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## **The politics of literature : a cultural text for improving undergraduate literary education.**

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THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE: A CULTURAL TEXT FOR IMPROVING  
UNDERGRADUATE LITERARY EDUCATION

A Dissertation Presented

by

RICHARD M. WIZANSKY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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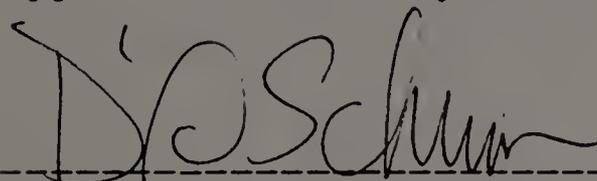
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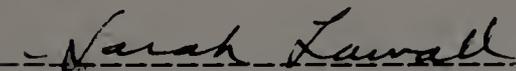
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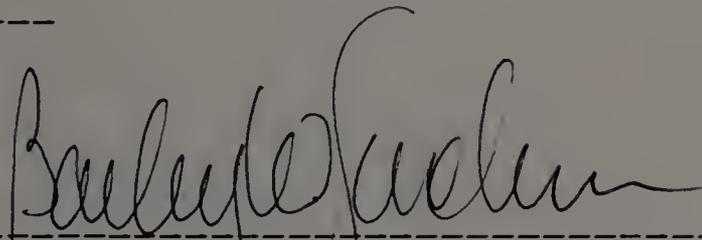
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For Todd Mandell: who saw, and sees, me through.

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF LITERATURE: A CULTURAL TEXT FOR IMPROVING  
UNDERGRADUATE LITERARY EDUCATION

MAY 1991

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This dissertation addresses the problem of how best to teach undergraduate literature courses in the climate of challenge and hostility which surrounds traditional literary studies today. The practical purpose of the dissertation is to recommend that teachers of undergraduate literature classes not only become thoroughly familiar with current academic debates over how and which literature to teach, but that they incorporate these debates into the curriculum. The dissertation further recommends that undergraduate literature courses teach the historical circumstances which shaped literary study in America and subsequently created the issues and positions with which the current debate is concerned.

The five chapters of the dissertation present an historical account of the development of literary studies in American higher education. Particular attention is paid to the influences of power and class which were brought to bear on this process from its origins in classical Greek

education to its institutionalization in the late nineteenth century. This history is intended to serve as resource material for literature instructors who wish to expand their curriculum and teach undergraduates that the historical and cultural background to any text is essential to understanding its purpose and meaning. The dissertation concludes with recommendations for how teachers can incorporate cultural history into the undergraduate literature curriculum.

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## PREFACE

The word literature is ripe with meanings and definitions. For the purposes of this dissertation it will be helpful to consider it from two perspectives: the qualities which distinguish it from other forms of writing, and its institutionalization into a body of writing which has become a "canon." Wellek and Warren (1956) suggest that "the term 'literature' seems best if we limit it to the art of literature, that is to imaginative literature" (p. 22). Imaginative literature can be distinguished from other forms of writing by its use of language. After pointing to differences which exist between "scientific," "everyday," and "literary" language they conclude that the latter exploits language "much more deliberately and systematically" (p. 24). The language of literature "imposes some kind of framework which takes the statement of the work out of the world of reality," and thus serves an "aesthetic function." Consequently, "it seems best to consider as literature only works in which the aesthetic function is dominant," and which have a completely aesthetic purpose (p. 25). A final distinguishing feature the authors assign to literature, however, is its "referential aspects. The centre of literary art is obviously to be found in the traditional genres of the lyric, the epic, the drama. In all of them, the reference is to a world of fiction, of imagination. The

statements in a novel, in a poem, or in a drama are not literally true; they are not logical propositions" (p. 25).

The critic Northrop Frye (1964) agrees: "The simple point is that literature belongs to the world man constructs, not to the world he sees.... Literature's world is a concrete human world of immediate experience" (p. 28). The "job" of the literary artist is "not to describe nature, but to show [us] a world completely absorbed and possessed by the human mind" (pp. 32-33).

T.S. Eliot takes a similar view of literary language and its functions in his influential essay "The Social Functions of Poetry" (1945). He writes "beyond any specific intention which [literature] may have... there is always the communication of some new experience, or some fresh understanding of the familiar, or the expression of something we have experienced but have no words for, which enlarges our consciousness or refines our sensibility... [Literature] is a constant reminder of all things that can only be said in one language, and are untranslatable" (Eliot, 1961, pp. 7-14).

A related way to define literature is as highly valued writing which has developed an historical tradition that is self-referential, and follows standards of evaluation which themselves follow an historical, though critical tradition. In this definition, literature is the "canon," that body of written words which adheres to the distinguishing features

of literary language, and constitutes the intellectual heritage of the West. James Atlas, referring to Santayana's advice about "which books young people should read," characterizes his answer: 'It didn't matter... as long as they read the same ones'." According to Atlas these "same ones," the books which "constituted the intellectual heritage of Americans and which had officially been defined as great... were the kind of books you read, say, in Columbia's famed lit. hum. course, virtually unchanged since 1937: Homer, Plato, Dante, Milton... The masterpieces of Western civilization. The Big Boys" (New York Times Magazine, June 5th, 1988, p. 25).

This canonization of literature is currently at the heart of a major academic debate in which one side represents an attempt to reject the ideological foundations of the canon and the works themselves. Terry Eagleton's position is characteristic of revisionist analyses of the canon. In his 1983 Literary Theory: An Introduction, he writes "what we have uncovered, then, is not only that literature does not exist in the sense that insects do, and that the value-judgements by which it is constituted are historically variable, but that these judgements themselves have a close relation to social ideologies. They refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups exercise and maintain power over others" (1983, p. 16).

The distance between T. S. Eliot's definition of literature in 1945, and Eagleton's 1983 definition, indicates the remarkable changes which have occurred in literary studies over the past forty years. This thesis is a product of those changes.

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation addresses the problem of how best to teach undergraduate literature courses in the climate of challenge and hostility which surrounds traditional literary studies today. At the center of this challenge is a debate about the texts, and thus the values on which the Western intellectual tradition and liberal arts education are based. One side of this debate claims that the entire intellectual heritage of the West is under attack, and in danger of extinction. The opposition fervently believes that the tradition has been constructed to impose a gender, class, and color hierarchy which should be overthrown so that a tradition based on cultural, economic, and gender diversity can replace it. The conflict increasingly pervades classrooms and campuses; it affects all those who have a stake in literary education, including students, teachers, and administrators.

This dissertation is intended primarily for those who teach undergraduate literature courses. Its practical purpose is to recommend that these teachers not only become thoroughly familiar with current academic debates over how and which literature to teach, but that they incorporate these debates into the curriculum. The dissertation further recommends that undergraduate literature courses teach the historical circumstances which shaped literary study in

America and subsequently created the issues and positions with which the current debate is concerned.

The five chapters of the dissertation present an historical account of the development of literary studies in American higher education. Particular attention is paid to the influences of power and class which were brought to bear on this process from its origins in classical Greek education to its institutionalization in the late nineteenth century. This history is intended to serve as resource material for literature instructors who wish to expand their curriculum and teach undergraduates that "the historical circumstances that must be inferred in order to understand any text are not a mere extrinsic background...but something presupposed by the work and thus necessary to intrinsic comprehension" (Graff, 1987, p. 257).

#### The State of the Discipline: A Summary

In October, 1988 The Voice Literary Supplement published "Where Do We Go From Here?" a collection of statements by seventeen influential teachers and critics on the current state of literary studies in America. Edward Said (1988) introduces the collection with a characterization of the contemporary challenges which face literary study and teaching. He writes:

In recent years, the old categories of literary studies have lost their intellectual authority. The notion of literature itself has been eroded, so that film, media, popular culture, music, and the visual arts have entered the once sacrosanct field of the literary text. Texts have become signs, structures, collectivities of

power, sites of play and indeterminacy; the author's role, once thought of as efficiently executive, has become problematic and ambiguous. As world languages, English and French have not only admitted the works of Asian, Irish American, African and Caribbean writers but have themselves been reinterpreted as polities that give rise to oppositional work and subjugated forms of knowledge -- the writing of women, oppressed or subaltern classes, marginalized or peripheral populations. The flowering of Third World, Afro-American, Latin-American, feminist and anticolonial studies right at the heart of English, French, or Spanish departments is testimony to the healthy intellectual disturbances taking place in the formerly tranquil pastures of Eurocentric national enclosure. (p. 16)

This statement makes reference to the three major issues which, according to Said, create "the great debate" and the "battleground" which surround literary study today. In summary, these issues are as follows. First, methods of literary study have come under intense re-examination since the 1960's. This re-examination has given rise to a diversity of critical approaches and methodologies which can be classified under the general heading of literary theory. Secondly, Said refers to the major issue in literary studies today: the challenge to the canon, that set of texts which composes the traditional literature curriculum, and is considered the literary heritage of the Western tradition. This challenge scrutinizes the value of the canon and motives for teaching it. The questions which such scrutiny poses are: "How are canons of masterworks formed? Why do they endure? What should one do to challenge them? Is it enough to replace one canon with another or is there some

noncoercive and nondominating alternative?" (Said, 1988, p. 7).

The third issue is implied in the former two. This issue involves the contemporary reassessment of collegiate literary education and the controversy over what texts and what background -- literary, historic, and cultural -- should and should not be taught.

### Literary Theory

The dominant, though controversial, approach to the study of literature today, particularly in advanced literary study, goes under the rubric of literary theory. "For a variety of reasons, [theory has, in the last twenty years,] become one of the 'glamour' fields in academic literary study. Structuralism, semiotics, hermeneutics, deconstruction, speech-act theory, reception theory, psychoanalytic theory, feminism, Marxism, and various philosophical 'approaches' have become a familiar part of the professional structure of literary study. Any literature department that does not have a 'theorist' of some sort on its faculty is clearly out of step" (Mitchell, 1985, p. 2).

It is difficult to pinpoint the date that theory began its critical ascendancy, but it is generally considered to have come into fashion in America following the academic turmoils of the sixties. Lindsay Waters and Gerald Graff, both included in the collection "Where Do We Go From Here?," summarize this extensive subject which crosses the

disciplines of literature, history, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology. Waters (1988) sets theory in the social and academic context of its present popularity:

Many of the old feel-good ideas about literature like genius, creativity, originality, moral improvement and uplift have been rejected. A dynamic sense of how literature works in connection with other symbolic systems is being elaborated; it has led to the collapse of the walls that separated the work of art from the gardens, jungles, deserts, and seas outside. Writing and reading are seen in different ways. The literary buck does not stop either at the desk of the author or at the reader but endlessly circulates. The over-emphasis on the individual is now balanced with a sense of the social constructedness of literature. (p. 20)

Gerald Graff (1988) summarizes more specifically the role of theory as it applies to changing literary studies:

What we call 'theory' is a kind of discourse that results when assumptions that were once agreed on in a community become controversial. Literature (like sex roles, religion, etc.) ceases to be something that you inherit without thinking about it and becomes a contested concept, an object of struggle. In this respect, the growth of theory in literary studies is the predictable outcome of a condition in which we no longer share the tacit agreements we once did about basic words -- 'literature,' 'culture,' 'meaning,' 'value,' 'tradition,' 'author,' 'reader,' 'text'.... (p. 23)

Theory, thus, involves diverse approaches to interpreting literature in the context of a text's interrelations to the nature of literature, to the text's "history, its place in society, its conditions of production and reception, its meaning in general, or the meaning of particular works" (Graff, 1987, p. 252). Such a methodology broadens both the scope of how a text may be interpreted and the methods by which texts are taught. For example, for a

Marxist literary theorist such as Terry Eagleton, a theory-based literature class would treat texts as "ideological." Literary theory in this case would focus on how literature and specific texts "have the most intimate relations to questions of social power" because "to speak of 'literature and ideology' as two separate phenomena which can be interrelated is...unnecessary. Literature, in the meaning of the words we have inherited, is an ideology" (1983, p. 22).

Whether the literary theorist is a Marxist or not, however, literature -- as a body of knowledge and as individual texts -- is studied in a social and historical context, rather than as purely belletristic, i.e. as beautiful writing. Theory, therefore, is in opposition to much of what is traditional in literary criticism and teaching. Traditionalists argue that criticism and interpretation must focus on the form and structure of texts, and on the aesthetic, formalist history of literature's evolution. The stark distinctions between theoretical and traditional methods of literary study are made clear in the contemporary debate which surrounds the teaching of those texts that have constituted the literary canon.

#### The Canon Question

The etymology of the word canon as it is used in literary studies today derives from the Greek verb to rule. Early usage defined the English noun as "a rule, law, or

decree of the Church." An equally important definition of the word is "the list of books of the Bible accepted by the Christian Church as genuine and inspired" (OED, 1971, p. 258). The ecclesiastical connotations of canon are carried over into its literary usage. The Western literary canon refers to a group of texts -- both classic and contemporary -- which are accepted by literary scholars, critics, and teachers as standards of style and content; these texts are the bulwark of traditional literature courses. They include such standard classical Greek authors as Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides Plato, and Aristotle; Latin writers such as Vergil, Ovid, Cicero, Seneca, and Plautus; Renaissance and Augustan writers such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Johnson, Dryden, and Pope; English novelists including Austen, Fielding, the Brontes, and Kipling; Continental writers such as Proust, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Kafka, and Mann; Americans such as Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson, and Dickinson; and modern works such as those by Virginia Woolf, Eliot, Joyce, Yeats, Hemingway and Faulkner. These and numerous other "great books" constitute the tradition and content of Western literature as it has been defined and taught through the ages.

New works have been continually added to the canon, most recently those from the Modernist period, and new critical approaches have been generated to interpret these

works. Nonetheless, however, the tradition has remained essentially uninterrupted until quite recently when a movement arose which challenged its values and claims to universality. At the core of this challenge, is the argument that the traditional texts represent the limited values and vision of predominantly white, Western males whose acceptance into the tradition forms an elite class of writers who possess a limited ability to represent the experience of a broader readership.

The challenge to the canon is at the heart of the controversy which is attached to literary study today. Those who pose the challenge include writers, critics, teachers, and students who hold in common the argument that the canon should not be considered the bastion of the values and traditions of Western thought. Rather, they argue, the great books transmit a limited white patriarchal Eurocentric and/or Anglocentric tradition which has been constructed to transmit ideas of culture and individuality which are gender and class biased at the expense of women, nonwhite, and nonwestern cultures.

The argument alters earlier definitions of the canon, bringing to its meaning a more highly charged contemporary connotation. Gerald L. Burns, using the etymological roots of the word, nicely demonstrates how, in the context of contemporary challenges, the word takes on a new, rather political meaning:

A text, after all, is canonical, not in virtue of being final and correct and part of an official library, but because it becomes binding upon a group of people. The whole point of canonization is to underwrite the authority of a text, not merely with respect to its origin as against competitors in the field -- this, technically, would simply be a question of authenticity -- but with respect to the present and future in which it will reign or govern as a binding text. The distinction between canonical and noncanonical is thus not just a distinction between authentic and inauthentic texts -- that is, it is not reducible to the usual oppositions between the inspired and the mundane, the true and the apocryphal, the sacred and the profane, and so on. On the contrary, it is a distinction between texts that are forceful in a given situation and those which are not. From a hermeneutical standpoint, in which the relation of a text to a situation is always of primary interest, the theme of canonization is power. (in Von Hallberg, 1983, p. 67)

The construction of the canon, as the following chapters will show, began in classical Greek education, was reinforced and further built upon by Roman infatuation with Greek texts, was further solidified by Renaissance rediscovery and imitation of classic texts, and was educationally standardized in the modern period -- still in its Hellenic incarnation -- with Matthew Arnold's much respected advice that the canon should be the cornerstone of formal education because it represented "the best which has been thought and said." The American higher education English department, which was established in the late nineteenth century, made the canon and its ascribed power the cornerstone of its mission and curriculum. By doing so, many today would argue, it continued a "literary tradition [which] observes a canon of hierarchies, a ranking of great

writers and genres that tends to exclude or downgrade women and lower caste males" (Wexlman, 1988, p. 5).

### The Question of What and How to Teach

The current controversy over the canon is manifested in three well-articulated positions concerned with its presence and influence in contemporary literary studies. Charles Harris (1988) summarizes these positions as follows:

Whereas canonical purists would preserve the canon and canonical anarchists eliminate it, canonical pluralists would displace its current bourgeois-patriarchal values with those that are more egalitarian and less imperialistic. Whereas purists want to preserve Arnoldian definitions of literature and pluralists want to democratize them, canonical anarchists wish to explode such definitions, to extend them beyond belletristic confines to the entire universe of discourse. Where purists tend to locate literary authority in the text or in the text's author and whereas pluralists tend to locate it in the text's social and ideological context, anarchists tend to locate literary authority in language itself. (p. 7)

Whether one's position in the canon debate is purist, pluralist, or anarchic, however, the argument is concerned as much with how to teach literature as much as it is with which texts to teach. In America, canonical purists embrace the pedagogic and cultural values of the Western tradition and unswervingly continue to teach essentially the same curriculum and texts which were institutionalized in American higher education in the 1890's. Canonical anarchists and pluralists, however, call for a literature curriculum which de-emphasizes focus on the "great books," and introduces into the literature classroom writings by women and other "marginalized" groups. This debate about how

and what to teach in the literature classroom is, ultimately, the "crisis [which] is besetting the study of English literature, particularly in higher education" today (Baldick, 1983, p. 1). That crisis, which serves as a catalyst for the research and recommendations contained in this thesis, is illuminated in recent statements by two literature teachers who hold opposing views on how the canon should be taught and its influence in the curriculum.

Harry Levin (1980) is Irving Babbitt Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University.<sup>4</sup> His address to the 1980 meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English was stimulated by a traditionalist's anxiety over the crisis in literary studies which -- from a conservative perspective -- threatens to destroy the fabric of Western culture. At the close of his speech, Levin lamented the deterioration of education and culture which he says is evident in the institutional and social fragmentation he observes all around him. He closed the address with an educational prescription which encompasses the "purist's" expectations of the literary canon and its powers.

Mere anarchy has been visibly winning out over high culture, when Arnold's well-worn formulation in the preface to "Literature and Dogma" -- 'the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world' -- is looked upon as outdated. Now, if ever, we need a pedagogy which can discern and propagate, which can affirm and hold together, a community of ideas. Without this, we will lose our most valued patrimony, our collective memory; and we have seen what wrong turns history can take when it is made by persons and peoples ill versed in it. Without a recallable past, we should live our lives groping through

uncharted territory...I should be purblind and disloyal to my nurture if I failed to note what is happening before my eyes and may be spreading through the academic stratosphere, thereby blurring the crucial differences between a well-tested canon and a well-advertised package. Higher education, across the centuries, has constituted a continuous dialogue between the minds of ancestors and of contemporaries. If we, the latter, know any more than the former, it is because we have learned so much from them. As T.S. Eliot remarked, 'They are that which we know.' (p. 362)

Levin's position, whether wittingly or not, refers to the "valued patrimony" which is the central issue in the opposition to traditionalist approaches to the canon and literary study, particularly among feminists who are in the vanguard of opposition to formulations of "the collective memory" which limit it to traditional male Eurocentric texts.

