by developing a technical vocabulary of terms like force, stress, pitch, ditones, tritones, and pectoral and nasal qualities. This only caused elocution to seem all the more ridiculous, and, as one observer put it, "the colleges became impatient with it, as did sensible people everywhere."

At Cumnock's retirement in 1913 the school of Oratory was still prospering, and in 1920 it was assimilated into the newly founded School of Speech, which continues today to harbor a Department of Interpretation that just recently was renamed the Department of Performance Studies. Thus a survival of the declamatory tradition coexists with the conventional literature departments of which it was once an implicit criticism. The formative controversy this division reflected, however, is long forgotten.

What finally should be the verdict on the literary education provided by the old-fashioned college? In many ways it was worse than a waste of time, a form of unredeemed drudgery carried on in the name of archaic social ideals. Yet the very class restrictions of the old college enabled it to create certain educational conditions that a more democratic modern university has had trouble recreating. The education it provided had the advantage of coherence, if only a coherence made possible by the fact that, in the heyday of American colleges, no more than 2 percent of eligible Americans attended them.

From the point of view of subsequent literary criticism, the old college's conception of literary study as an extension of grammar,

rhetoric, and elocution was merely an evidence of hopeless provincialism. But this modern view was formed only after literature had largely ceased to journalism and other media whatever power it had had to shape public opinion. By contrast, the old college maintained a socially "committed" view of literature in its very conservatism. It bespoke a culture that still assigned a social function to a humanistically educated class.

But then, how effectively did the college make literary ideals into a socializing force? It is tempting, but finally misleading, to describe the story of the transition from the old college to the modern university as a falling away from organic traditional "community" into fragmented modern "association," from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. Organic community hardly existed outside New England, and even there it weakened progressively throughout the century. The mounting criticism of the classical curriculum before and after the Civil War suggests that the college curriculum was failing to transmit the traditional culture. Without the student literary societies and magazines and the class-day orations and declamations, the old college literary education would make a very poor showing indeed.

- 33 "a language!"—Adams, p. 16.
 34 "reflective powers"—Adams, p. 19.
 "and theoretical."—Adams, p. 12.
 "increasingly remote."—Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963), p. 400-401; see also Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 135 ff.; also Martin Green, *The Problem of Boston: Some Readings in Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966).
- 35 culture outside.—After this book went to press, I encountered Myron Tunan's article "From Astor Place to Kenyon Road: The NCTE and the Origins of English Studies," *College English* 48, no. 4 (April 1986): 339-49. Tunan argues that the decline of the rhetorical conception of writing in the colleges and the influence of "Romantic poetics" was already evident in the colleges by the time of Edward T. Channing's accession to the Boylston Professorship at Harvard in 1819. If Tunan is correct, my argument in this and the following chapter would have to be qualified.

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 THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

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 36 "necessary acquisition."—Quoted by Rudolph, *Curriculum*, p. 72.
 37 "in this."—I. R. Lounsbury, quoted in "Extra Session," *PMLA* 11, no. 4 (1896): x.
 "and German."—March, "Recollections of Language Teaching," p. xx.
 "anything else."—John F. Genung, in William Morton Payne, ed., *English in American Universities*, (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1895), p. 110.
 "natural sciences."—Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), p. 67.
 "classical curriculum."—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, p. 194.
 "of study."—Rudolph, *American College and University*, pp. 317-18.
 38 "Greek is."—Quoted by Albert H. Tolman in Payne, *English in American Universities*, p. 89.
 "or Greek."—March, "Recollections of Language Teaching," p. xx.
 "one's mind."—March, in Payne, *English in American Universities*, p. 76.
 Noah Webster.—Arthur N. Applebee, *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974), p. 40, n. 23. On the careers of March and other pioneering American scholars (George Marsh, George Ticknor, Francis James Child), see Phyllis Franklin, "English Studies: The World of Scholarship in 1883," *PMLA* 99, no. 3 (May 1984): 356-70.
 "the class."—March, "Recollections of Language Teaching," p. xx.
 "linguistic study."—March, p. xx.
 39 "the predicate?"—March, *Method of Philological Study of the English*

- Language (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879), p. 8.
 39 "for ourselves."—Brander Matthews, *These Many Years*, p. 108. The manual Matthews referred to was Thomas B. Shaw's *A Complete Manual of English Literature* (New York: Sheldon, 1873).
 "and when?"—Charles D. Cleveland, *A Compendium of English Literature* (Philadelphia: E. C. and J. Biddle, 1857), p. 765.
 40 the 1880s.—Applebee, *Tradition and Reform*, p. 34.
 student papers.—Horace E. Scudder, *James Russell Lowell: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1901), 1:395; on Lowell's teaching, see also the reminiscence of Barrett Wendell, "Mr. Lowell as a Teacher," in *Stelligeri and Other Essays concerning America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), pp. 203-17.
 "a causerie."—Scudder, p. 398.
 41 "their thought."—Scudder, pp. 393-94.
 "undergraduate compositions."—Henry James, *Charles W. Eliot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 2:14-15.
 "nothing more."—Charles H. Grandgent, "The Modern Languages: 1869-1929," in *The Development of Harvard University*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 66.
 42 "separate laws"—Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Philadelphia: Hayes and Zell, 1854), p. 394. On Blair's importance in the nineteenth century "as a model for using literature to teach writing," see James A. Berlin, *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century American Colleges* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 25-28.
 "he speaks."—Blair, p. 421.
 "and disposition"—Blair, p. 378.
 "and great."—Blair, p. 15.
 "this end."—Blair, p. 421.
 "poetry begins."—Blair, p. 422.
 "the author."—Editor's Note, Blair, p. 4.
 43 "were essential."—Walter P. Rogers, *Andrew D. White and the Modern University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1942), p. 31.
English Reader.—Hiram Corson, *The Voice and Spiritual Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 22.
 "not done."—White, in Hale, *How I Was Educated Papers*, 105.
 own subject.—Baggs, *Four Years at Yale*, pp. 559-62.
 "an orator."—Baggs, pp. 567-68.
 44 similar obligation.—Baggs, p. 615.
 "also 'writers.'"—Baggs, pp. 608-9.
 entrance examinations.—Applebee, *Tradition and Reform*, p. 30.
 "the world."—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, p. 87.
 Henry Adams.—Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies*, pp. 8-9; see also Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), p. 36.
 "college libraries."—Rudolph, *Curriculum*, p. 96.