Christine Froula (1983) is a feminist writer and university teacher. Her essay "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy" is a response to Levin's published address. As well as presenting an opposing view to Levin's, Froula's perspective is characteristic of a pluralist (although somewhat radical) approach to the canon in the classroom; an approach which has been instigated and nurtured by feminism and women's studies and by the marginalization of women's writing in traditional literary studies. Froula writes:

...the feminist (or antipatriarchal) challenge to the ideal of the 'literary canon' points to the need to transform a pedagogy which conceives 'Great Books' on the model of sacred texts into one which calls into question the unexamined hierarchies invoked by the Arnoldian ideal, 'the acquainting ourselves with the

best that has been thought and said in the world'...There can be no hope for a 'community of ideas' or for anything... like the consensus a 'canon' requires, based on a heritage in which domination and hierarchy are the very ground for literary and social authority -- a 'patrimony' accumulated at the expense of silencing woman's culture-making power in 'matrimony.' Yet if the 'collective memory' held in the traditional canon of Western literature is a danger to the future so long as it is propagated by a 'Great Books' pedagogy in the traditional curriculum, it also has powerful possibilities, read from a critical perspective, as an instrument for change. Few of us can free ourselves completely from the power ideologies inscribed in the idea of the canon and in many of its texts merely by not reading 'canonical' texts, because we have been reading the patriarchal 'arcetext' all our lives. But we can, through strategies of rereading that expose the deeper structures of authority and through interplay with texts of a different stamp, pursue a kind of collective psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogeys' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable. In doing so, we approach traditional texts not as the mystifying (and self-limiting) 'best' that has been thought and said in the world but as a visible past against which we can teach our students to imagine a different future. (in von Hallberg, pp. 171-172)

Levin's traditionalism and Froula's feminist and pluralist challenge to it represent two of the major positions regarding how and what to teach in literature classes today. A third position, which Waller refers to as "anarchic," tends to stress, considerably more vehemently than pluralists do, the destructive limitations of the canon. Anarchists would prefer to see the traditional canon replaced in the classroom, and the literature course restructured to focus on 1) a redefinition of literature, and 2) the relationships which exist between language and power.

Terry Eagleton (1983) redefines literature and literary study in Literary Theory -- his rather anarchical introduction to the study. He unequivocally concludes the book with the statement that, "The present crisis in the field of literary studies is at root a crisis in the definition of the subject itself" (p. 214). He offers "a modest proposal" to "replace" outdated literature courses with new courses that "explore how the signifying systems of a 'literary' text produce certain ideological effects" or, he suggests, these courses may do the same exploration "with a Hollywood film." These practices in the classroom will foster in students "a sense of linguistic potential denied to them by their social conditions" (1983, p. 212). Such practices embrace a redefinition of literature in which it becomes "discourse" which "itself has no definite signified" which is not to say that "it embodies no assumptions." It is, rather, "a network of signifiers able to envelop a whole field of meanings, objects and practices. Certain pieces of writing are selected as being more amenable to this discourse than others, and these are what is known as literature or the 'literary canon'" (1983, p. 201). The end result of this anarchic position is the view that "Shakespeare was not great literature lying conveniently to hand, which the literary institution then happily discovered: he is great literature because the institution constitutes him as such" (1983, p. 202). Eagleton's

"discourse" course would follow why and how this "constitution" of Shakespeare's language occurred, and would include the study of Shakespeare's language as simply one form of language's use and impact among many.

While Harris (1988) has suggested that three positions dominate the canon debate, Gary Waller's position (1985) -- which borrows from the pluralist, traditional, and anarchic approaches -- represents what might be considered a less theoretical distillation of the other three. It creates a useful methodology out of those elements he considers most worth saving in each. This approach to literary study places greater practical emphasis, in the classroom, on the cultural context of literature itself; i.e., the power that literature has been assigned in culture and education, with particular emphasis given to discussions of the sources of that power.

Waller summarizes his approach regarding how and what to teach in an essay on poststructuralism and the college curriculum. "Until now," he writes, "we have not had a full and coherent undergraduate curriculum in which students are encouraged not only to read widely and intensely in the writings of our culture but, in addition, to recognize the contexts and issues of interpretation and analysis that connect their readings of those texts with their understanding of the whole culture" (1985, p. 7).

According to Waller, this ineffective undergraduate curriculum has been due to "an unfortunate development in the discipline in the past forty years" which initiated the "ghettoizing of literary studies." This compartmentalization or alienation of the literature curriculum has been "caused, in part, alas, by the professors of literature themselves, concerned to find and protect what they have mistakenly seen as an unchanging object called art" (1985, p. 10).

While it is not possible to summarize all the debates about the best way to teach undergraduate literature courses today, the four approaches which have been described outline four of the most frequently held by teachers and critics. Levin promotes the idea of a Western culture and tradition which must be at the focus of text selection and pedagogy, the purpose of which would seem to be preservation at all costs. Froula also would, at least to some extent, preserve the canon but would teach those works in a new way which would demystify their reputations and their power. In addition, she emphasizes the importance of adding to the curriculum texts which represent the writings of women and "marginalized" groups to make the literature course more responsive to today's multicultural realities. Eagleton calls for a radical redefinition of literature, and argues that literature departments and courses should be replaced by a new discipline which studies "discourse." Waller's approach, like Froula's, incorporates the uses of the

traditional canon in the classroom as well as the need to include other texts in the curriculum. More so than Froula, however, he staunchly advocates for undergraduate literature courses to break a "powerful silence" and connect both canonical and marginalized literature to the "social and historical individuals we are." In this way, according to Waller, literature which is "Art" can be "inextricably connected with wider cultural codes" and the "'reading' of a work of art" can be "inextricably connected to wider cultural practices" (p. 10).

This study agrees with Waller (1985) that this "dimension" of literary studies "has been badly neglected in...curricular organizations" (p. 10). We also concur that the results which this "connection" of texts to an "understanding of the whole culture" can bring about in the classroom are both enormous and promising. Such teaching objectives can lead to a thorough examination of the purpose of undergraduate literary studies and to the re-examination of traditional texts. For those teachers moved to redesign their undergraduate literature courses, this new approach leads to the teaching of literature not only as art or as great books but as manifestations and artifacts of culture. Put another way, this approach leads to treating literature in the classroom "as in some respect a problem" which can be addressed by teaching a work of literature by setting it in the context of "the nature of literature, its history, its

conditions of production and reception," and "its meaning in general." These aspects of the work, however, are not treated as givens but become "questions to be argued in a generalized way" (Graff, 1987, p. 252). Robert Scholes (1985), who embraces such an approach, does so because of his belief that "in order to teach the interpretation of a literary text, we must be prepared to teach the cultural text as well" (quoted in Graff, 1987, p. 252).

We believe that this focus on the "cultural text" can revitalize literary study because of its potential to connect students to what they read; to teach them not only **how** to read the words of "great" and other books currently used in their classes, but to teach them **why** these books are read. In this way, we as teachers of literature, will present not only the aesthetic and historical importance of texts, but -- because we will focus on how these texts represent controversial cultural forces -- we will teach their political significance as well.

We recognize that "at issue" in such a new approach in the classroom, and in the formation of a new literature curriculum, are "how much of the 'cultural text' students must presuppose in order to make sense of works of literature, and how this cultural text can become the context of teaching" (Graff, 1987, p. 258). The following pages present -- for both teachers and students -- one response to this issue. They present an historical account

of the "cultural text" which informs the teaching of undergraduate literary education in America from its roots in classical Greek education to its institutionalization in the new English departments of the late nineteenth century. Our concluding chapter reinforces the need to include such resource material in the undergraduate literature curriculum, and recommends methods for how this might be accomplished.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The title of Levin's Chair could be an indicator of his position in the canon debates. Irving Babbitt, for whom the Chair was named, was "an outstanding scholar and... a leader of the new Humanist movement" which advocated the importance of traditional humanism and great books in the undergraduate classroom during the early part of this century. See Babbitt's 1908 Literature and the American College for a clear exposition of this movement, which was called the "new Humanism."

## CHAPTER I

### CLASSICAL BACKGROUNDS TO THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of English and American literature draws heavily on the moralizing and classicizing characteristics of European and Biblical tradition. Our first chapter surveys the classical Greek backgrounds of vernacular literary studies. We focus on the uses of canonical texts and moral training in early Greek education which came to be imitated by early innovators and teachers of vernacular literature. In Chapter II, we explore how the classicizing tradition was joined to Puritan Bible studies at seventeenth century Harvard and gave rise to vernacular literature studies in American higher education.

#### Education for the Aristocracy

The aristocratic context of Greek education is crucial to an understanding of how oral and written literature were used for moral training. Literature and education were for, and produced by, an aristocratic class of free men whose highest ideal was to have the time free from labor to go to war and brag about it in the earlier, pre-Socratic centuries, and to practice politics in the fifth and fourth centuries when Athens was at the peak of its cultural ascendance. Thus, the content, method, and administration of education were all devised with a single, controlling purpose in mind: to train citizens in the values and laws of

the society they were to govern, and to be able to discuss them. The purpose of education, then, was from the very outset, political. It was conceived as a duty of the state, and administered by the state. The death of Socrates is a testament to the force of belief with which this idea was held.

The content of Greek education reflects this aristocratic orientation. It was governed by three ideas which reflect its profound ties to moral training and literary study.

#### The Heroic Ideal

The "heroic ideal" (Jaeger, 1945; Marrou, 1956; Arendt, 1959) clearly illustrates the moral functions of literary study in Greek education. According to Marrou's A History of Education in Antiquity, Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" were the "basic text, the focus" of both early and later Greek education. He quotes Plato as saying that Homer "was, in the full sense of the word, the educator of Greece" (p. 29). Marrou's examination of "the content of Homeric education, and its ultimate fate" distinguishes "two aspects, one technical and the other ethical" (p. 28). The technical side deals with the child's preparation and initiation into a prescribed way of life. The ethical side was "more than a set of moral rules: a certain ideal of existence is presented, an ideal type of Man" (pp. 28-29). This presentation of an ideal in the stories and heroes of Homer

is the essence of the heroic and moral models which governed the content of Greek education. But this process of using examples of heroic men and actions in education reveals much more than a piece of Greek curricular history. For the heroic ideal, first articulated in Homer and taught to the very end of classical Greek civilization, also demonstrates two other important aspects of Greek education: its reliance on literary examples to picture ideals, and its exploitation of those examples to illustrate conduct in the moral world. "Indeed," Marrou writes, "it was not primarily as a literary masterpiece that the epic [Homer] was studied, but because its content was ethical, a treatise on the ideal" (p. 30). This same emphasis on ethics in the analysis of literature would pervade later Greek educational content, and also cause Plato, with great irony, to turn against Homer and the poets in The Republic.

The concept of "Arete" defines what the heroic ideal should be, and is a second component of Greek education which relied on literary models to teach moral behavior. Defined as virtue, excellence, or valor, this word and the quality it represents underwent transformation as Greek civilization evolved from a Homeric warrior culture in the eighth century to a citizen-oriented polis in the fifth (Marrou, 1956; Jaeger, 1945; Grube, 1974).

## Arete

Homeric arete was "valour in the chivalric sense of the word -- the quality of the brave man, the hero" (Marrou, p. 32). Homer used it frequently "to describe not only human merit but the excellence of non-human things -- the power of the gods, the spirit and speed of noble horses" (Jaeger, p. 5). But arete referred only to noble things or men, and was esteemed the highest attribute the aristocratic Greeks could attain and demonstrate. The Homeric epics focus on descriptions of heroes pursuing and attaining this form of personal and publicly acknowledged glory. They were read or listened to by men who strove to emulate the arete and other ideals which could only be known as they were represented in the epics.

Even when arete came to mean the civic virtue and excellence to be pursued by Athenian citizens in the fifth and fourth centuries, the Homeric epics continued to be the educational tools which reflected the valorous deeds of men, and served as the primary examples of the moral and ethical world of men in action. "That world was the first work of the Panhellenic spirit: it made the Greeks conscious for the first time that they were a nation; and thereby it set an ineffaceable stamp on all later Greek culture" (Jaeger, p. 56). The Homeric epics became the canon that later Greeks would use to educate the aristocracy, and represent its cultural and political values and demands. Thus, the civic

and moral educational functions of the Western literary canon were established.

### Paideia

The concept which dominated Greek educational thought and practice, and which has been used to characterize most fully the classical ideal, is "paideia." According to Werner Jaeger in his three volume analysis Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture (1945), the term can be translated as culture, and signified "a concept of value, a consciously pursued ideal" (p. xvii). Jaeger and others (Marrou, 1956; Grube, 1974) contend that the concept underwent changes throughout specific stages of Greek history, but that the ideal was always linked with the objectives of education. Its earliest meaning was "child-rearing" (Jaeger, p. 286). But by the fourth century "it was used to denote the sum total of all ideal perfections of mind and body... a concept which was now consciously taken to include a genuine intellectual and spiritual culture" (p. 286).

Marrou confirms both the historical evolution in the meaning of paideia and the concept's inextricable ties to the Greek educational model:

Paideia here [in Hellenistic Greece] is no longer the technique by which the child is equipped and made ready in life for the job of becoming a man; by a remarkable extension of meaning -- the same word, in Hellenistic Greek -- is made to denote the results of this educational effort, pursued beyond the years of schooling and lasting throughout the whole life, to realize ever more perfectly the human ideal. Paideia... comes to signify 'culture' (p. 142).

From Homeric times to the heyday of Greek culture in fifth century Athens, it was the major purpose of Greek education to foster and teach this idea of culture which combined the heroic ideal and arete into a definition of Greek morality and identity. Literature, i.e. the canon, was the device used to transmit these ideas (Arendt, 1959; Jaeger, 1945; Marrou, 1956; Pfeiffer, 1968). The cultural ideals portrayed in the early oral epics (as well as later writing) depended on literary devices to embody them, and to make them the shared attributes and behavioral models of the community. The Greeks understood the necessity to rely on literary representation to animate and represent their cultural ideals. European tradition considers that it is this self-conscious reliance on texts (oral and written) which sets Greek civilization apart from cultures which had come before it, and consequently introduced the materials and techniques of literary study into the world.<sup>1</sup>

This reliance on literature in Greek educational practice is also evident in the Greek emphasis on the logos, or word; in descriptions of the poet's function within works of literature including the Homeric epics, and in the Athenian debate between philosophers and rhetoricians which focused on the purposes of language in education and culture.<sup>2</sup> But the place of literature in Greek education is most clearly brought to light in the works of Plato and Aristotle. The mere quantity of their written concerns about

the social and moral functions of literature testifies to the solid position of literature and literary issues not only in the realms of education and culture, but in the realm of politics as well.

### Plato

Plato well knew that the poet's function in his society was to educate by means of describing high ideals of glory. In the "Phaedrus" Socrates tells Phaedrus, his interlocutor, "there is a third form of possession or madness, of which the Muses are the source. This seizes a tender, virgin soul and stimulates it to rapt passionate expression, especially in lyric poetry, glorifying the mighty deeds of ancient times for the instruction of posterity" (Phaedrus, 245 a., in Edman, 1956). This "madness," Socrates argues "is a gift of the gods, fraught with the highest bliss" (245 c.). Despite this apparent praise of poetry, however, Socrates goes on in the dialogue to develop an argument against writing because words "seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever" (275 d.). His major complaint, however, is that once a thing "is put into writing" it gets "into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it" (275 e.). This concern with the wrong words in the hands of the wrong people demonstrates Plato's convictions

about literature as a moral and political force. It is this concern with mis-education, and its moral and political consequences, which causes Plato to banish poets from the ideal polis of The Republic (Grube, trans., 1974).

The Republic makes clear Plato's rejection of the stature and function literature had assumed in Greek society and educational theory. This rejection, however, when taken into account with the incidental praises of poetry which fill the dialogues, and with Plato's own technique of using literary images and references to moralize throughout his work, serves to indicate how much Greek education, and Plato's own writing, depended on the Homeric epics and other works (Jaeger, 1945; Grube, 1980; Marrou, 1956; Kimball, 1986; Kennedy, 1963).<sup>3</sup>

One of the great ironies of Plato's argument against the poets in The Republic is that it eloquently sets out and develops a literary aesthetics which encompasses the subjects of how literature works and how it functions morally and politically. Socrates argues that storytellers should be "controlled" and "the majority of the stories they now tell must be thrown out" (Grube, trans., 1974, p. 47). His argument is substantially pedagogical. The stories we tell to children, he says, "are, in general, untrue, though there is some truth in them" (p. 47). He is concerned that children are carelessly allowed to hear stories invented by anyone and "to take into their souls beliefs which are for

the most part contrary to those we think they should hold in maturity" (p. 47). The aesthetic basis of this argument, however, is particularly important as a guide to the connections between literature, culture, and education which originated with the Homeric epics and were established theories in Plato's day.

The crux of Socrates' argument is that poetry is "imitative" and, as such, "is likely to damage the mind of the audience" (p. 240). He explains the principles of imitation as follows:

The imitative poet has no natural connexion with the controlling intellect. His wisdom is not concerned with it, if he has to have a reputation with the multitude, but with the emotional and varied parts of man because they are a good object of imitation (impersonation)... We should be right to attack him then,... both because his works contain an inferior truth, and because he associates with a part of the soul that is of the same kind, not the best, and is made to like it. And so we were right not to accept him in a city that is well-governed, because he rouses this part of the soul, nurtures it and makes it strong, thus destroying reason... The imitative poet makes for bad government in the individual soul, pandering to that which is unintelligent -- [he is] a maker of images, far distant from the truth. (Grube, trans., 1974, p. 249)

Two principles contained in this argument began a tradition of literary criticism which persisted long after Plato; they have come to be considered essential aspects of literary studies in the West. In his identification of imitation as the process which governs literary creation, Plato brilliantly explains the process by which literature functions as a moral (or immoral) force. The second principle involved, that literature imitates the "emotional

and varied parts of man" not only broadens the subject matter of literature, but identifies its capacity to represent intense moments and aspects of moral experience. Thus, while arguing against these qualities of literature, Plato's Socrates established the moral and psychological elements within literature which literary study would follow and advocate from Plato's time onward.

It is ironic that Plato created this critique while arguing against the introduction of literature into his ideal republic. The greater irony, however, is the fact that while Plato argues from the position that literature is morally and politically dangerous, he unwittingly supports the moral and civic functions of literary education. History has borne out the fact that the functions of literature which Plato identified in The Republic became the basis and rationale for literary instruction in the West.<sup>4</sup>

#### Aristotle

Aristotle's contributions to the traditions governing the purposes of literature and literary study also emphasize the important moral, pedagogical functions of literature in Greek education. His writing on the subject both acknowledges Plato's theories, and disputes them. His literary theory in Poetics (Fergusson, Ed., 1961) and Politics (Loomis, Ed., 1943) is not concerned with an ideal state and its legislation, but with the uses of literature in the education of citizens in existing political systems

which, according to Aristotle, are obliged to govern education. Although he recognizes the dangers of literature, Aristotle is more tolerant of it than Plato. He is much more concerned than Plato with the pleasures of literature; the pleasures which lead to its morally educative potential. The Poetics develops both an analysis of how literature works, and the kinds of pleasures it creates.

Like Plato's, Aristotle's literary theory is based on the concept of "imitation" in art. But it is here that Aristotelian and Platonic theories part ways. For while Plato wrote much about the functions of imitation in art, it was the imitative nature of poetry which caused him to ban it from the ideal state. Imitation, Socrates asserts, causes the mind to turn away from reason and toward irrational passions. Aristotle's analysis is quite different. The imitative quality of literature produces its educational effects. These effects are the results of the pleasures and emotional satisfactions produced by the process of imitation in literature. The theory of imitation is explained in Part IV of The Poetics.

Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes, each of them lying deep in our nature. First, the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated. We have evidence of this in the facts of experience. Objects which in themselves we view with pain, we delight to contemplate when reproduced with minute fidelity... The cause of this again is that to learn gives the liveliest pleasure, not only to

philosophers but to men in general... Thus the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, 'Ah, that is he.' (in Fergusson, 1961, pp. 55-56)

Thus, for Aristotle, the fact that literature works by imitating human experience, which, in turn, brings us both learning and pleasure, is the key to its social and educational utility. He counters Plato's banishment of the poets from the ideal state because of their lies, their imitations, by suggesting that "if it be objected that [the poet's] description is not true to fact, the poet may perhaps reply 'But the objects are as they ought to be' (p. 112). In this way, Aristotle contends that literary art deals with the possible, with what might or should happen, rather than with what has happened; an idea derived from the "moral heroics" of the Greek epics, and the education and culture which strove to inculcate them. Aristotle gives additional support to the moral functions of literature with his idea of catharsis, the purgation of pity and fear in literature's audience. For the cathartic effects of literature serve to defuse the emotions it produces, and this cleansing serves the state by calming and relaxing the citizenry.

Aristotle's support of literary education, however, is not entirely free from the notion of censorship. Like Plato, he agrees "education should be regulated by law and should be an affair of state" (in Loomis, 1943, p. 410). The state,

he writes, "should banish pictures and stage plays which are indecent. Let the rulers see that there is no image or picture representing unseemly actions..." (p. 409). This kind of censorship, according to Aristotle, is particularly necessary in the moral education of young children. But, once again, this support of censorship characterizes the political force which literature had already become in Greek education; a force which Aristotle's literary theory recognizes as having the capacity to shape cultural and moral values as well as worldview.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, while Aristotle agrees with Plato about the state's obligations in education, he sharply disagrees "about the extent to which he would control the social influence of the arts, particularly music and poetry" (Adler, 1965, p. 40). Both writers, however, articulated the major themes in Greek culture and thought which informed literature's pivotal role in education. That role was inseparable from education's function in the formation of cultural, civic, and moral ideals. Plato and Aristotle fully recognized and articulated the political nature of that process, and how important literature was in it. Their works established the basic vocabulary of literary criticism and the principles which promoted the moral and civic functions of literature; principles which came to govern literary education in the West. Once those principles passed from

Greece into Roman civilization, their transmission throughout Europe was assured.<sup>6</sup>

The canon and its functions in moral training were brought to the new World in the theology and Weltanschauung of seventeenth century Puritanism. When the Puritan clergy joined its theology to secular literary study at Harvard College in the early seventeenth century, academic literary studies were established in American higher education.<sup>7</sup> The following chapter examines this process.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt (1959) has observed this fascinating dependence by the Greeks on language and stories. The Human Condition explores the connections which existed between the Athenian's recognition of the power of words, their storytelling, and their concept of freedom. According to Arendt, the Greeks depended on the power of speech to overcome the inherent unpredictability, "the limitations and boundaries [which] exist within the realm of human affairs" (1959, p. 170). Turning speech into stories, for the Greeks, allowed "the essence of who somebody is " [which] "can come into being only when life departs" to enter the "web of relationships" and be remembered (p. 172). Using the model of the Homeric epics, according to Arendt, the Greeks believed that "whoever consciously aims at being 'essential,' at leaving behind a story and an identity which will win 'immortal fame,' must not only risk his life but expressly choose, as Achilles did, a short life" in order that his "disclosure" or "appearance" in public life become more worthy of remembering in story (p. 173). Thus, "even Achilles... remains dependent upon the storyteller, poet, or historian, without whom everything he did remains futile" (p. 173). Achilles's story, then, became both an example of the heroic life to be followed by the Greeks and the efficacy and function of story-telling. In addition to those capacities, the story of Achilles, according to Arendt, "served as the prototype of action for Greek antiquity and influenced, in the form of the so-called agonial spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states" (p. 173). In turn, Arendt tell us, this passion to "show one's self" relied on the power of speech to become actualized. In this analysis, language and story are crucial to education, action, and politics in the Greek world view.

<sup>2</sup> That debate has been traditionally depicted as the split between poetry and philosophy, rhetoric and truth, represented on one side by Isocrates who promoted the utilitarian and political uses of language, and the Socratic side which argued that language should be used philosophically, in dialogues pursuing the nature of the good.

<sup>3</sup> In many of Plato's works, Ion and The Apology among them, his philosophical and literary stances express admiration and wonder at what he considers to be divinely inspired poets and their art. In the Ion, Socrates tells Ion: "All good epic poets utter those beautiful poems not through

their craft, but as men possessed by some other power. And the same is true of good melic poets: as corybants dance when beside themselves, so the melic poets are beside themselves when they make those beautiful songs." (in Grube, Plato's Thought, 1980, p. 181)

<sup>4</sup> I mean here that Plato's theory of imitation and the influence of poetry on individuals and societies, although he characterized them as destructive phenomena, were carried on in every way but negatively. These concepts became the backbone of literary aesthetics and criticism. His banishment of the poets in The Republic is considered to have little to do with his ultimate theories of literature, except as it demonstrates the poet/philosopher dichotomy in Greek thought, and the very political nature of literature in Greek education and society.

<sup>5</sup> It must also be remembered that in The Republic Socrates supports the poets who write "hymns to the gods and eulogies of good men" (p. 251). In this same section, Socrates tells Glaucon that "Homer is most poetic and that he stands first among the tragedians," and goes on to regret the banishment of poets from the republic which is one result of the "ancient quarrel between it [poetry] and philosophy (p. 251). Indeed, above all it is Plato's philosophic search for truth which turns him against poets who thrive by imitating truth.

<sup>6</sup> "The historical importance of Roman education is not to be found in any slight variations or additions it may have made to classical education of the Hellenistic type, but in the way it managed to spread this education through time and space... The truth concerns something quite different: Rome's historic function was not create a new civilization but to take the Hellenistic civilization which had conquered her and establish it firmly on the whole Mediterranean world" (Marrou, 1956, p. 391). Of course, Rome's influence went much further. It is particularly important to remember that much of the classical influence on the nineteenth century in America was Roman-oriented, an influence which originated in the eighteenth century when American law and government turned to Roman models in the process of development.

<sup>7</sup> The Christian era, the age of Medieval scholasticism and the founding of universities, and the Renaissance accepted the classical model and made lasting additions to developing

theories about the function and meaning of literature in society and education. When higher education curriculum began to evolve in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., the study of Greek and Latin -- as language and as literature -- pervaded educational practices. Although it is true that literature before the nineteenth century was never a discipline per se, its study was incorporated in medieval and Renaissance concepts such as the "septem artes liberales" which were thoroughly based on literary education. These seven Liberal Arts were first described by Martianus Capella in the fifth century. They consisted of the "Trivium" -- Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic -- and the "Quadrivium" -- Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy. The later Renaissance added the study of Greek literature to this basic "liberal arts" program, according to Morison (1956). This early curriculum is evidence of the literary nature of medieval conceptions of what education should be, and its dependence on classical texts (Morison, 1935; Kimball, 1986; Butts, 1939).

## CHAPTER II

### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: LITERATURE AND PURITANISM

The origins of literary study in American higher education were significantly influenced by the Biblical tradition as expressed in Puritan faith and theology. When the Puritans joined this tradition to the study of classical literature at Harvard in the early seventeenth century, the model for literary study in America became firmly established. In this chapter we examine how Puritan teachers introduced literary studies into American education, combining the moral and classicizing traditions of early Greek education with an intractable belief in the moral and sacred laws and literature of the Bible. We shall see that Puritanism's dependence on literary education was due to two components of that religion: its belief in the Word and the Word's potential to incarnate the Godhead (as the Bible did), and its need to train ministers. These interrelations of Puritanism and literature were crucial factors in the early development of literary study in American higher education.

#### Puritanism and the Word

While Puritanism at first may seem the unlikely "alma mater" of literature as a discipline in America, a closer look at its theological and philosophical premises indicates that its dogma and worldview were highly dependent on

literature. In the first place, the primary tenet of Puritan faith was the belief that the Word was the incarnation of spirit, and that it had achieved its linguistic apotheosis in the revealed word of the Old Testament.

According to both Calvinism and Lutheranism -- the pedagogic and doctrinal forces shaping Puritan theology -- the Old Testament, particularly, contained the universal, moral law which governed human thought and behavior. As such, the language and stories of the Old (and New) Testament were sacrosanct, illustrative of a power which was miraculous in that the word of God had assumed incarnation in ancient languages. It was a further miracle that these languages, i.e., this incarnation, was still accessible, and translatable. The reality of this power led to the Puritan's belief in, and dependence on, the power of the word in general to convey their faith; a faith which included spiritual and worldly submission to doctrine. Perry Miller (1939) describes the Puritan's dependence on the Word as follows:

They believed that, the facts being what they are, one deduction alone was possible. The facts were in the Bible, which was of course the Word of God... Therefore the sovereign God, who is also, merciful, has patiently explained all that we really need to know in a language we can understand. He does not leave us to the delusive light of natural reason, but gives us a law, 'not in more obscure termes, or so as only to be drawn by Consequence, but this shall be expressed in so many words;' [and] it is 'written as in Capitall Letters, that every one that runneth may read it, and none may plead excuse or exemption.' (pp. 7-20)

This system of belief led the Puritans to the premise that truth was not discoverable, but had been once and for all set down in language that all those who came to God could understand and follow. Miller refers to this core of belief as Puritan "literalism;" and, indeed, the Puritans relied upon the power of Biblical language and story to guide their quotidian and spiritual activities.

In addition to the theological credence the Puritans assigned to the incarnation of God in the word, they also depended on the powers of language and story for propagating their faith and beliefs. As inheritors of medieval and Renaissance methods of scholarship and rhetoric, Puritan writers, teachers, and preachers knew full well that the transmission of the faith depended on, in their case, explication and syllogistic proof. Their religion needed an intellectual as well as spiritual focus. Orthodox Puritans knew that sermons, texts, exegeses, and other forms of figurative and rhetorical language were, other than the Bible, the only means available to them for breathing life into their doctrines. Thus Puritan preachers and intellectuals, and the congregations they addressed, depended on literary scholarship and techniques to foster and spread their creed.

By 1600, "Calvinism could no longer remain the relatively simple dogmatism of its prophet [i.e. John Calvin]. It needed amplification, it required concise

explication, syllogistic proof, intellectual as well as spiritual focus. The thinking of... Puritanism was governed by this requirement" (Miller, 1939, p. 95). This particular faith in, and dependence on, literature and rhetoric to explicate doctrine led to volumes of Puritan works on theology, and the Bible, and to sermons which concentrated on vivid images and illustrations of doctrine and moral law. These literary manifestations of faith and teaching serve to verify the fact that "in true Puritanism, faith can never remain mere spiritual conviction; it must also be made articulate" (p. 67).

#### Puritanism and Classical Literature

In spite of internecine controversy over methods of articulation, American Puritanism settled for a reliance on classical methods of explanation and reasoning to articulate its spiritual and secular precepts.<sup>1</sup>

Historians of the Puritan seventeenth century in New England have documented the sect's affiliations with classical humanism. Private libraries have been examined, books counted, and sermons investigated all of which prove that leading Puritans owned and made use of classical texts. There is, of course, a certain irony involved in this "heathenish" interest in pagan literature, and there were those Puritans who stood firmly against all pagan/classical influence on the primarily Hebraic foundations of the faith.<sup>2</sup> Yet Greek and Roman influence seemed an

inevitability in the planting of the New World. The reasons for this are numerous, but most important are two facts: Puritanism was a religion which rested on scholarly theological foundations which put great stock in logical connections, and secondly, it had become articulated and fortified in England at Oxford and Cambridge.

Morison (1956) and others put the number of university graduates who emigrated to New England before 1646 at "at least one hundred and thirty." Morison goes on to explain that "this does not seem a very impressive total; but the entire population of New England in 1645 was not greater than 25,000, and probably less, which means that there was on the average one university-trained man to every forty or fifty families" (pp. 17-18). Morison's investigations into the demographics of the Puritan emigration also reveal that a "large but indeterminate number" of Puritan men who arrived in New England had "a sound classical education in the English grammar schools, and therefore saw eye to eye with the university men on intellectual matters" (p. 17). He also concludes that these grammar school and university-trained emigres had "an influence all out of proportion to their numbers" (p. 17). This is not surprising given the essential Puritan trust in scholarship, the basic scholarly nature of their theology, and the need of the faith to be propounded, explained, proved, and syllogized in reasoned (and therefore classical) terms and rhetorical argument.

These facts collected by historians such as Miller (1939), Morison (1956), and Staveland (1987) indicate both the acceptance and importation of the classical canon by a substantial portion of the Puritan leadership in New England. Morison refers to this phenomenon as constituting "an intellectual ruling class" which set ethical, moral, and intellectual standards for the Puritan community, and the college they would found soon after their arrival on the American continent. These standards and their propagation were based on a perceived need and mission to carry to the new world the "civilization" which Puritan scholars and clergy believed was their inheritance as Englishmen and children of God (Morison, 1956; Miller, 1939; Staveland, 1987; Wright, 1966). This civilization was embodied in the classical canon which the university men brought out of England with them, and which they set great store by as devices both embodying and transmitting the secular ideals and values they believed in. This knowledge, of course, when set beside the knowledge transmitted by the Word as revealed in the Bible, paled in its significance as a guide to spiritual and practical life. Yet the Puritans were reluctant to turn their backs on the canon and tradition which contained such secular knowledge. On the contrary, they worked to incorporate into their world view the paradox contained in the Word as revealed, on the one hand, and the tradition of classical texts, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

Miller's (1939) assessment of the seventeenth century "New England mind" raises interesting issues regarding the seeming paradox between the knowledge revealed in scripture as used by Puritans and their acceptance of the Western, secular canon. According to Miller, the paradox produced struggles over the nature of the ministry and education, as well as the sectarian dilemma about whether knowledge was necessary in experiencing, comprehending and articulating religious feelings and affections. At the same time, Miller's research indicates that the paradox might be interpreted as specious in light of the Puritan's urge to unify knowledge, and to use classical humanism as further evidence of the truth of revelation. He concludes that both forces landed on the American continent with the seventeenth century Puritan influx, and that "Puritans both in England and New England drew freely upon the stores of knowledge and the methods of thinking which were then available to educated men" (p. 89). He connects this reliance on the canon to Puritan attitudes toward literature, and further concludes "Puritans in New England were not unfamiliar with works which we call literature, [and] that Puritanism was not in itself hostile to 'belles-lettres'" (p. 91).

Both Miller (1939) and Morison (1956) present textual evidence which confirms that "classical orators and citations from classical philosophy helped out many sermons" (Miller, p. 99). In addition, evidence points to the fact

that Plutarch and Seneca were frequently quoted and referred to, and that "passages from these two moralists are legion in New England writers" (p. 99). Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero were also frequently quoted and written about in their roles as classical authorities, particularly in sermons and political tracts. It will be shown that this absence of doctrinal animosity toward literature actually contributed to a reliance on its ability to inculcate cultural and moral values in students when the Puritans institutionalized theological and literary studies at Harvard College.

Puritanism's professed mission to transmit Western culture to the New World is apparent in its attitudes towards the incarnating power of words, its practical uses of the intellectual tradition, and in its theological premises which, above all, emphasized the Puritan's "errand into the wilderness" (Miller, 1964; Winthrop in Perkins, 1985; Miller and Johnson, 1965). The objective of that "errand" was to bring to the new world the revealed word and the knowledge and traditions of the old as they were filtered and re-constructed by the Protestant Reformation. The histories, journals, and sermons of scholars and preachers throughout the century are persistent in the acknowledgment of, and commitment to, this mission. John Winthrop (1630), the chief steward of the Massachusetts Bay

Colony, made that mission quite clear on board the Arabella before landing in Boston Harbor:

We must delight in each other, make other's conditions our own... always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "the Lord make it like that of New England." For we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill. The eyes of all people are upon Us... (in Perkins, 1985, p. 33)

Winthrop's sermon emphasized the religious mission of the Puritans aboard the Arabella, as well as the rationale for why they would need to find community as they confronted the hazards of an unknown natural and cultural wilderness. But throughout "A Model of Christian Charity" is the sense that the religious mission is tied to the more secular job of bringing to the New World the light of Reformation thought as it was illuminated by Puritanism. Miller's (1964) essay titled Errand Into the Wilderness argues that the migration led by Winthrop was "running an errand in the earlier and more primitive sense of the word -- performing a job not so much for Jehovah as for history, which was the wisdom of Jehovah expressed through time" (p. 11). The errand, Miller writes, was "being run for the sake of Reformed Christianity; and while the first aim was indeed to realize in America the due form of government, both civil and ecclesiastical, the aim behind that aim was to vindicate the most rigorous ideal of the Reformation" (1964, p. 12). This ideal included the intellectual traditions the

Reformation inherited, as well as those it was newly espousing. It therefore depended, in part, on the canon for its content and methods; that tradition which was represented in classical literature. In order to sanitize that tradition, Protestant scholars funneled it through Protestant methods and theology. Nonetheless, "the gentile learning" found its way into the tradition that first spread through Europe and then was planted with the Puritans in America. Cotton Mather, the imposing and influential Puritan divine, characterized this Protestant-Classical Humanism complex as follows:

Incredible Darkness was upon the Western parts of Europe, two Hundred years ago: Learning was wholly swallowed up in Barbarity. But when the Turks made their descent so far upon the Greek churches as to drive all before them, very many Learned Greeks, with their Manuscripts, and Monuments, fled into Italy, and other parts of Europe. This occasioned the Revival of Letters there, which prepared the World for the Reformation of Religion too; and the Advances of the Sciences ever since. (in Miller, 1939, p. 97)

This characterization by one of Puritanism's most learned and influential spokesmen indicates how Puritans found it possible to join the secular canon to the Old Testament and to their religious mission, and make of them one commitment to bringing God's word into the world. As they respected the Bible, and the power by which it came to live for them, so they understood the power of more profane literature to affect action and thought. Their world view merged Reformation religion and the Western tradition, Bible studies and study of the secular canon. As that world view

became naturalized in the American landscape, it gave rise to the necessity for its institutionalization. The founding of Harvard College in 1636 accomplished this task for the Puritans. It initiated a tradition in higher education which valued the ability of the word -- in the Bible and in Greek and Roman text -- to stabilize and propagate the Puritan faith as well as the new American culture rapidly developing around it.

#### Institutionalization of Literature Studies at Harvard

The objectives of Harvard College's earliest curriculum were articulately summed up in the Massachusetts Bay Colony's 1646 "promotional pamphlet" New Englands First Fruits:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and wee had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, rear'd convenient places for Gods worship, and settled the Civill Government: One of the next things we longed for, and looked after was to advance Learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust. (in Morison, 1935, p. 432)

These objectives and closer inspection of the actual curriculum indicate that Puritan higher education at this time had two major purposes: the training of ministers and the transmission of the Western intellectual heritage as it was funneled through Puritan ideology. "All students, whether or not candidates for the pulpit, took a prescribed course in six of the traditional Seven Arts (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy), in the Three

Philosophies (Metaphysics, Ethics, and Natural Science), and in Greek, Hebrew, and Ancient History" (Morison, 1956, p. 42). This curriculum is based on the idea of "liberal education" which was developed during the medieval period and the Renaissance. The Renaissance had promoted the classical ideal in its theories and practices of education. It added the secular dimension of literary studies to the medieval tradition of education which trained students for the ministry. At Harvard, the early curriculum illustrates a merging of these two traditions, both of which were based on linguistic and literary studies (Morison, 1935).

As a new religion in a new world, Puritanism created an institution and a curriculum to promote its civil and ecclesiastical principles. It built Harvard College to train its aristocracy, the ministers whose responsibility it was to propagate the faith and "advance Learning." In the theocratic complexity of Massachusetts Bay, these two educational purposes were inextricably joined. They reflected the essential secular and religious unification of the Puritan way of life. The Puritans constructed affirmation of this unity from their reading of secular and religious literature. Both were necessary in the training of ministers whose responsibilities included the interpretation of Divine and civil law, as well as seeing to the perpetuation of "Learning to Posterity." <sup>4</sup> Thus, the civic and moral functions of literary study which had been

developed by classical thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle arrived in the New World because the Puritans believed the rules for how to live in this world and the next had been written in one book which was the incarnation of Divine law. Literary studies became necessary because ministers whose responsibility was to interpret the book needed training in how to read it and transmit its rules and knowledge. There can be little doubt that the Puritans believed, as Increase Mather said, "that the Interest of Religion and good Literature, hath risen and fallen together" (in Miller, 1939, p. 98).