- 44 "student magazines."—Rudolph, *American College and University*, p. 143.
- 45 "in literature."—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, p. 94.
 "future eminence."—Bishop, *History of Cornell*, pp. 138-39.
 "to Caedmon."—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, pp. 96-97.
 on campuses.—White, *Autobiography*, 1:268-69.
 delivery inaudible.—Bliss Perry, *And Gladly Teach* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), p. 79.
 "of Byron."—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, pp. 92-95.
 "in 'nature.'"—Bledstein, pp. 250-51.
 "the day."—Angell, in Hale, *How I Was Educated Papers*, p. 102.
 at Williams.—Perry, *And Gladly Teach*, pp. 48-49.
 "academic community."—Lynn Miller Rein, *Northwestern University School of Speech: A History* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1981), p. 1.
 "prize competition."—Bagg, *Four Years at Yale*, p. 619.
 optional subject—Grandgent, "Modern Languages," p. 75.
 "train elocutionists."—Rein, *Northwestern University School of Speech*, p. 1.
 47 "half-taught scholar."—Adams, *College Fetich*, p. 11.
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 "literary scholarship"—Bishop, p. 116.
 "literature itself."—White, *Autobiography*, 1:429.
 "but itself"—Hiram Corson, *The Aims of Literary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1895), pp. 42-44.
 "absolute being."—Corson, *Voice and Spiritual Education*, p. 6.
 "moral slovenliness"—Corson, p. 107.
 was reading.—Corson, p. 23.
 young pupils.—Corson, p. 53.
 49 "other world."—Bishop, *History of Cornell*, pp. 117-18.
 50 "people everywhere."—Rein, *Northwestern University School of Speech*, pp. 8-22.
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- 55 "anti-professionals"—Stanley Fish, "Profession Despise Thyself: Fear and Self-Loathing in Literary Studies," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1984): 349-64.
 56 "limiting them."—Aplebee, *Tradition and Reform*, p. 28.
 "of knowledge.—Flexner, *Daniel Coit Gilman*, p. 54.
 "'own sake'"—Flexner, p. 9.
 57 "or partnership."—Daniel Coit Gilman, "Fundamental Principles," in *The Launching of a University, and Other Papers* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1906), p. 41.
 "scientific treatises."—Flexner, pp. 63-64.
 "results attained."—Gilman, in Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith,

- American Higher Education: A Documentary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 2:646.
- 57 undergraduate college.—Flexner, *Daniel Coit Gilman*, pp. 50, 55-56.
 "and sciences."—Eliot, quoted by Flexner, pp. 108-9.
 58 "ancient truth?"—Henry Wade Rogers, quoted by William Albert Looy in Arthur Herbert Wilde, ed., *Northwestern University: A History: 1855-1905* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1905), 1:343.
 and programs.—Bishop, *History of Cornell*, p. 239.
 "neighboring departments."—Parker, "Where Do English Departments Come From?" p. 348.
 59 in 1878.—Flexner, *Daniel Coit Gilman*, pp. 89-90.
 "industrial ideal"—René Wellek, "American Literary Scholarship," in *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 299; first published as "Literary Scholarship," in Merle Curti, ed., *American Scholarship in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).
 "who can."—Patee, "Old Professor of English," p. 185.
 "to knowledge."—Grandgent, "Modern Languages," p. 99.
 "to another."—Veysey, "Stability and Experiment in the American Undergraduate Curriculum," p. 36. Veysey states that the departmental major was virtually universal by 1910.
 60 to 1930.—Earnest, *Academic Procession*, p. 310.
 "and opinion."—Veysey, *Emergence of the American University*, p. 311.
 "increasingly ritualistic."—Veysey, p. 258.
 "same terms."—Veysey, p. 315.
 "shared values."—Veysey, p. 311.
 "threateningly serious."—Veysey, p. 308.
 "on ignorance."—Veysey, pp. 337-38.
 "for jobs."—Rudolph, *Carriculum*, p. 117.
 "their differences."—Bledstein, *Culture of Professionalism*, p. 327.
 61 suspected subversives.—On Butler, see Horace Coon, *Columbia: Colossus on the Hudson* (E. P. Dutton, 1947), pp. 93-133; see also Hofstadter and Metzger, *Development of Academic Freedom*, pp. 468-506; for an illuminating account of repression on campus, see James Wechsler, *Revolt on the Campus* (New York: Covici Friede, 1935).
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 "least taboos."—T. Atkinson Jenkins, "Scholarship and Public Spirit," *PMLA* 24, no. 4, appendix (1914): cv.
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