It can be assumed from statements such as Mather's and from the objectives and curriculum of Harvard in 1636 that Puritanism did not reject outright the ideals and methods which classical Greek education had promoted for its own culture, and by extension, the Western heritage.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, Puritanism continued the tradition and landed it in America. It accepted the institutionalization of that heritage when it modeled its college on English medieval and Renaissance universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. It contributed to the further institutionalization of the tradition when it devised a curriculum based on literary studies which were intended to train the leaders of its culture. In the process, the study of Christian gospel was joined to the study of works by Plato, Seneca, and Plutarch (Morison, 1936). The canon which had its beginnings in

classical Greece, and had been rediscovered and enhanced in Renaissance Europe, was brought to America in the libraries and doctrines of the Church leaders who governed the secular and spiritual lives of the Puritans. That canon was already beginning to be securely housed in the Harvard College library of 1636. Its function in the seventeenth century was to teach a learned ministry to make both civil and ecclesiastical polity clear to the community. By the end of the next century, the canon and the study of literature in English were being used to teach citizens the laws and values of the new republic. It is to the subject of vernacular literature and eighteenth century nationalism that we now turn.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Puritan controversy over the religion's reliance on words and Western scholarship is made clear in the eventual banishment of Anne Hutchinson from the Massachusetts Bay colony. The so-called "Antinomian affair" caused a split in the Puritan community of the 1640's. In one "party" were the Hutchinsonians who believed and argued that words and scholarly works clouded faith and revelation. They promoted suspicion of learned clergy because "it is only the Inspiration of God, that inables a man to know the things of God, and not a mans study or Humane Learning... The Arts, Sciences, Languages, etc. are Idols, Antichristian, the smoke of the bottomlesse Pit, filth, froth, dung, needlesse and uselesse for the right understanding of the Scripture" (in Miller, 1939, p. 73). On the other hand, was the party composed of orthodox ministers and believers who were forced to defend the spiritual efficacies of language and literature, its power to further illuminate the Word which had already been revealed. This was the party which had taken responsibility for the founding of Harvard, and which argued that "Learning... quickens, and imbetters the naturall faculties of the Soul" and that "Sanctified Wit beautifies Religion, sanctified Reason defends it, sanctified power protects it, sanctified Elocution perswades others to the love of it" (Reynolds in Miller, 1939, p. 84). It is interesting to consider what would have been the fate of Harvard and its curriculum if the orthodox had not seen fit to banish Anne Hutchinson on March 22nd, 1638 -- the same day that they voted to fund the establishment of the college.

<sup>2</sup> Miller and Morison quote many examples of vitriolic sermons and texts against the classics, including: "Must that word be secured by Aristotle, which delivers all the Elect from sin, death and hell for ever? Are Grammar, Rhetorick, Logick, Ethicks, Physicks, Metaphysicks, Mathematicks, the weapons whereby we must defend the Gospel?" (in Miller, 1953, p. 78).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Wright (1966) devotes an entire chapter in his Literary Culture in Early New England to the documentation of libraries and the circulation of books in seventeenth century New England. Although religious texts far outnumbered classical, secular texts, Greek and Roman authors were nonetheless well represented. Miles Standish's library, for instance, contained Homer's "Iliad," and Caesar's Commentaries, among other secular works. The over four hundred volume library of William Brewster of Plymouth included works by Machiavelli and Seneca, as well as

contemporary works by Bacon, Hakluyt, and Cawdrey. John Harvard who left his extensive library to the college which took his name had accumulated books by Aesop, Erasmus, Homer, Juvenal, Isocrates, Lucan, Plautus, Plutarch, Salustius, Terence, and Cicero, among other classical writers. Seventeenth century historians such as Wright, Miller, and Morison use this documentation to demonstrate the degree to which the Puritans were acquainted with the classical tradition, and were schooled by it. As this thesis argues, a major aspect of that tradition was the conviction that works of literature had the capacity to inculcate cultural and moral values. Miller, Wright, Morison and other historians agree that this conviction was integral to the Puritan Weltanschauung, and that it led to their conception of education.

\* It should be noted that, like the Greeks and virtually every other pre-twentieth century culture, the Puritans reserved higher education for an elite. In ancient Greece, this was the class of free men whose freedom was directed toward governing themselves and others. For the Puritans, the predominant elite were the ministers who governed and sermonized, and who could give the Word powerful incarnation in their writings, sermons, and magisterial pronouncements. Even in the restricted seventeenth century, the word was at the center of appearance in public life.

<sup>5</sup> We know much more about the specifics of the curriculum at Harvard twenty years after its founding. In regard to the place of Greek studies, for instance, Morison points out that President Chauncy, second President of Harvard College, had been known in Cambridge (England) as one of the best Hellenists of his day, and had been a lecturer in Greek at Trinity College. In addition, one of Harvard College's entrance requirements in 1655 was "to be able to construe and Grammatically to resolve ordinary Greeke, as in the Greeke Testament, Isocrates, and the minor poets, or such like" (in Morison, 1956, p. 45). It is true that practice in reading Greek was most likely aimed at developing proficiency for reading the New Testament. Nonetheless, Isocrates and the minor poets embodied Hellenism and had been used by the Greeks themselves for educational purposes. At least some ministers in training were undoubtedly not immune to the aesthetic and moral values imbedded in these works.

## CHAPTER III

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY INFLUENCES ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

While the conjunction of Puritanism and the traditional canon established literary study at seventeenth century Harvard, the nationalist spirit and intellectual ferment of the eighteenth century influenced how literature in the vernacular would be studied in American higher education. Part I of this chapter will examine the decline of the classical curriculum in the years before the Revolution. This development in colonial education created the climate for the developing importance of vernacular studies in the American curriculum. We shall find that, during a time when Greek and Latin were considered the only languages suitable for study and teaching, the introduction of English into the classroom was itself a nationalistic, if not revolutionary, phenomenon.

Part II of this chapter examines the far-reaching influence of post-revolutionary nationalism on the teaching of literature in American higher education. The nationalist ideal, and the movement to promote it as the cornerstone of a "new Republican education,"<sup>1</sup> were central to the works of Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster. These three writers were instrumental in creating the nationalist tendencies which influenced the mission of the English department in the next century. They promoted the idea that

study of the vernacular, with emphasis on literature, was crucial in accomplishing the aims of a new, American education that would create enlightened, patriotic, useful citizens.

Franklin's and Rush's writings on education remained theoretical, but none the less were influential in shaping the dialogue which occurred among contemporary theorists on the nature of "Republican education." This dialogue was crucial to the development of the American curriculum which began to take shape in the next century. In the works of Noah Webster we shall see practical methods of using the vernacular to introduce nationalist ideals into the curriculum.

## PART I

### The Decline of Classical Studies in Pre-Revolutionary America

A great deal of evidence exists which demonstrates a gradual decline of the classical curriculum in colonial American schools as early as the late seventeenth century. This evidence is apparent in the number of "English" <sup>2</sup> schools which were opened, as well as in the English textbooks of the period. George Teaforde, focusing on education in early Massachusetts, reports "that the ideal of the classical grammar school, so apparent during the first decades of settlement, by the eighteenth century seems to have been gradually disappearing" (McClennan & Reese, 1988, p. 29). He documents middle and late seventeenth century

court records to prove that numerous towns in Massachusetts failed to obey the Massachusetts law legislating the establishment of grammar schools.<sup>3</sup> These same towns, however, established more informal English or "writing" schools which taught reading and writing in the vernacular. Teaford ascribes this to the fact that as the seventeenth century came to a close, secularization as well as changes in the numbers and varieties of the population altered the Puritan emphasis on classical education. In addition, rapidly changing economic and social factors contributed to a growing emphasis on utilitarian education which offered vocational futures to merchants, lawyers, doctors, and other developing American professions. Courses were needed in science, business, English, mathematics; courses which began to redirect the curriculum from an earlier concentration on training ministers, gentlemen, and scholars (Butts, 1978; Curti, 1951; Cohen, 1974; Hansen, 1965).

The most noticeable changes in curriculum were carried out in elementary and "grammar" schools, wherein Sol Cohen (1974) finds evidence of the "weakened predominance of classically oriented curricula" (p. 79). His examination of textbooks of the period demonstrates a slow but gradual shift in emphasis from sectarian and Latin and Greek content to nonsectarian content and the use of the vernacular (pp. 96-97).<sup>4</sup>

In regard to higher education, Cohen's investigations of pre-revolutionary curricula point to a broadening curriculum "which included mathematics, natural philosophy, and scientific subjects which accounted for at least one-fifth of a student's classroom time." In addition, notes Cohen, "readings from Newton, Locke, and other luminaries of the Enlightened entered other studies" (pp. 100-101).

Freeman Butts's (1939) research on pre-revolutionary Harvard, his benchmark for changing curriculum in the eighteenth century, shows that while liberal education remained "religious and bookish," significant changes in the curriculum were weakening the hold of the classics. He reports that in 1728 the Hollis Professorship of mathematics was established, and by 1743 "the Harvard curriculum included more Enlightenment science and philosophy in the form of Isaac Watts' Astronomy, Gravesende's Natural Philosophy, Fordyce's Moral Philosophy, and Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding" -- all in English (p. 62).

The greatest blow to Harvard's classical curriculum, according to Butts, was the overseers' 1767 vote "to revise the tutorial system so that each tutor would teach only one or only a few subjects to each class instead of teaching all subjects to one class" (p. 63). He quotes the crucial section of the proposal:

For the advancement of learning it is proposed, That one Tutor shall teach Latin; another Greek; another Logic, Metaphysics, Ethics; and the other Natural Philosophy, Geography, Astronomy, and the Elements of

Mathematicks...That on Friday and Saturday mornings each class shall be instructed by a distinct Tutor in Elocution, Composition in English, Rhetoric and other parts of the Belles Lettres. (p. 63)

The introduction of a separate tutor for English language and literature studies at Harvard marked a weakening of the predominance of classics study at the country's oldest college. Frederick Rudolph's (1962) observations on eighteenth century Harvard also note the waning of Latin and Greek. He points out that a 1653 disputation in English at Harvard commencement was considered by faculty "a concession to the general public... not soon repeated," but that in 1754 Harvard "provided for a group of English debates at Commencement." Further, in 1756 the college "provided for a system of undergraduate exhibitions in which English oratory was displayed. In 1767 English grammar and oratory entered the sophomore studies at Yale. In 1771 two new tutors, Timothy Dwight and John Trumbull, edged the study of belles lettres into their instruction" (pp. 37-38).

Rudolph's evidence demonstrates the declining predominance of classics in the early to mid eighteenth century curriculum. At the same time, of course, it can be seen that vernacular studies were on the rise. Rudolph (1962) reports that "in 1776 the Yale corporation grudgingly acceded to a request from the senior class that they be allowed to receive instruction in rhetoric, history, and belles lettres -- all in English." The same process was

operant at Princeton where in 1768, the college's new President "introduced instruction in belles lettres." Seven years later, in 1785, Ezra Stiles at Yale "welcomed into the course of study Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, published in London two years before, the first textbook in English literature" (pp. 38-39).<sup>5</sup>

Butts' and Rudolph's evidence makes it clear that the ascendancy of English during the period was "in part a function of the substitution of forensic disputations for syllogistic disputations. The 'New Learning' made itself felt throughout the curriculum, dignifying induction at the expense of deduction, ethics at the expense of theology, and English at the expense of Latin" (Rudolph, 1962, p. 37). This process of "dignifying" English as a subject of study signaled a new direction for American education. An "enlightened" conception began to permeate the pre-revolutionary educational establishment: Greek and Latin grammar and literature were no longer entirely appropriate subjects to convey the ideals of an emerging nation which was facing revolution. By the time of the Revolution, it became apparent to writers, practitioners, and politicians that vernacular studies should be used to inculcate the nationalism and Republican ideals which were to shape the identity of the new nation (Butts, 1953; Hansen, 1965; Rudolph, 1962).

## PART II

### Nationalism

Writers on education and politics in the twenty years following the Revolution ardently promoted methods for creating a national identity which would separate American politics and culture from England and Europe and introduce to the world the concept of an American Republic and citizenry. In 1782, the French expatriate St. Jean de Crevecoeur<sup>6</sup> summed up nationalist efforts to construct an American identity when he posed his now famous question, "What then is the American, this new man?" He answered:

He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world... The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. (in Perkins, 1985, pp. 211-212)

Crevecoeur's question nicely indicates the existence and scope of the challenge that post-Revolutionary Americans confronted. They were obliged to create a national identity which<sup>54</sup> had never existed before, and they were confronted with the need to find methods to define, educate, and inculcate this identity (Butts, 1953; Cremin, 1980; Commager, 1950; Mosier, 1952). Those who were aware of the issue and made themselves responsible for identifying solutions, turned, of course, to the schools. The system and philosophy of education they began to shape was one which

assumed responsibility for inculcating national identity, and created the cultural traditions which, it was hoped, would in large part define that identity.

In essence, the "national" period was devoted to the establishment of a system of republican education which would examine and teach "the principles of public right and the foundations of true virtue upon which the republic had been founded" (Mosier, 1952, p. 135). According to Benjamin Rush, this meant that American educators would have to examine "our former habits upon this subject, and in laying the foundations for nurseries of wise and good men, to adapt our modes of teaching to the peculiar form of government" (p. 135). Rush, along with Franklin, led the movement to establish a system of republican education which would "inculcate these republican duties" in pupils and "inspire them with republican principles" (p. 135). It is to their work we now turn.

#### Benjamin Franklin on English in the Schools

In 1750, Benjamin Franklin wrote to Samuel Adams: "I think with you, that nothing is more important for the public weal, than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue. Wise and good men, are, in my opinion, the strength of the state" (in Blinderman, 1975, p. 49). Franklin's writings on education<sup>7</sup> continued to argue this basic premise which was shared by many of his contemporaries. His

writings on education expounded on the best methods for creating the sought-after results.

Franklin's particular influences on the study of literature were his public arguments that study of classical languages need not be central in the educational systems of the new Republic, his advocacy for vernacular studies, and his promotion and design of English schools. "There is in Mankind," Franklin wrote, "an unaccountable Prejudice in favour of ancient Customs and Habitudes, which inclines to a Continuance of them after the Circumstances which formerly made them useful, cease to exist" (in Sol Cohen, 1974, p. 508). He was referring to the study of classical languages in his 1789 "Observations Relative to the Intention of the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia."

In these "observations," Franklin ascribes the study of classical languages to an anachronistic habit which has little place in the new Republic. He is not entirely opposed to the study of Latin and Greek, but argues that in the new Republic, where so much was revolutionary, educators should not force the study of classical languages on every student. Rather, the study of languages should be utilitarian, geared to students' "intended" vocations. His position was most clearly stated when he wrote "all [students] should not be compell'd to learn Latin, Greek or the modern foreign languages; yet not that have an ardent Desire to learn them should be refused" (1789, in Sol Cohen, 1974, p. 409). This

was a radically different perspective on the study of Latin and Greek than the conventional one. It was a perspective which derived from the cornerstone of Franklin's ideas for education in the new Republic: it should be of use to the citizens and the state.

This educational utilitarianism was most clearly expressed by Franklin in his views on the necessity and benefits of studying the vernacular. He writes in the 1749 "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania" that "it would be well if [the students] could be taught every Thing that is useful, and every Thing that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be most useful and most ornamental, Regard being had to the several Professions for which they are intended" (1749, in Sol Cohen, 1974, p. 497). His "proposals" then launch into what Franklin considered the subjects most useful in the creation of enlightened, aspiring Republicans. The first subject he discusses is English. "The English Language might be taught by Grammar," he writes, "in which some of our best writers as Tillotson, Addison, Pope, Algernon Sidney, Cato's Letters &c. should be Classicks..." (p. 497). The suggestion that contemporary writers be used to teach language, and that these writers could be considered "Classick" was a rather revolutionary idea at this time, but one which Franklin promoted and explained how

to institutionalize in his 1751 essay "Idea of an English School."

Franklin believed strongly that "the good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men in all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Commonwealths. Almost all Governments have therefore made it a principal Object of their Attention, to establish and endow with proper Revenues, such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour to themselves, and to their Country" (1751, in Sol Cohen, 1974, p. 496). To this end, Franklin proposed the establishment of an "Academy" in which youth "might receive the Accomplishments of a regular Education" (p. 495). According to Franklin the purposes of education as well as the nation's interest in proper education could both be served by an "English School" where the importance and utility of the vernacular would be foremost in the curriculum. Franklin sketches out the curriculum of such a school in his 1751 "Idea of the English School Sketch'd Out for the Consideration of the Trustees of the Philadelphia Academy." ° In this "sketch," Franklin details the curriculum class by class, and the role of English in each. He summarizes the purpose and accomplishments of the English School in this way:

Thus instructed, Youth will come out of this School fitted for learning any Business, Calling or Profession, except wherein Languages are required; and tho' unacquainted with any antient or foreign Tongue,

they will be Masters of their own, which is of more immediate and general Use; and withal will have attain'd many other valuable Accomplishments; the Time usually spent in acquiring those Languages, often without Success, being here employ'd in laying such a Foundation of Knowledge and Ability, as, properly improv'd, may qualify them to pass thro' and execute the several Offices of civil Life, with Advantage and Reputation to themselves and Country. (1751, in Sol Cohen, 1974, pp. 503-504)

In educational philosophy such as this, Franklin set the tone for the study of English in the new American educational system. This system was about to promote and then institutionalize the study of the vernacular as a kind of key to the attainment of individual success in the new commercialism of the Republic. In addition, vernacular studies would be central to an education system and philosophy designed to create patriotic citizens who could both manipulate and respect their system of government. The respect which Franklin's contemporaries held for him, as well as his vast influence, were crucial in these new ideas receiving national attention. (Cohen, 1974; Hampson, 1968; Hansen, 1965). His own facility with English literature and language played no little role in that influence and served to make his arguments more powerful.

#### Benjamin Rush and "Republican Machines"

Perhaps the most interesting indication of the rise of English after the Revolution, and the shaping of the purposes it would serve in American education, were the numerous plans for national education which were widely published and debated during the period 1780 to 1797.

Indeed, in that year the American Philosophical Society sponsored a competition for the best system of, as one of the winning "contestants" put it: "liberal Education and literary instruction, adapted to the genius of the Government of the United States; comprehending also a plan for instituting and conducting public schools in this country, on principles of the most utility" (in Hansen, 1965, p. 110).

Benjamin Rush was a leader in the Revolutionary movement, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was a doctor who wrote extensively on scientific and medical issues, and on education. His curriculum proposals significantly influenced the shape of late eighteenth century education. His particular concerns included articulating the curriculum and philosophy of a national education, with specific attention paid to what kind of curriculum should be used to educate citizens in the new Republic.

Rush was convinced that a new kind of education was required for the new kind of society that America was in the years following the Revolution. He wrote that "the business of education acquired a new complexion by the independence of our country" (1797, in Hansen, 1965, p. 51). His widely-read writings on education set out to define this "new complexion." The place of vernacular English language and literature study was dominant among his ideas.

Like Franklin, Rush balked at the tradition of keeping Latin and Greek central in the curriculum. The title of an he essay he published in Museum Magazine in 1798 clearly states his case: "Observations upon The Study of The Latin and Greek Languages, As A Branch of Liberal Education, with Hints of A Plan of Liberal Education, with Hints of A Plan of Liberal Instruction, Without Them, Accommodated To The Present State of Society, Manners, And Government in The United States." In this article, Rush gave numerous reasons for why the study of Latin and Greek were inappropriate to the educational aims of the new Republic. Among these were its lack of accessibility, and its tendency (because texts needed to be translated) to render all learning exclusive and specialized. This ran counter, Rush argued, to universal education which it was the role of a democracy to foster. Latin and Greek study also took up curricular time which could be spent teaching science, history, and English -- the three subjects to which Rush assigned a central place in the new curriculum (1798, in Hansen, 1965, pp. 53-55).

In his call for adapting "our modes of teaching to the peculiar form of our government," Rush made it clear that the new American government required citizens who could speak, read, and write with ease, elegance, and comprehension. He politicized the role of English in America and in American education:

Philology... should include, besides rhetoric and criticism, lectures upon the construction and

pronunciation of the English language. Instruction in this branch of literature will become the more necessary in America, as our intercourse must soon cease with the bar, the stage and the pulpits of Great Britain...Even modern English books should cease to be the models of style in the United States... The cultivation and perfection of our language becomes a matter of consequence when viewed in another light. It will probably be spoken by more people in the course of two or three centuries, than ever spoke any one language at one time since the creation of the world. (1798, in Hofstadter & Smith, 1961, p. 154)

There is an undeniably political quality to statements such as this one. Such statements make English literature and language essential to the principles of the Revolution, not least of which was the principle which separated American culture from British. Rush is suggesting here that the study of English will contribute to the education of enlightened, useful, and patriotic citizens. "I consider, as possible," he wrote, "to convert men into republican machines" (1797, in Hansen, 1965, p. 55). His writings on education created an environment in which nationalist ideals were firmly connected to the study of vernacular literature and language.

#### Noah Webster and the Institutionalization of the Vernacular

Perhaps no single post-revolutionary writer made political connections between English and nationalism and good citizenship more clear than Noah Webster.

Webster's life (1758-1843) spanned the crucial years which formed the establishment of an American national identity. With the publication of his first book in 1783,

A Grammatical Institute of the English Language, he began a career of intensive advocacy for American political and cultural nationalism, which emphasized the importance of education in the vernacular in that process. The "Institute" which was composed of the famous "blue-backed" speller, a grammar book, and a reader became enormously popular in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century America. In addition to teaching reading and writing, the contents of these texts were intended to produce "good and patriotic Americans, develop an American language, and create a unified national spirit" (Warfel, 1966, p. 93). Webster's biographer, Henry Warfel, characterized the impact of the "Institute": "This unified series of textbooks effectually shaped the destiny of American education for a century. Imitators sprang up by the dozen, and each echoed Websterian nationalism. The word 'American' became indispensable in all textbook titles; all vied in patriotic eloquence" (p. 93).

The changes in language and literature studies from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries which Webster "instituted" are hallmarked by his integrating a political agenda into the study of American and English. Thus, he not only raised the status of the vernacular to one of great importance in the classroom, but also articulated its special functions in American life and education. This dual role for the study of English and American literature and language is apparent in an early version of his speller in

which he included a catechism. (The New England Primer and other seventeenth century spellers included "catechisms", but Webster's was significantly different). The 1783 speller contained both a political and moral catechism which blatantly displayed Webster's biases. The "Federal Catechism," for instance, asks the following question, the answer to which was to be memorized by the student:

Q. What are the defects of democracy?

A. In democracy, where the people all meet for the purpose of making laws, there are commonly tumults and disorders. A small city may sometimes be governed in this manner; but if the citizens are numerous, their assemblies make a crowd or mob, where debates cannot be carried on with coolness and candor, nor can arguments be heard. Therefore a pure democracy is generally a very bad government. It is often the most tyrannical government on earth; for a multitude is often rash, and will not reason. (in Spring, 1986, p. 38)

The "moral" catechism displays the same kinds of purposes. It is intended to teach the vernacular and to connect the idea of public virtue with Christian morality. Evident in both catechisms is the Republican, aristocratic, and somewhat elitist political perspective of eighteenth century educational and political leaders who understood the value of native literature and language in propagating prescribed morals and political ideas. Webster's aristocratic orientation in political thought and education can be seen again and again in other writing of the period.'

Webster's motives for wanting to institutionalize studies in the vernacular throughout all of American education, and his hopes for it, are characteristic of post-

revolutionary thought. His views were based on the educational philosophy he published in "On the Education of Youth In America" in 1790, but, as we have seen, were in the air much earlier. "The Education of youth is, in all governments" he wrote "an object of the first consequence. The impressions received in early life, usually form the general character of a nation..." (1790, in Tyack, 1967, p. 93). He emphasizes the point later in the essay when he writes that "Education should therefore be the first care of a Legislature... A good system of Education should be the first article in the code of political regulations..." (p. 97). Once Webster lays out his initial premises concerning the connections between education and civic and moral behavior, he launches into criticisms of American education where "the first error... is a too general attention to the dead languages, with a neglect of our own" (p. 93). He finds "the want of proper books" to be "inexcusable."

The collections which are now used consist of essays that respect foreign and ancient nations. The minds of youths are perpetually led to the history of Greece and Rome or to Great Britain; boys are constantly repeating the declamations of Demosthenes and Cicero... These are excellent specimens of good sense, polished style and perfect oratory... They cannot be very useful except to young gentlemen who want them as models of reasoning and eloquence, in the pulpit or at the bar. (1790, in Tyack, p. 97)

Webster's word useful here is important to his meaning, as well as to an understanding of the educational and political premises surrounding his advocacy of the vernacular. It demonstrates the eighteenth century's growing

emphasis on the utilitarian aims of education, as well as the belief that literature and language in the vernacular could service education's primary use -- teaching the values and culture of the new Republic. The essay closes with a war cry which makes the study of native language and literature more than a private educational affair: "Our honor," Webster writes, "is concerned in the establishment of literary institutions, adequate to our own purposes... Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his country; he should lisp the praise of liberty" (1790, in Tyack, pp. 97-98).<sup>10</sup>

Webster's theories, texts, and practices clearly represent the post-revolutionary agenda for the uses of vernacular studies in American classrooms. That agenda was to create strong bonds between nationalism and the study of English. As the century came to a close, the vernacular, particularly the study of English grammar, became a part of standard practice in elementary, "English," and private schools. The pace was somewhat more slow in higher education, although there, literature in English and translation began to be identified with collegiate curricula. Much of this emphasis was due to writers like Franklin, Rush, and Webster who unremittingly advocated that

vernacular study was essential for the nation's future and identity.

The study and teaching of English language and literature in the eighteenth century was an integral part of the revolutionary spirit. There is no question that as a subject of study, and as disciplines, literature in the vernacular was at a very early stage of development. Nonetheless, the emphasis on vernacular studies and the "New Learning" fostered a decidedly nationalistic approach to the study of both English and classical literature. Cremin's study (1970) of American education in the eighteenth century sums up this approach clearly:

Eighteenth century students read the Greek and Latin authors, as had students for generations, and they no doubt parsed and scanned and constructed the texts. But they read the classics in their own ways and could be forgiven, perhaps, if they tended to learn from Aristotle the dangers of violating immutable laws of God and nature, from Plutarch the glory of opposing tyranny even unto death, from Cato the power of a virtuous republicanism rooted in the soil, from Cicero the excellence of reasonable laws and the hazard of government, and from Tacitus the decadence of the later Roman (read English) empire. (Cremin, 1970, p. 460)

Cremin agrees that it was during the revolutionary period that the study of literature in the American curriculum was assigned responsibility for transmitting national values and cultural identity. Evidence of the politicization of literature study in post-revolutionary America, however, is most clearly documented in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, largely the work of John Adams:

Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of the commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences...to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence...(1780, in Butts, 1978, p.14)

The post-revolutionary expectations for literary study are quite clear in Adams' legislation. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, these same functions were assigned to literary study when the Greeks academized it in the fifth century. In eighteenth century America, the tradition was re-cast when a new culture, a new nation looked for methods to invent itself, and inculcate its virtues and values. The Revolution, in fact, engendered the study of literature in America and separated it from the study of Greek and Latin. The roots of the emerging discipline are steeped in the politics and nationalism of the period.

The nationalist mission of literary study became progressively institutionalized as the eighteenth century came to a close. In higher education, the study of vernacular literature entered another revolutionary turning point when English achieved department status in the late nineteenth century. It is the early nineteenth century roots of that process that we examine next.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Allen Hansen (1965) clarifies the meaning of this phrase in his analysis of two major premises of eighteenth century thought: the "indefinite perfectibility" of man and of institutions, and the idea that education could foster this perfectibility.

He writes that "the doctrine of the indefinite perfectibility of man and of institutions was defined and its implications elaborated in the eighteenth century." This doctrine became the "dominant motif" of the revolutionary democratic movement in America. Institutions could be justified only "if they contributed to the advancement and welfare of mankind." According to Hansen, the logical eighteenth century conclusion to this manner of thought was belief in a system of education "that would make inevitable a scientific, objective, experimental attitude that would lead to creative innovation and that would energize everything related to the progress of man" (1965, pp. 20-21).

Hansen's thesis is that the American Revolution actualized these eighteenth century premises, and gave rise to an enthusiasm for creating a system of education which could create both "liberal" thinkers and devoted Republicans in America. He documents the numerous contemporary "plans for National Education" that would accomplish the foregoing objectives as well as promote "a national culture which would be an expression of these principles."

Hansen characterizes these plans as representing "two emphases." One advocated "a rather rigid system of indoctrination in those things that were thought to be peculiarly characteristic of American thinking and life." The other, according to Hansen, "stressed chiefly the development of an unbiased scientific attitude which was to be open-minded to whatever contributions might be made to human progress" (p. 45). The two emphases, of course, in Hansen's context, encompass the meaning of "Republican education" as it was forged in post-revolutionary America.

<sup>2</sup> Both grammar and English schools in Massachusetts were mandated by an act of 1647 which indicates quite clearly the relationship of Puritan Calvinism and education. The educational history of New England, in fact, was greatly influenced throughout the colonial period by this law:

It being one of the chief projects of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by persuading them from the use of tongues, that so at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers, that learning may

not be buried in the grave of our fathers in the church and commonwealth...

It is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction, after the lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their own to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read;...and it is further ordered, that where any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university.... (in Sheldon Cohen, 1974, p. 59)

It is interesting to note here the Puritan emphasis not only on learning, in general, but on learning oriented toward the revelation of meaning in literary works even though, of course, their particular and necessary interest was in the Bible and literature about the Bible.

<sup>3</sup> The grammar school was based on the English model. It "ran over seven years and was complemented by appropriate training in piety and civility." The curriculum "emphasized Latin but included an introduction to Greek and occasionally Hebrew, the level of aspiration being best defined by the Harvard entrance requirements of 1655, which specified an ability to read and understand Cicero, Virgil, or any 'such ordinary classical authors.'" In addition, students were expected to "construe and gramatically to resolve ordinary Greek as in the Greek Testament, Isocrates, and the minor poets" (Cremin, 1970, p. 184).

<sup>4</sup> This shift was concomitant with the gradual process of secularization which affected every aspect of eighteenth century religious, intellectual, and institutional life. The process catalyzed many of the changes associated with revolutionary America, and it is particularly relevant to an understanding of the educational transformations which took place at the time.

Secularization in America followed the movement of European Enlightenment articulated by such philosophers as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Newton, and others. The intellectual foundation of the Enlightenment was the rejection of "the traditional religious view of the universe [which] had put the earth at the center of the universe and had asserted that all of nature had been created by God for divine purposes" (Butts and Cremin, 1953, p. 50). In place of this, the new secular thinking accepted Newtonian explanations for the way Nature worked; an epistemology which depended on reason rather than faith.

The eighteenth century acceptance of these alternatives to the earlier religious world view, was the operant principle of the secular thinking which identified the period as both the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment. In the realm of education, secularization sifted down into every day life in concrete changes in curriculum and pedagogy. These included a de-emphasis on training the ministry, and a new emphasis on training students for more secular vocations such as law, medicine, and business.

<sup>5</sup> The publication of this book is crucial in the development of literature studies both in America and Europe. "For well over a century beginning about 1760 Hugh Blair markedly influenced writers and speakers, teachers and students in Great Britain and America" (Harding, 1965, p. vii). He wrote the first comprehensive literature textbook for his age, and incorporated within it emphases on both classical and contemporary writing. In addition to restating the literary teachings of Aristotle, Cicero, Longinus and Quintilian, he exemplified their theories by using excerpts from contemporary writers such as Addison and Swift. As such, the book promoted both the study of classical literature (rather than history or grammar) and validated the study of contemporary literature as well. The book's perspective contributed significantly to the isolation of literature study as a separate discipline, particularly in the college curriculum.

<sup>6</sup> St. Jean De Crevecoeur (1735-1813) was a French aristocrat who typified the intense Republican nationalism of many emigres. His Letters From an American Farmer (1782) charmingly characterizes contemporary views on the economic and social potential of the new Republic. He was one of the first writers to note the "melting pot" quality of American life when he wrote that in America "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world." His enthusiasm for America was most clearly expressed when he wrote of his compatriots, "we are the most perfect society now existing in the world" (in Perkins, 1985, pp. 209-217). Crevecoeur's observations of the new identity -- the American -- which came into being, however, were not enough to eradicate his aristocratic roots; he remained an unhappy Tory during the Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> Franklin's most well known work The Autobiography, of course, can be interpreted as his most comprehensive analysis of education. That book is essentially a history of his autodidactic success, and the promotion of the idea of

educating one's own character. Franklin's other important writings on education include: The Silence Dogood Letters, the 1749 Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania, the 1751 Idea of the English School Sketch'd Out for the Consideration of the Trustees of the Philadelphia Academy, and the 1789 "Observations Relative to the Intentions of the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia."

<sup>9</sup> The ambivalence, among thinkers less forward-looking than Franklin, regarding the place of the vernacular in education is manifested in the history of the Academy. The Academy of Philadelphia opened its doors on January 7, 1751. The twenty-four trustees elected Franklin to serve as president of the Academy until 1756. But the trustees did not give Franklin full reign in curriculum planning. Traditionalists, they insisted that Latin and Greek be taught, although Franklin had set forth his preference for teaching in the vernacular (Blinderman, 1975, p. 55).

<sup>9</sup> In the new American Republic, which was so frequently likened to Greece and Rome, this aristocratic dependence on literary education can be understood to be an eighteenth century American reworking of the traditions governing the civic functions of literature which, we have seen, began with the Greeks.

<sup>10</sup> Merle Curti (1959) takes a refreshingly delightful and undeniably jaundiced view of Webster's role in the foundations of eighteenth century American education and the uses -- political and literary -- his textbooks were put to. Curti focuses on the aristocratic, elitist trend which seems to emerge as a paradox in the educational philosophies of the century's statesmen and intellectuals who, while fashioning a system of education for the new democracy, consistently portray it in aristocratic terms. Of Webster's Elementary Spelling Book of 1782, Curti writes:

This speller translates into terse sentences a social philosophy appropriate to a system which attached great value to acquiescence on the part of the poor in their poverty and at the same time promised ultimate success to those who would practice the virtues of frugality, industry, and submissiveness to moral teachings and to God's will.

The philosophy held that if there were no pain, misery, misfortune, or danger, then patience, humanity, fortitude, and prudence would be but empty names and that consequently man's duty is patient submission 'to

the evils of life and calm acquiescence in the disposition of divine providence which suffers no more evils to take place in the system than are necessary to produce the greatest possible good'...With such views it is not surprising to find in the speller maxims inculcating respect for property rights and honest labor, the virtues of poverty, and contentment with one's lot, as well as an aristocratic conception of charity. (pp. 32-33)

Curti's observations here reinforce the premise that eighteenth century vernacular education was teetering between Puritan and Republican teachings; a balancing act which perhaps was firmly grounded only in the nineteenth century when lessons of literature study were divorced from religious intentions, and concentrated on much "purer" nationalistic messages. Certainly Curti's reading of Webster demonstrates the politics inherent in literature and language teaching, even in a text so apparently innocuous as a speller.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INFLUENCES ON LITERATURE STUDY IN AMERICA

In Part I of this chapter, we will look at how American Romanticism of the early and mid nineteenth century posited a set of aesthetic principles which were crucial to the study of literature in English at the end of the century. Part II will take up the work of Matthew Arnold and examine the far-reaching influence of this English humanist on the philosophy which governed the origins of formalized literary study in American higher education. In the next chapter, we will follow how the "Genteel Tradition" -- which was greatly influenced by American Romanticism and Arnoldian humanism -- came to dominate American ideas about liberal education, and the place of literature instruction in it. Each of these intellectual forces -- in addition to the social and economic events of the period -- created the impetus for the departmentalization of English in the 1890's, and the central role of vernacular literary study in the department. In addition, each contributed to the tradition which the new English department constructed to rationalize and legitimize its mission.

#### PART I

##### Romantic Theory

Romanticism,<sup>1</sup> a school of thought and artistic practice which flourished throughout the nineteenth century,

was a particularly strong influence on the formation of the American higher education English department at the end of the century. In this section, we will examine the basic tenets of Romanticism as they applied to the creation and appreciation of literature, looking first to the enunciation of doctrine in nineteenth century English poets whose influence stretched far beyond British life and letters. Next, Part I turns to how these doctrines were formulated in the writings of two influential American Romantic writers: William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Here, we shall see that two Romantic principles of literary creation and appreciation stand out: the sacredness of Art, and the moral uses of literature. We shall also see that these principles can be understood to constitute reactions by intellectuals to the conditions of nineteenth century life. These conditions, and the Romantic literary response to them, were crucial influences on the mission of the new English department of the 1890's. They can be considered the cultural milieu in which vernacular studies became both necessary and meaningful.

Matthew Arnold perhaps most clearly expressed the Romantic doctrine governing literature when he wrote in "The Study of Poetry" (1880) that his mechanical and materialistic age would have to turn more and more to poetry "to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.

Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry" (in Brown, 1947, p. 63). This attitude had been expressed earlier by the chief English Romantic poets Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge whose extensive poetry and prose writings had defined the Romantic movement in England, and greatly influenced American writers and thinkers. The essence of Romanticism, as it applied to literature, was an emphasis on emotion and imagination in the creative act, its "spontaneous" quality as Wordsworth referred to it, and on the uses of poetry. Chief among these uses was the ability of poetry to inculcate the moral truths that, for the Romantics, were to be found in Nature.

Summing up this moral quality of poetry in his "A Defence of Poetry," (1821), Shelley put it this way: "the noblest end of poetry is an intellectual pursuit, that of acting upon the desires and characters of mankind through their emotions, to raise them towards the perfection of their nature" (in Clark, 1954, p. 290). Earlier in his now much-read essay, Shelley had defined why it was particularly important for the nineteenth century to be reminded of the moral sphere in human life:

The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements remains himself a slave... The cultivation of poetry is never

more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceed the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. (1821, in Clark, 1954, p. 293)

In this "defence," Shelley characterizes the struggles between progress and the past, the spiritual life and materialism, industrial development and agrarianism which were issues of major concern to nineteenth century intellectuals and writers, as well as to everyday people. It was a period experiencing the effects of a world undergoing rapid changes brought on by the advances of industrialism. Romanticism was a way of thinking which offered alternatives to the new science which was, in part, creating the bleak urban and industrial landscapes of the age. As an alternative to these bleak facts, Romanticism offered the power of imagination; in place of mass society, it proposed the cult of the individual; it countered industrialism and its effects by emphasizing the "sublimity"<sup>2</sup> of landscape. In addition, Romanticism countered the doctrine of utility with its philosophy of liberal idealism;<sup>3</sup> in place of failing religion, it proposed the worship of poetry. Finally, as an alternative to nineteenth century despair brought about the sense of the loss of a moral center, Romanticism offered optimism and faith in the essential goodness of Nature. These ideas formed the core of Romantic ideology which dominated nineteenth century thought.

The works of William Cullen Bryant and Ralph Waldo Emerson, two American poets and essayists, develop these Romantic principles from an American perspective. Both writers were reacting to what they conceived to be the momentousness of their times, the rapid changes brought about by industrialized democracy, a disappearance of the old values, and an America which was turning away from the Protestantism which had guided its founding. They brought Romanticism into the American sphere, and by doing so, greatly influenced the way literature was written, read, and taught in the nineteenth century.

#### William Cullen Bryant

William Cullen Bryant's influence as a poet, literary critic, newspaper editor, and political analyst became firmly entrenched in America following his arrival in New York from the wilderness of Massachusetts in 1825. Even during the last decade of the nineteenth century, he was still considered one of America's greatest, most important, and most nationalistic poets. With Longfellow and Whittier, he had become one of the "schoolroom" poets whose poetry was firmly entrenched in the curriculum from the elementary grades to the university.<sup>4</sup> Bryant's legacy, however, was not limited to his poems. He gave a number of lectures on poetry which became important commentary on that art for American scholars, teachers, and critics. Indeed, "William Cullen Bryant defined the character and tone of poetry

during the early nineteenth century both in his verse and in his criticism" (Elliott, 1988, p. 281). Bryant's authority persisted long after his death in 1878, and his lectures on poetry, first published in 1884, were representative of popular literary and critical attitudes toward the "uses" of poetry, and literature in general. His emphasis on poetry's uses and on the moral significance of Nature made Bryant one of the earliest American Romantic poets and critics.

"All that kindles the imagination, all that excites emotion, all those moral truths that find echo in our bosoms, are his [the prose writer's] property as well as that of the poet," lectured Bryant in 1825 in an address he titled "On the Nature of Poetry." This lecture and others on the subject consistently returned to the moral value and uses of literature. Bryant's major premise was that, in Nature, human beings could behold ultimate moral truth. It was the writer's responsibility to "look into nature," and to transcribe the messages written there; messages which could teach humankind ethical conduct. The greater writer was the one who saw most clearly, and could with greatest precision set down the truths Nature revealed (1825, in Godwin, 1964).

Bryant's Romantic aesthetic, crucial to the principles which governed literary education in the late nineteenth century, is summed up in his description of the "values and uses of poetry":

One of the great recommendations of poetry... which I am now considering [is] that it withdraws us from the despotism of many of those circumstances which mislead the moral judgment. It is dangerous to be absorbed continuously in our own immediate concerns. Self-interest is the most ingenious and persuasive of all the agents that deceive our conscience, while by means of it our unhappy and stubborn prejudices operate in their greatest force. But poetry lifts us to a sphere where self-interest cannot exist, and where the prejudices that perplex our every-day life can hardly enter. It restores us to our unperverted feelings, and leaves us at liberty to compare the issues of life with our unsophisticated notions of good and evil. We are taught to affect our present convenience, and then we are sent back to the world with our moral perceptions cleared and invigorated.

Among the most remarkable influences of poetry is the exhibition of those analogies and correspondences which it beholds between things of the moral and natural world. I refer to its adorning and illustrating each by the other -- infusing a moral sentiment into natural objects, and bringing images of visible beauty and majesty to heighten the effect of moral sentiment. Thus it binds into one all the passages of human life and connects all the varieties of human feeling with the works of creation. (1825, in Godwin, 1964, p. 18)

In this passage, Bryant expresses the essence of Romantic theories regarding literary creation, and the uses of literature. Literature, above all, has a moral intention; it teaches the moral truths set out in the natural world. Beyond this, literature has the capacity to disengage the reader from the actual world. The disengagement protects the reader from worldly involvement which can tarnish the conscience, and obscure distinctions between good and evil. Thus, literature, according to Bryant, had the capacity to offer shelter to the world-weary reader. This aspect of Romantic literary theory became integral to the objectives of literary study in the 1890's when literature was assigned

the dual role of engaging students in their world while also offering them the opportunity to retreat from it.

### Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson was an outspoken critic of nineteenth century life in America. In essays, poems, and lectures that spanned fifty-seven years, he rebelled against the American materialism and loss of values he saw all around him. In pursuit of an antidote "to the crass materialism of the age," Emerson took it upon himself to re-define, from the Romantic perspective, Nature, Self-Reliance, Manners, Literature, Scholarship, Theology, and numerous other vital social and cultural concepts. When considered as philosophy, these redefinitions compose Emersonian Idealism or Transcendentalism.

Emerson's most precise articulation of the role of literature in America, and its uses, was presented in the 1839 address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard referred to as "The American Scholar," and in his essay "The Poet" (1842). In "The Poet," Emerson presents the typical heightened expectations and respect Romantics held for writers and their work, attributing to poets an almost divine insight and mission which made of them the world's great teachers. In "The American Scholar," Emerson clarifies the values and uses of poets and literature in American higher education.

## The Poet

In "The Poet," Emerson, in typical Romantic fashion, attributes both highly magical and realistic powers and authority to the poet. "The poet alone knows," writes Emerson, "astronomy, chemistry, vegetation and animation, for he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs. He knows why the plain or meadow of space was strewn with these flowers we call suns and moons and stars; why the great deep is adorned with animals, with men, and gods; for in every word he speaks he rides on them as the horses of thought" (1842, in Whicher, 1960, p. 231). From this perspective, the poet has a specialized capacity to read the world of Nature, to penetrate it, and to articulate the "Truth" that lies beyond appearance. "Since everything in Nature answers to a moral power, if any phenomenon remains brute and dark it is because the corresponding faculty in the observer is not yet active" (p. 228). In the case of the poet, however, this "faculty" is highly developed. It is the poet's responsibility, therefore, to read the "moral power" in Nature, and to perform the highly moral task of expressing it. Poetry, therefore, according to Emerson, represents the expressed thoughts of individuals who are in touch with the "moral power" of Nature, and exists to teach it. Thus, the poet is not only a creator but a visionary and a teacher.

Since this ability to penetrate the moral power of Nature is limited, "the poet is representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man, and apprises not of his wealth, but of the common wealth. The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is" (p. 223). Thus, in Emerson's Romanticism, the poet's power to teach, and to command respect is supreme because of all men he has the "largest power to receive and impart" (p. 224). This power which can transform the facts of the world into symbols, and its symbols into facts, gives the poet powers of creation which are divine-like. "Poets are thus liberating gods," according to Emerson, and "this emancipation is dear to all men" (p. 236).

The power and knowledge and "godliness" which Emerson ascribes to the poet are characteristic of nineteenth century Romanticism. In Emerson's American version of Romantic theory, the figure of the poet becomes particularly significant to American culture -- a culture in the process of formation, in need of models and teachers. According to Emerson, American poets could participate in the important work of shaping American literary culture, and also point the way to liberation from nineteenth century materialism and immorality. He assigned to poets and poetry a status and responsibility which were profoundly to shape their role and influence in American higher education. The educational

ramifications of his theories about poetry were more clearly expressed in his "American Scholar" address at Harvard in 1839.

### The American Scholar

"The American Scholar" begins with a warning and rallying cry. Emerson admonishes the students sitting before him:

Perhaps the time is already come... when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in an new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the polestar for a thousand years. (1839, in Whicher, 1960, p. 64)

This finale of Emerson's first paragraph in the lecture presents us with four crucial premises that he will develop throughout the address. In the first place, we must notice he uses the image of "iron lids" to refer to the mechanization and industrialization of America which Emerson fears will overtake the spiritual and literary endeavors of American intellectuals. Secondly, there is also here the introduction of Emerson's theme of cultural nationalism. He admonishes the Harvard students that America must produce its own art, literature, and ideas; it must stop borrowing from other countries, such as England and Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, he introduces the premise that poetry, by which he means literature, will be crucial to American cultural nationalism. And, fourthly, Emerson conveys the Romantic doctrine of the religion of poetry, its power to lead, to heal, to introduce or reintroduce morals and values into an America gone mad with materialism.

Following this dynamic introduction, Emerson develops more thoroughly his warnings and his theories. He tells the students that the scholar must become "Man Thinking" in opposition to "a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking" (1839, in Whicher, 1960, p. 65). His distinction implies that the present "state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters -- a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man" (p. 64). Thus, his diagnosis of the fragmentation of modern American society and the lack of wholeness, of individuals relating to what is essential and common in their humanity.

The balance of the lecture is concerned with the influences, the proper influences, on "Man Thinking." These include, according to Emerson, Nature, the mind of the Past, Action, as well as his "Duties." Emerson's discussion of the "Mind of the Past" focuses on books and literature as influences on young American scholars. "Books are the best type of influence of the past," he tells his audience. But it is here that Emerson makes a major qualification. For he

wants his audience to understand that there is a judicious use of books, and the mind of the past, and a wrong use which creates what he calls "bookworms." His purpose is to warn his audience not to worship books or the past. His interest is in convincing the young men sitting before him that they must write the new books, the new philosophy, the new poetry that will not only teach and bring pleasure, but will identify America as a major intellectual power in the world. Thus "books are the best of things, well used; abused among the worst. They are nothing but to inspire" (1839, in Whicher, 1960, p. 67). When they do inspire, Emerson explains:

They impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy -- with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all time from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants... (p. 69)

Here, we see Emerson's Transcendentalism in his connection of literature with the identity and harmony of the whole of Nature; a Transcendentalism which affords literature the ability to allow the reader to transcend time and place and become one with Nature or "Identity," as Emerson calls it. Here Emerson presents the same Romantic

irony which we saw in Bryant's work. For, on the one hand, he advises the scholars to be of and in the world. On the other hand, however, he glorifies books -- one of the major influences in their education -- and promotes literature's ability to allow readers to transcend the time and place they are in.

Emerson locates the scholar's duty directly in the realm of literature. The scholar, he says, "is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history" (1839, in Whicher, 1960, p. 73). This characterization of the scholar's duty signifies the importance of literature in the scholar's education and in his work, and demonstrates Emerson's Romantic, Transcendentalist belief that the study of literature offers an antidote to the materialism of mid-nineteenth century American life. Pulling out all the stops of his powers of persuasion, Emerson ends the "American Scholar" address promising the students that they have the power to create a new American culture independent of the past and Europe, firmly grounded in a new native education and literature where "we will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak with our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence" (p. 80).

Emerson's influence throughout the nineteenth century was profound (Matthiessen, 1975; Parrington, 1927; Whicher, 1960). "The American Scholar" address, particularly, came to be called the "American Intellectual Declaration of Independence";<sup>6</sup> it made deep impressions on writers, teachers, students, and scholars during the formative period of American higher education. While not specifically traceable, Emerson's Transcendentalism served as a background to the important developments that occurred in nineteenth century culture. Elliot's recently published Columbia Literary History of the United States (1988) suggests that while his contributions "might seem too familiar to name... they are seldom recognized for what they most strenuously attempt to be -- contributions to an aesthetic reappropriation of the world under the aspect of idealism" (p. 215). While this may be exaggeration, Emerson's contributions to the place of literature in American society and education cannot be denied.

## PART II

### The Influence of Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold's influence on the directions of literary education in England and America was profound (Butts, 1939; Butts and Cremin, 1953; Gribble, 1967; Sutherland, 1973; Payne, 1895; Raleigh, 1961). He wrote and lectured on the necessity for English and literary study in

the public schools in the crucial period 1865 to 1885 -- the formative period of departmentalization. In essays and lectures during these years, Arnold presented a widely accepted philosophy of education which focused on its relationship to culture and moral instruction. Literary study was central to Arnold's purposes. Rather like a missionary, he lectured extensively in England, on the continent, and in America promulgating his theories.<sup>7</sup> They were enthusiastically taken up by late nineteenth century literati and educators such as Professor Hiram Corson of Cornell who, during the 1890's at Cornell, read from Arnold's works "every Saturday morning" (Payne, 1895, p. 62). Later in this chapter we will demonstrate Arnold's influence on literary education in the 1890's.

In his major work, Culture and Anarchy (1867-1869), Arnold is haunted by a mass demonstration in Hyde Park in which participants tore down "park railings." This event left deep impressions on him, and gave rise to his characterizations, in the book, of the cultural and educational crises of the period. For him, the incident represented the anarchy and intellectual barbarism of his age; a social dilemma he considered to stem from the loss of "religious feeling," the period's "bondage to machinery," and the mechanistic values associated with that bondage. The world was showing "a disquieting absence of sure authority" where he found "all manner of confusion arising out of the

habits of unintelligent routine and one-sided growth, to which a too exclusive worship of fire, strength, earnestness and action has brought us" (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 240). These products of industrialization and class division were the "anarchy" for which Arnold sought educational remedies. As an English Public School Inspector he was particularly concerned with how these issues and remedies played out in England; he nonetheless acknowledged that America too was haunted by these potential anarchic forces (Raleigh, 1961; Summerfield, 1969; Sutherland, 1973; Arnold, 1867-1869).

#### The Problem

Arnold's critique of his society can be summed up in his complaint that the period's "faith in machinery" was at the root of the anarchy he believed threatened his world. He uses the word "machinery," however, to encompass the process of mechanization and the accompanying loss of values which he believed infused the industry, politics, religion, class division, and individualism of his day. "Faith in machinery," he writes, "is our besetting danger...What is freedom but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are, even, religious organizations but machinery?" (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 170). He argues that this "bondage to machinery" leads to a "proneness to value machinery as an

end in itself" (p. 185). This "worship" has created an intellectual and moral vacuum in individual and social life. That vacuum is marked by a thoughtlessness which is manifested in personal and social behavior. It is also marked by a "worship of freedom" without enough regard for "the ends for which freedom is to be desired" (p. 185).

This worship, according to Arnold, leads to two of the major threats to the order of present society. The first of these threats is the tendency for "doing as one likes," particularly as it applies to the working classes as evidenced by the riot at Hyde Park. Arnold's reaction to this threat is emphasized by the irony he uses to describe it:

But meanwhile our social machine is a little out of order; there are a good many people in our paradisiacal centres of industrialism and individualism taking bread out of one another's mouths. The rough has not yet found his groove and settled down to his work, and so he is just asserting his personal liberty a little, going where he likes, assembling where he likes, bawling as he likes, hustling as he likes. Just as the the country squires in the aristocratic class, as the political dissenters in the middle class -- he has no idea of a State, of the nation in its collective and corporate character controlling, as government, the free swing of this or that one of its members in the name of the higher reason of all of them, his own as well as that of others. (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 189)

Arnold's description here demonstrates that "doing as one likes" was responsible for the breakdown of order in his society, and, although it posed particular dangers in regard to the working class, it pervaded and weakened the social structure at all levels. The greatest danger this misguided

"individualism" caused was a disregard for authority, and a failure to understand its relationship to individual decorum and social stability. Arnold believed that this disregard could lead to anarchy, but also that a renewed belief and attention to authority could act as a defense against anarchy.

Arnold also believed that the worship of freedom prevalent in his time led to a second threat: "the relaxed habits of government" (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 188). He is as caustic describing this failure as he is with those who have used it to advantage:

More and more because of this blind faith in machinery, because of our want of light to enable us to look beyond machinery to the end for which machinery is valuable, this and that man, and this and that body of men, all over the country, are beginning to assert and put into practice an Englishman's right to do what he likes... All this, I say, tends to anarchy; and though a number of excellent people, and particularly my friends of the liberal or progressive party... are kind enough to reassure us by saying... that a few transient outbreaks of rowdyism signify nothing, that our system of liberty is one which itself cures all the evils which it works... this faith of theirs one cannot exactly share, when one ... sees that they have not prevented our coming to our present embarrassed condition... Whatever happens, their overwhelming strength, like our military force in riot, never does act.

The moment it is plainly put before us that a man is asserting his personal liberty, we are half disarmed; because we are believers in freedom, and not in some dream of a right reason to which the assertion of our freedom is to be subordinated...

There are many things to be said on behalf of this exclusive attention of ours to liberty, and of the relaxed habits of government which it has engendered. It is very easy to mistake or exaggerate the sort of anarchy from which we are in danger through them. (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, pp. 187-188)

Arnold believed that mechanization and corrupted ideas of freedom and authority led to the thoughtlessness which led, in turn, to the "vulgarization of culture" which was "the diseased spirit of our time" (pp. 171 and 241). His solutions for combating these threatening, anarchic forces were all squarely founded on the new kind of education which he proposed for English schools and students. The study of literature in English was crucial to this educational philosophy and the institutionalization of its aims.

#### Literary Solutions

Arnold presented his educational solutions to the crises of his times in his major works which included Culture and Anarchy (1867-1869), Essays in Criticism (1865), "Literature and Dogma" (1873), "The Study of Poetry" (1880), and "Literature and Science" (1885). Each of these essays identified "the diseased spirit" of the time, its etiology, and Arnold's educational remedies.

Arnold's solutions, from a theoretical perspective, were founded on his ideal of culture. In Culture and Anarchy, he had identified a gap between the two major influences on culture: "Hellenism" and "Hebraism." Hellenism represented the process of thinking and "being", while Hebraism stood for action and Puritan conscience. The mechanization, thoughtlessness, and anarchy of his time were due, he wrote, to the imbalance of these two forces which caused action without regard for consequences to take

precedence over clarity and elegance of thought. Hebraism was responsible for "insisting on perfection in one part of our nature and not in all; the singling out the moral side, the side of obedience and action;" it was also responsible for "making strictness of the moral conscience so far the principal thing, and putting off for hereafter and another world the care for being complete at all points, the full and harmonious development of our humanity" (1867, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 236). Hebraism had led to "the entire subordination of thinking to doing" and to "a mistaken and misleading treatment of things." Thus, education which fostered Hebraism was in great part responsible for the failures of culture Arnold identified. On the other hand, a kind of education which fostered the comprehension and pursuit of Hellenistic ideals could counteract thoughtless action, and bring about order and the "sweetness and light" to stave off anarchy. Hellenism as an attitude and a body of knowledge -- as "culture" -- was Arnold's antidote for social chaos. It was most fully represented in the literature of the past and the "hellenistic" literature of the present.

#### Culture and Hellenism

In Culture and Anarchy, Arnold argues that hellenism had been "neglected," and that this neglect had caused the socially chaotic climate he confronted. He defined hellenism as "sweetness and light." "To get rid of one's ignorance, to

see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty is the ideal which hellenism holds out before human nature... Difficulties are left out of view, and the beauty and rationalness of the ideal have all our thoughts" (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 223).<sup>9</sup> Arnold believed these values were the cornerstone of the western intellectual tradition, and that these values could influence and control behavior. This learned behavior, which became a way of being, was what Arnold meant by "culture." He defined culture as a "study of perfection, and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than having something, an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances" (1869, in Sutherland, 1973, p. 169). Culture was "at variance with the mechanical and material civilization" so "in esteem" in his world. It was set into motion "by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good." Ultimately, culture could make "reason and the will of God prevail" (pp. 166-167). He summed up both his fears and hopes for culture in his time when he wrote "through culture seems to lie our way, not only to perfection, but even to safety" (p. 263).

Arnold's belief in culture as a social palliative was almost religious in its nature. Indeed, it has been said that he preached culture as a substitute for the waning religiosity which pervaded his time. If this analogy is

stretched, the "texts" of this religion became works of classic and contemporary literature which were capable of most fully expressing the hellenistic ideals on which true culture was based. Arnold promoted these texts as the means of propagating culture and thus of ameliorating the scientific, mechanistic education and spirit of his times.

#### Arnold's Solution in "Literature and Science"

Arnold's 1885 "Literature and Science" is a comprehensive example of his educational proposals which focus on teaching culture through literature. It blames science education for devaluing and mechanizing late nineteenth century culture, redefines culture, and recasts the content of liberal education in the light of redefined cultural needs and aims.

According to the essay, liberal education and culture rest on the moral foundation of "getting ourselves to ascertain what perfection is and to make it prevail" (1885, in Gribble, 1967, p. 12). The specific objective of education is not in the dissemination or acquisition of knowledge, per se, but rather in relating knowledge to "our sense for conduct, to our sense for Beauty" (p. 172). This relationship becomes the primary aim of liberal education. Consequently, Arnold finds it necessary to distinguish between academic courses which instill "the desire for good" and those which do not. Those which do not, he refers to as "instrumental." They "cannot be directly related to the

sense for beauty, to the sense for conduct; they lead to other knowledges" (p. 173). His examples of "instrument-knowledges" include physics and mathematics. The essay is organized around the question of whether humanities or science courses should dominate the newly forming modern curriculum. Arnold's foils are Darwin and Thomas Huxley, both of whom promoted the modern need for the curricular predominance of science education.

Arnold's major concern is whether study of the modern sciences can, as education must, "relate to man's instinct for conduct, his instinct for beauty" (1885, in Gribble, 1967, p. 176). His thesis is that they cannot. Such studies, he writes, "may finally bring us to those 'great general conceptions of the universe which are forced upon us all' says Professor Huxley, 'by the process of physical science.' But still it will be knowledge only which they give; knowledge not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty" (p. 174). The teaching of this relationship between knowledge and conduct, according to Arnold, is the responsibility of "humane letters" which embody "the best that has been thought and uttered in the world.... They have the power of relating the modern results of natural science to man's instinct for conduct, his instinct for beauty" (p. 176). The study of literature can make sense of the modern, technological world and the modern curriculum. It can humanize scientific knowledge as well as

teach culture. Arnold explains the role of literary educations as follows:

I do not mean that modern philosophical moralists are to come and relate for us in express terms the results of the modern scientific research to our instinct for conduct, our instinct for beauty. But I mean that we shall find, as a matter of experience, if we know the best that has been thought and uttered in the world, we shall find that art and poetry and eloquence of men who lived, perhaps, long ago, who had the most limited natural knowledge, who had the most erroneous conceptions about many important matters, we shall find this art, and poetry, and eloquence, have in fact not only the power of refreshing and delighting us, they have also the power -- such is the strength and worth, in essentials, of their authors' criticisms of life -- they have a fortifying and elevating, and quickening, and suggestive power, capable of wonderfully helping us to relate the results of modern science to our need for conduct, our need for beauty. (1885, in Gribble, 1967, p. 177)

"Literature and Science" concludes with an indication of the propriety of the analogy which compares Arnold's preaching literary education to the preaching of a religion -- an opiate, a salve, a form of salvation for the anarchic late nineteenth century:

If then there is to be separation and option between humane letters on the one hand, and the natural sciences on the other, the great majority of mankind, all who have not exceptional and overpowering aptitudes for the study of nature, would do well, I cannot but think, to choose to be educated in humane letters rather than in the natural sciences. Letters will call out their being at more points, will make them live more.

And indeed, to say the truth, I cannot really think that humane letters are in danger of being thrust out from their leading place in education... So long as human nature is what it is, their attractions will remain irresistible. They will be studied more rationally, but they will not lose their place. What will happen will rather be that there will be crowded into education other matters besides, far too many; there will be, perhaps, a period of unsettlement and

confusion and false tendency; but letters will not in the end lose their leading place. If they lose it for a time, they will get it back again. We shall be brought back to them by our wants and aspirations... the majority of modern men will always require humane letters... (1885, in Gribble, 1967, p. 181)

Arnold is prophetic here when he foresees that letters "will be studied more rationally." Within twenty years of this lecture, English and literature studies had become fully departmentalized in British and American colleges and universities, and the mission of literary study and its place in liberal arts education had been thoroughly articulated. There is substantial indication that Arnold's conception of the civilizing influences of literature education was primary in the formulation of these missions in the late nineteenth century. Throughout the period "educators concerned with English in schools... expressed their admiration for Arnold, acknowledging his influence upon their views" (Mathieson, 1975, p. 45). The crux of those views was perhaps most clearly stated in Arnold's School Inspector Report of 1880:

Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and of truth in alliance together; it suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative. Hence its extreme importance to all of us. (in Mathieson, 1975, p. 37)

This "extreme importance" was located in what Arnold believed literary education could accomplish in his own troubled society -- the staving off of social and economic anarchy, the return to an integrated, "hellenistic" social

fabric. His hope, expressed in all of his writing on the subject, was that students who were introduced to literary culture would come to be "cultured;" they would understand and participate in the "sweetness and light" necessary to harmonize class divisions and defend English and western traditions. The study of literature and its values, according to Arnold, would turn the "populace" away from the anger and disenfranchisement they were acting out in Hyde Park during his own time. He also had faith that such education would enlighten the "philistine" aristocracy and "barbarian" middle class, making it possible for thoughtfulness and social integration to govern in the technological, "mechanical" revolutions confronting late nineteenth century society. These conditions were not limited to England, and Arnold's "religion of culture" had particular appeal to American thinkers and teachers, especially those who, by virtue of their genteel status, shared Arnold's social and pedagogical concerns.

#### Arnold's Influence in America

Arnold's influence in America has been documented by John Henry Raleigh in his Matthew Arnold and American Culture (1961). According to Raleigh, that influence pervaded American social thought, philosophy, literary criticism, and education. He uses extensive quotes from lectures, periodicals, and essays by American authors and educators which attest to the profound effects Arnold's

writing produced in American thinkers and writers, as well as to the popularity of his writings. According to Raleigh (1961), "no other foreign critic, and perhaps few native ones, have acquired such a reputation and exercised such a palpable influence on American culture" as Matthew Arnold who was "a classic example of the man and the moment in proper and successful conjunction" (p. 1).

This "reputation and palpable influence" were the result of Arnold's aggressive program for American culture in the late nineteenth century, and of American receptivity to Arnold's ideas about literature, culture, and the role of the middle class in improving social values and institutions. Indeed, the dangerous social conditions which Arnold had identified in Culture and Anarchy existed in America as well as in England. America, too, was experiencing class discontent and the social and cultural malaise brought about by the technological advances of the period. Thus, "more than any other foreign critic [Arnold] spoke of and to the people of the United States. It had always been his province as well as England, and he had consequently developed in America a large and divided audience... E.S. Nadal, in an essay on Arnold in "The Critic," ... observed: 'Mr. Arnold's writings have been read here. They have a natural relationship to this country... I would say that the example of Mr. Arnold's unconventional and persistent thoughtfulness is needed in this country. It

does not seem to me that truthfulness is the especial characteristic of our literature'" (Raleigh, 1961, p. 57).

Raleigh identifies the primary reason for Arnold's "pre-eminence" in America, particularly during the nineties, to rest on America's status as "a middle class nation." His contention is that "Arnold knew the middle class as few other intellectuals have known it before or since... And Arnold therefore always knew that the middle class, with all its absorption in money-making, had yet ever cherished, if not actualized, a great vaporous dream -- and nowhere more so than in America -- the idea of "cultural" self-improvement" (p. 57). Arnold, of course, had argued in Culture and Anarchy that responsibility for the improvement of education and thus culture in England would have to fall to the newly emergent middle class; a responsibility which would also include shaping education that could civilize the underclasses, which Arnold referred to as the "Populace," as well as the middle class itself.

It is in this appeal to the middle class and Arnold's conceptions of its responsibilities and cultural aims that Arnold's influence on American higher education can most clearly be seen. It was to the higher education establishment of the late nineteenth century that the new American middle class had gone to learn how to cope with their new technological society and to find, as well, the "sweetness and light" of Arnoldian hellenistic culture. The

newly-formed English department was in a strategic position to fulfill these needs. These departments, across the country, were filled with professors and students convinced that Matthew Arnold's literary solutions offered the "safety" from contemporary social ills which Arnold promised. Proof of this can be seen in a variety of contemporary documents which testify to Arnold's influence on the methods chosen to teach literature in the newly formed English departments of the 1890's.'

Arnold, English, and American Universities

In 1895, The Dial magazine brought together a collection of English department descriptions which it had previously published in its issues of 1894. The contents of English in American Universities, edited by William Morton Payne, consists "mainly of a series of twenty articles upon the teaching of English in as many American colleges and universities, prepared in each case by one of the leading department professors of the institution in question."

Payne's introduction explains that the publication of the collection was due to the "great interest aroused in these articles [which] made it seem desirable to publish them in book form" (Payne, 1895, p. 3). Arnold's influence is prevalent throughout. It is evident in references to him by name; but, more importantly, in articulations of English department philosophies which reflect his "preaching" of culture and the role of literary education within it.

The theme of the "spiritualizing" effects of literature occurs again and again in the twenty department descriptions. It is perhaps summed up most clearly by Professor John B. Henneman's article in the Appendix of the collection which gives an overview of "English in The Southern Universities." Professor Henneman concludes his description with the fact that the English courses in the institutions he has discussed "necessarily... differ among themselves; but, nevertheless, one general spirit animates them. They cannot pretend to have solved all the difficulties present and to have met all the needs required; but, I think, it is not too bold to answer that they are at least doing their share in upbuilding and leavening and spiritualizing the existing conditions of American life" (Payne, 1895, p. 166). The functions which Henneman assigns to English courses, and literature courses specifically, are the very goals which Arnold promoted for the study of literature.

This same Arnoldian reverence for the "spiritualizing" effects of literary study is apparent in the description of Cornell's English Department by its Chair, Hiram Corson. Corson, who it will be remembered read from Arnold every Saturday morning, wrote that literary education "should aim to bring the student into sympathetic relationship with the permanent and eternal -- with that which is independent of time and place" (Payne, 1895, p. 61).<sup>10</sup>

Arnold is directly referred to in the University of Wisconsin, University of Nebraska, Cornell, University of Chicago, and Lafayette College English department descriptions in the Payne collection. The reference is most representative in Professor David B. Frankenburger's description of "English at the University of Wisconsin." He concludes his account of the spiritual and cultural aims of literary study in the department as follows:

We aim not at the production of literature, but in some little degree to arouse and cultivate the literary spirit; not that spirit that simply enjoys literature, feeling what is good, but the artist spirit that rejoices in creation, in the perfect embodiment of an idea, -- the critical spirit as Matthew Arnold understood the term. (Payne, 1895, p. 135)

This reference, and the many others contained in English in American Universities, testifies to Matthew Arnold's considerable influence on the minds of those men responsible for establishing the new American higher education English departments of the 1890's. The literature component of the new English departments was held responsible for "civilizing" students, for putting them in touch with "the best that has been thought and uttered" in the history of the West. Literature would "spiritualize" these students who would upon graduation participate in building the modern America just then experiencing enormous growth in its industrial and technological future. The new discipline of English, and literature courses fashioned to achieve Arnoldian objectives, in particular, would "save"

these students from forging a valueless, mechanical culture on the verge of anarchy. Thus, the "undergraduate work in English literature" was considered to hold, for these students, "a peculiar position." This was due to "its capabilities in developing the taste and artistic discernment, its liberalizing influence in broadening the student's view of life and man, [and] its enormous weight against utilitarianism " (Payne, 1895, p. 133).

Thus, the forces of Romanticism and Arnoldian humanism constituted a body of theory which the newly emergent English department used to rationalize its beginnings. But these forces also constituted a profound response to nineteenth century life. According to Bryant, Emerson, and Arnold, developments in industrial life and its attendant mass society seemed on the verge of destroying the traditional and spiritual aspects of social life. Tradition, manners, and wisdom -- the products of the classical liberal education curriculum -- were being swept away by the new science and nineteenth century materialism. The response of these three influential writers to such conditions was to promote the idea that literature (in English) was a counterforce to nineteenth century blight; it could disengage students from the actual, and turn their sights to more humane preoccupations. The effects of this "civilizing" process would enable them to see life more clearly, and to act more thoughtfully. The irony is apparent. Literature was

considered a discipline that could disengage readers from unfortunate social realities while teaching them how to wisely engage these same realities.

The higher education English departments of the 1890's institutionalized this irony. They promoted the "civilizing" myths of the classical tradition, while taking a central place in the modern liberal arts curriculum. These developments in English and literature instruction can be viewed as a metaphor for crucial issues and events occurring at the turn of the century. This metaphorical process, and the dual functions of literary study in the modern liberal arts curriculum of the 1890's, form the content of the following chapter.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This is one of those very broad terms which frequently incorporates so much that it fails to accurately describe a phenomenon. It is generally agreed, however, that the Romantic movement extended from around the time of the French Revolution through at least the first quarter of the nineteenth century. It describes a school of thought and criticism, an aesthetic, and a set of artistic premises. Individualism, the landscape as subject matter, egalitarianism, experimentation, and a distortion of the "real" are all aspects of Romantic theory. M. H. Abrams (1953) describes what he calls the "expressive" aspect of Romantic poetic theory as follows:

A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined products of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operation's of the poet's mind...The paramount cause of poetry is not, as in Aristotle, a formal cause, determined primarily by the human actions and qualities imitated; nor, as in neo-classic criticism, a final cause, the effect intended upon the audience; but instead an efficient cause -- the impulse within the poet of feelings and desires seeking expression, or the compulsion of the 'creative' imagination which, like God the creator, has its internal source of motion. (p. 22)

Such a characterization describes Romanticism's approach to literary works and their relation to experience.

The concept of Romanticism, however, has been controversial in both academic circles and literary history. Wellek (1949) writes in "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History" that "the terms 'romanticism' and 'romantic' have been under attack for a long time" (in Wellek, 1963, p. 128). His essay defends the veracity of both the concept of romanticism and its periodicity against attacks such as those by Arthur O. Lovejoy's "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" (1924). Lovejoy argues that "romantic ideas were in large part heterogeneous, logically independent, and sometimes essentially antithetic to one another in their implications" (quoted in Wellek, 1963, p. 128).

<sup>2</sup> Sublimity and "the sublime" were important words in the vocabulary of Romanticism, although the use of the word in literary criticism dates at least as far back as the work of Longinus (dates unknown, but presumed to have written "On The Sublime" in the first or third centuries A.D.). Romantic writers and painters, particularly, used the word to describe the awe created in the viewer by powerful landscapes or natural forces. Thus, the "sublime" as an aesthetic was a reciprocal relationship between the viewer and the viewed which had the tendency to produce moments of recognition or deep faith or feeling in the viewer. Early American Romantic painters, for instance, painted sublime storm scenes, or what today would be called "awesome" landscapes such as the grand canyon or the peak of Mount Washington. The now famous Hudson River School of painters often chose such landscapes and scenes as the subjects of their paintings.

<sup>3</sup> Laurence Veysey's The Emergence of the American University (1970) offers a comprehensive definition of this term in the chapter entitled "Liberal Culture." His reference from Hiram Corson's The Aims of Literary Study (1901), although written in the post-Romantic period, defines what I mean here by the Romantic belief in liberal idealism. Corson wrote that "the true aim of culture" was "to induce soul states or conditions, soul attitudes, to attune the inward forces to the idealized forms of nature and of human life produced by art, and not to make the head a cockloft for storing away the trumpery of barren knowledge." Liberal idealism was a strong belief in the civilizing influences of Western literary culture added to the Romantic belief in the essential subjective and transcendental qualities of experience.

<sup>4</sup> Many of us remember the portraits of these bearded literary patriarchs which hung in classrooms through the 1950's. The portraits were intended to remind pupils of nationalist American values and the American literary triumphs of the nineteenth century when an American literary tradition was solidly founded. Many of the poets whose early reputations earned them their place on the classroom wall, did not survive the test of time or more sophisticated literary standards. "Even their framed, sepia-tinted likenesses that used to hang on schoolroom walls or over the mahogany bookcases of the genteely elect have faded from the common memory, leaving behind only the superstitions of gray beards and dusty leather bindings" (Elliott, 1988, p. 279).

<sup>5</sup> Emerson, of course, along with Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau and others, was a great proponent of the cultural nationalism which marked this period. The need to define America as a separate entity in the world infused much of American life during this period, and also caused a fervid nationalism which, for instance, disparaged European travel by Americans. The movement worked well for American writers. They identified themselves as colleagues, devoted themselves to using American subject matter and a new American style for their work, and carved out an American literary tradition which rapidly became a competitive force in the literary marketplace, and continues as such today.

<sup>6</sup> The thrust of the address, as I have pointed out, was to emphasize the fact that America must produce its own scholars and writers who, Emerson prophesied, would some day assume positions of leadership in the world of ideas. We must remember that before this time Americans looked to England for the books they read and the ideas they believed in. Emerson rebelled against this Anglophilia, believing it inhibited the growth of American literature and ideas.

<sup>7</sup> "Arnold's tour, [in America] which started in New York, and then took him through New England, the middle Atlantic states, the upper South, and as far west as Chicago and St. Louis, covered the period from October, 1883, to March, 1884" (Raleigh, 1961, p. 274).

<sup>8</sup> It is here where "difficulties are left out of view" that the essential irony in Arnold's theories on literary education can be seen. Literature was supposed to have the capacity to enlighten students, and to "engage" them in the "beauty and rationalness of the ideal." This process, of course, would disengage them from the realities of life which surrounded them. It is here we can see the class nature of Arnold's views. Like the genteel class, he wanted to use literature to teach students about "ideal" life and to help them pretend that the devastating conditions of late nineteenth century industrialization did not exist or were certainly not as real as the ideals which literature presented.

<sup>9</sup> Examples of these documents will be quoted in the following chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Corson's book The Aims of Literary Study, published in 1894, was widely popular and is the quintessence of Arnold on literary education. It also represents the thinking which dominated the literature classroom of the 1890's. Corson wrote that

...literature, more especially poetic and dramatic literature, is the expression in letters of the spiritual, cooperating with the intellectual man, the former being the primary, dominant coefficient... The inference is, therefore, easy, as to what should be the leading aim of literary study -- that literature is not a mere knowledge subject, as the word knowledge is usually understood, namely, that with which the discursive, formulating intellect has to do. But it is a knowledge subject (only that and nothing more) if that higher form be meant, which is quite outside of the domain of the intellect -- a knowledge which is a matter of spiritual consciousness and which the intellect cannot translate into judgment. It is, nevertheless, at the same time, the most distinct and vital kind of knowledge. (pp. 25-26)

## CHAPTER V

### THE EIGHTEEN NINETIES: LITERATURE AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Numerous academic and cultural forces within the nineteenth century influenced the departmentalization of English and the new department's approaches to literature during the 1890's. This chapter presents an analysis of the relationship between the founding of the English department and the aims of culture<sup>1</sup> and liberal education put forward by the decade's Genteel class. We conclude that it was during this dynamic and crucial decade that the English department was given central responsibility for carrying out both the missions of collegiate liberal education and contemporary American culture. Literature in English was at the core of this process, and for the first time was taught and studied as an independent discipline which could transmit traditional as well as contemporary values. As such, the institutionalization of vernacular literature teaching can be understood as a metaphor for the struggle between tradition and modernity which characterized American culture during this period.

#### A Decade of Change

Henry Steele Commager (1950) refers to the last decade of the nineteenth century as a "watershed of American history" (p. 41). His interpretation treats the ten years as a dividing point between "an America predominantly

agricultural; concerned with domestic problems; conforming, intellectually at least, to the political, economic, and moral principles inherited from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" -- and a modern urban, industrialized America "experiencing profound changes in population, social institutions, economy, and technology" (Commager, 1950, p. 41). These "watershed" events also led to important changes in higher education. They contributed to the climate in which college and university English departments were founded.

The changes which occurred during the nineties include the closing of the Western frontier, the emergence of the New South, the completion of the transcontinental railroads, and the acceleration of natural resources deterioration. American farming also swiftly deteriorated during this period. This led to the "transfer of the center of economic and political gravity from country to city" (p. 44). Related to this development was the new dominance of manufacturing and the accompanying intensive growth of the transportation, communication, and banking industries. The nineties also spawned the rise of big business, monopolies, and the heroization of the successful businessman. These were the years President Coolidge referred to when he said "the business of America is business." In addition, the nineties also witnessed a tremendous influx in immigration, the beginnings of the modern labor movement, and the beginnings

of labor discontent as demonstrated in the Haymarket Riot and the Homestead and Pullman strikes.

This growth brought new and profound social problems to the American scene. These included the labor vacuum left by the diminishing agrarian economy, urban poverty, slums, business and political corruption, race prejudice, and the maldistribution of wealth. The period's naive attempts to cope with these problems were manifested in such legislation as the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and the Antitrust Act of 1890, as well as in the more grassroots development of social welfare agencies, private philanthropy, and social legislation. But, despite such legislation and social service pioneering, class conflict pervaded this new America, and efforts "to adapt a federal political system to a centralized economy and a laissez faire philosophy to a program of social democracy" (Commager, 1950, p. 45) were producing social and political turmoil.

Change was also abroad in the intellectual climate of the period. Darwinianism, Spenserianism, and Pragmatism -- three of the many new "isms" on the scene -- radically undermined previous conceptions of universal truth. Conceptions of biological, social, and theological stasis gave way to evolutionary ideas which challenged the position of God in a once-fashioned universe, and changed previously held notions of a priori truths.

Summing up the changes and turmoils associated with the eighteen nineties, Commager wrote:

It was all part of the process of coming of age, a strenuous effort to come to terms with a new economic and philosophical order for which Americans were but inadequately prepared by experience or by instruction. The dominant impression at the turn of the century is not that of material development, splendid as that was, but of bewilderment and distraction. The safest thing that could be said of the vast display of economic, political, and intellectual energy was that it created as many problems as it solved, raised as many issues as it laid, contributed as much to discontent as to contentment...

The decade of the nineties marked the end of an era; it heralded even more unmistakably, the beginning of one. Not only economically and politically but intellectually and psychologically, it attached itself to the twentieth rather than to the nineteenth century. (pp. 48-52)

The tension between tradition and modernity which Commager identifies in late nineteenth century American life had far-reaching effects on educational philosophy and practice; effects which were particularly important to the discipline formation of English and the values the new discipline placed on literary study. The early years of the English department demonstrate this looking backward and forward simultaneously. In part, this was due to changes in the constituency, curriculum, and educational philosophy of American colleges and universities. For higher education in the 1890's was, on the one hand, continuing its traditional mission of liberally educating gentlemen, while on the other hand, coming to the realization that industrialized, commercialized America was in need of higher education that could teach the new middle and managerial classes how to run

the nation. The origins of the English department, and its approach to literature particularly, were significantly influenced by the social and political changes of the time. It was in these early years that literature was assigned the role of teaching the values and manners of an older, traditional America while it was also given crucial responsibility for the modern education of the newly emergent managerial and industrial classes.

#### The Academic Environment of the Nineties

The new English department of the nineties and its emphasis on literature were products of the struggle of the modern or "new" curriculum to defeat the hold on education of Latin and Greek and the classical curriculum. The new departments were also the product of two other struggles in American higher education. The first was the struggle between advocates of "faculty psychology" and those who believed in the efficacy of content. This basic argument had raged in higher education since the 1820's, and it was an argument that was, in part, stimulated by the introduction of the vernacular into the classroom. The faculty psychology position was best summed up in America by the "Yale Report" of 1828. It had been written to argue against what Yale considered encroachments into the classical curriculum and the very nature and purpose of learning. Yale's President Day wrote:

The two great points to be gained in intellectual culture, are the **discipline** and the **furniture** of the

mind; expanding its powers, and storing it with knowledge... Those branches of study should be prescribed, and those modes of instruction adopted, which are best calculated to teach the art of fixing the attention, directing the train of thought, analyzing a subject proposed for investigation; balancing nicely the evidence presented to the judgment; awakening, elevating, and controlling the imagination...(in Butts, 1939, p. 120)

The development of English as an academic discipline emerged in contradistinction to this pedagogic philosophy. English studies represented the trend to examine and comprehend content for its own sake rather than for mental training. The force of this opposing philosophy is given evidence to by the overwhelming progress of literature in English courses in the 1890's, and by the decline of interest in the rhetoric and grammar courses in both English and Latin and Greek (Butts, 1939; Allen, 1968; Applebee, 1974).

#### Electives

A second struggle out of which the establishment and consolidation of literature in English study emerged was that of the practice of "electives" for undergraduates as opposed to the prescribed course or program. The victory of electives in higher education in the late 1860's, 70's and 80's instigated the creation of a variety of English courses and programs in colleges throughout the country. At the same time, however, in colleges like Harvard which were leading the electives battle by abolishing requirements for particular subjects, English remained one of the two

required courses in the newly liberalized curriculum (Butts, 1939; Applebee, 1968; Rudolph, 1962). In essence, then, English benefited from the elective system in two ways: as the necessary and required course in institutions which presented students with the free choice of subjects, and as a subject which could divide itself into numerous offerings within the elective system.

Harvard College, under the leadership of Charles W. Eliot<sup>2</sup>, was in the vanguard of the elective movement. Eliot spent forty years promulgating the benefits of the elective system (Butts, 1939). In addition, however, he also spoke and wrote about a redefinition of liberal education. The basic ingredient of that redefinition was the expansion of liberal education to include the modern subjects.

"Announcing the good progressive doctrine that the best intellectual and moral materials of the day should be made the substance of a liberal education, Eliot urged that the following subjects should be given an equal rank along with the ancient classics and mathematics: English language and literature, French and German, history, political economy, and the natural sciences" (Butts, 1939, p. 178). It is important to note here that Eliot's list is introduced with English, and also that "moral materials" are given equal time with "intellectual materials."

Eliot's influence was of major significance not only at Harvard, but in American higher education in general. His

tireless argument for the elective system in American colleges and universities brought that system about almost single-handedly. In his inaugural address of 1869 he characterized the system as follows:

The elective system fosters scholarship, because it gives free play to natural preferences and inborn aptitudes, makes possible enthusiasm for a chosen work, relieves the professor and the ardent disciple of the presence of a body of students who are compelled to an unwelcome task, and enlarges instruction by substituting many and various lessons to small, lively classes, for a few lessons many times repeated to different sections of a numerous class. (quoted in Butts, 1939, p. 179)

This elective philosophy and the redefinition of liberal education worked together to create an academic environment in which the study of literature in English as a requirement, as a broad range of elective courses, and as the cornerstone of a newly defined and modern liberal education, was firmly at home in the higher education curriculum in America in the 1890's.

#### German Influences and Philology

Two other factors inform this environment and contribute to the rootedness of college English in that decade. The first is a radical transformation in the nature of scholarship which occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This idea of scholarship was based on the German university model. It produced, in America, the rapid establishment of universities, the expansion of colleges into universities, and specialization. The model

was steeped in the idea that scientific method was and should be applicable to the liberal arts.

Secondly, for language study, the German research model led to an emphasis on the methods of philology. And, indeed, whereas philology in the study of English had existed minimally before the 1850's, by 1895 the major emphasis in the study of English literature and language was philological (Curti, 1953; Applebee, 1974; Butts, 1939). "In 1900 a type of philological scholarship imported from Germany had triumphed in American graduate schools and in the production of American literary scholars" (Rene Wellek in Curti, 1953, p. 111). That "triumph" indicates the triumph not only of philology and specialization in the English department at this time, but the graduate and undergraduate pervasiveness of the German model of scholarship based on research. In turn, the research method gave rise to numerous new institutions which included, for instance, graduate specialization, the publication of journals devoted to publishing research, and to university and private research libraries. For English studies, this meant the founding and publication of: Publications of the Modern Language Association in 1886, Modern Language Notes in 1886, the Journal of English and Germanic Philology in 1903; and the founding of the Folger and Huntington libraries devoted to English Renaissance literature (Wellek in Curti, 1953, p. 111).

## The Ethical Obligations of Education

Yet while research and philology, the elective system, specialization, and a redefined concept of liberal arts education were establishing a modern and new curriculum in the place of the classical curriculum and creating the environment perfectly suited for English literature and language studies, there was one more factor at work which insured that some vestige of the past would dominate the classroom of the nineties. This was the ethical strain in American education. It was rooted in the classical tradition which promoted the civic functions of education, and gave literature the major responsibility for transmitting "paideia." This tradition firmly asserted itself in whatever changes were occurring, and no matter how liberal Charles W. Eliot of progressive Harvard and Daniel Coit Gilman of the new German model Johns Hopkins graduate school might sound, their attitudes and beliefs never strayed far from the moral and political responsibilities of American higher education. It is true that there was a split in the 1890's between classicist and progressive humanists, including English teachers -- those who staunchly advocated the modern curriculum and those who hesitated to give up the classical. But, whether advocates for the new or the old curriculum, the cultural, ethics-oriented mission of the curriculum was agreed on by both (Butts, 1939; Curti, 1953; Graff, 1987; Rudolph, 1962). For humanities scholars and teachers, and

English teachers in particular, there was a built-in tradition and set of materials for this approach, the very existence of which seemed to give it credence, authority, and a kind of academic infallibility:

Certain individuals, stretching from Plato to Emerson, were placed on pedestals as the carriers of a single worthy civilized tradition. Their output, interpreted as embodying a timeless morality, came to be taught as a kind of substitute for the now partly discredited religious scriptures. Potentially, the new Germanic style of historical and philological research might subvert these oversimplified pseudohistorical formulas, just as it had already undermined the sacred position of the Bible, but in the period before 1920 such probing skepticism only seldom entered into the motivation of humanistic scholars. In the main, scholarship pressed its searchlight into further corners of the agreed civilization, not challenging the ethical generalizations of the recently formed Western European and Northern American upper-middle class which had created the very notion of civilization itself. The humanities existed to uphold 'standards.' (Veysey in Voss and Olesen, 1979, pp. 52-53)

In essence, the force of this "civilizing" role of the curriculum is one half of a paradox in which late nineteenth century secularization and Modernism are the other half. The teaching of literature in English was particularly situated to incorporate this paradox. The subject stood for the victory of the modern curriculum, for electives, for the new research model approaching subject matter. But as the victor, English inherited the former role of the classics -- the handing-down of Western tradition. And the purpose of dispensing that tradition, since the very beginning of education on whatever level, had been to instill in students a model for the good life, particularly as it applied to the

role of the citizen in the political and cultural community. The philologists of the 1890's might side-step the issue by complete immersion in a kind of value-less linguistic study. But even there, linguistic research often led to the connections between language and culture, nation and citizen, and questions of ethics and/or nationalism would emerge. But for the teacher of American and English literature who concentrated on style and content, and not on linguistic analysis (and there were many), the interpretation of texts could not escape the academic environment which seemed to coalesce into a paradox. That paradox suggested the complete rejection of the old tradition in the name of "science," or the incorporation of it within the scientific model. All signs point to the entrenchment of the latter method during this period.

Proof of these dynamics can be found in Professor Albert S. Cook's description of Yale's English course of study in 1895. Cook was one of the five men "to do the work in English " at Yale (Payne, 1895, p. 29). The department offered 19 hours of English a week to 922 men, "being rather more than four-fifths of the number of students in the College." He further describes the department as follows:

The present year [1895] is the first that an entrance examination in English has been required since the modern methods of teaching preparatory English have come into effect, and measures have now been taken to conform to the recent recommendations of the Commission of Colleges in New England. All the Junior and Senior work is elective; Sophomores choose five out of six prescribed subjects, these being Greek, Latin, modern

languages, mathematics, English literature and physics.  
(Cook in Payne, 1895, p. 30)

Here Professor Cook summarizes how the modern innovations of electives, entrance requirements, and the new subjects of the modern curriculum were handled by Yale and his English department, an institution, it must be remembered, that in the 1820's had been most vociferous in resisting curricular change. Cook, however, is writing two years after the "Committee of Ten" report of 1893. That report essentially "modernized" English studies in the secondary schools and by extension in higher education by claiming its primacy in the education of all Americans.<sup>3</sup>

But most interesting about Cook's descriptions and details of the English department is his closing and somewhat personalized statement of the department's aims. (Like the writers of the other nineteen English department descriptions collected in Payne, Cook had been chosen by his department to write his narrative, which originally appeared in The Dial during 1894.) The piece closes as follows:

The general purpose of the undergraduate literary instruction...is to foster the love of literature and the development of the critical sense, implying as the latter does, the fullest appreciation of all excellent qualities. Methods vary, as they must, with the individuality of the teacher. The writer might formulate the especial object which he proposes to himself as the development in the student, whether graduate or undergraduate, of insight and power, and indeed he conceives this to be the end of all education whatever. The imparting of information seems to him quite a secondary object; and a love for literature is most likely, as he thinks, to be promoted by the acquisition of insight and power. Of course these terms must be taken in the broadest sense, so as to include

the emotional and aesthetic faculties as well as the purely intellectual, the will and the moral nature no less than the reason. To this end no study can be better suited than English, its comprehensiveness, variety, and richness of content rendering it an unsurpassed aliment of the spiritual life, while, by proper methods of instruction, it may be made a most effective instrument of spiritual discipline. (Payne, 1895, p. 39)

Thus, Professor Cook elegantly characterizes the academic environment of the period, and the place of English literature teaching in it. It was to be scientific, directed towards mental discipline and the appreciation of beauty, forward-looking and appreciative of the past, and it was, above all, and in the balance, to direct the student to an ethical, moral vision which would produce spiritual training no less than good citizenship. English literature teaching in the 1890's was balancing the old and the modern curriculum. It was clinging to the the values which governed traditional literary education while embracing scientific methods which threatened to obliterate the role of literature as an instrument of civic and moral education.

This dilemma, or balance which describes the dual roles of English in the 1890's, is directly related to the status of American cultural life of the period. A significant aspect of that life involved the values and actions of what might be called America's late nineteenth century ruling class -- the "gentility." This traditional bastion of American social and economic power played out many of the tensions which were set into motion as late nineteenth

century tradition gave way to twentieth century innovations. This one class clung to the idea of an older, more genteel America while it nonetheless prepared to dominate twentieth century social and economic life. This class was most invested in the changes occurring in the 1890's. Its members were the primary constituents of colleges and universities (Commager, 1950; Persons, 1973; Butts, 1939). Consequently, it was this class which greatly influenced the direction that higher education took in this period of radical social and educational change. The genteel class was particularly responsible for influencing how English and literature were to be taught in the English department's formative years; a time particularly receptive to the economic and class interests of American "gentility."

#### The Genteel Tradition

The Genteel Tradition is by now a well-worn epithet used to describe the values and beliefs associated with high culture and the American "aristocracy" which permeated the last half of the nineteenth century. The phrase was coined by George Santayana in 1911 in an address to the Philosophical Union of the University of California at Berkeley. The lecture was titled "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," and was much less about philosophy than it was about a pervasive intellectual tradition which, according to Santayana, had originated in the mid nineteenth century and persisted into his own time. America, he said,

was not simply "a young country, with an old mentality," but was, rather, a "country with two mentalities." He described the first as a "survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers." The second, he said, was "an expression of the instincts, practices, and discoveries of the younger generations." He developed his dichotomy as follows:

In all the higher things of the mind -- in religion, in literature, in the moral emotions -- it is the hereditary spirit that still prevails.... The truth is that one-half of the American mind, that not occupied intensely in practical affairs, has remained, I will not say high-and-dry, but slightly becalmed; it has floated gently in the backwater, while, alongside, in invention and industry and social organization the other half of the mind was leaping down a sort of Niagara Rapids. This division may be found symbolized in American architecture: a neat reproduction of the colonial mansion... stands beside the skyscraper. The American Will inhabits the sky-scraper; the American intellect inhabits the colonial mansion. The one is the sphere of the American man; the other, at least predominantly, of the American woman. The one is all aggressive enterprise, the other is all genteel tradition. (1911, in Wilson, 1967, pp. 39-40)

Santayana's complaint is focused on both America's preoccupation with the past (and a Calvinist past, at that) and its lack of what he might call "manly" progressive culture and an equally aggressive or progressive art which would illustrate it.<sup>4</sup> But the tradition and culture which Santayana named had much more substance and reality than an epithetic convenience for his critique of the American mind. It was a way of life and thought which dominated nineteenth century America, and dictated a good portion of its values and objectives, including those involved with education, and higher education in particular.

Santayana's "tradition" was, in effect, a socio-economic class and a way of seeing the world. It was an American parallel to British Victorianism, a substitute for breeding. According to Stow Persons (1973) "the gentry were a self-constituted aristocracy of the best, monopolizing virtue, beauty, and power" (p. 3). The class consisted of men and women

who subscribed to a distinct code of values, and who modeled their lives in accordance with the traditions of gentility, modified by American circumstances. Their position was not a birthright, either in theory or practice. Anyone could assume gentry status by conforming to the standards of gentility; newcomers were constantly being recruited. It was commonly acknowledged, however, that membership in a gentry family conveyed great advantages... Many members of the gentry were professional people: doctors, lawyers, the educated, clergy, college professors, artists, writers, editors, and publishers. Also included were a substantial number of businessmen bankers, and merchants. (Persons, 1973, p. 2)

In essence, the participants of the genteel tradition were members of a new American socio-economic class engendered by the industrialization, commercialism, and professionalization associated with the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was a class, however, which was defined as much by its attitudes as by its social and economic characteristics. Above all, the genteel class believed that it was responsible for "much of the burden of sustaining cultural life in the nineteenth century" (Persons, 1973, p. 2). It sustained cultural life by imposing its Victorian value system on all aspects of culture, behavior, and education.°

### Genteel Ideology and Liberal Education

The "operative fusion of idealism and the instinct for craftsmanship which dominated high culture from 1865 to 1915 and which infiltrated the culture of the middle class" (Jones, 1971, p. 21) developed an ideology which imparted "an air of moral and social steadiness in a still turbulent world" (Horton & Edwards, 1974, p. 193). The principles and values of this ideology composed the "tradition" to which Santayana referred. It was marked by sentimentality, provincialism, moral probity, materialism, and a passion "for concealing the true nature of everything from umbrella stands to adultery. The mention of such realities as death, disease, insanity, deformity, moral irregularity, money-making, crime, or such controversial matters as religion, politics, or divorce were avoided as much as possible, with the idea that such things were disturbing" (Horton & Edwards, 1974, p. 196).

One of the most articulate spokesmen for the values of the Genteel Tradition was the Boston "Brahmin" Eliot Norton, a Harvard professor of Art History who, from 1874, taught there for a quarter of a century.<sup>6</sup> According to Howard Mumford Jones, "Norton clung to the doctrine that the purpose of art was to enrich culture through idealism" (Jones, 1971, p. 239). In his 1895 article "The Educational Value of the History of the Fine Arts," Norton clarified the

Genteel Tradition and the philosophy which formulated its educational aims:

It is through the study and knowledge of the works of the fine arts, quite apart from the empirical practice of any of them, that the imagination, the supreme faculty of human nature, is mainly to be cultivated... And nowhere are such study and knowledge more needed than in America, for nowhere in the civilized world are the practical concerns of life more engrossing; nowhere are the conditions of life more prosaic; nowhere is the poetic spirit less evident, and the love of beauty less diffused. (Quoted in Jones, 1971, p. 240)

Although Norton's phraseology takes the form of an indictment, it can nonetheless be understood as an expression of the Genteel Tradition's expectations of liberal education. Its duty was to bring about "an early and first-hand acquaintance with the thinkers of the world whether their mode of thought was music or marble or canvas or language" (J.J. Chapman, quoted in Jones, 1971, p. 226). This "acquaintance," however, was hardly value-free. It was fashioned both by and for the gentlemen of America's genteel class whose spokesmen were Norton, Chapman, James Russell Lowell, William Dean Howells, and Matthew Arnold in England. These men, and many others, constructed the genteel ideology which defined and directed liberal education in this period. This ideology and genteel culture, laissez faire economics, and the advantages of a liberal education were fused into a curriculum which came to dominate late nineteenth century higher education.

This curriculum included athletics (because the Greeks

had emphasized exercise in education); science (because it demonstrated intelligence); foreign languages, literature, and the arts (because they expanded the mind); and philosophy (idealism). Graduates of such an education who were "enriched by ancient tradition and intellectual inquisitiveness " were "theoretically ready to study for one of the professions... but, in fact... most of them went into white-collar jobs in business as the antagonism to college education diminished among stockbrokers, bankers, industrialists, and their kind" (Jones, 1971, p. 231). These graduates who were "enriched" by the genteel ideology and liberal education, then, became the leaders of late nineteenth century American society. Their liberal education, it was believed, had humanized them but had also prepared them to run America's rapidly advancing industrialized democracy. For the ultimate objective of their liberal education was "to develop not only a lofty purposefulness and vision, but to translate purpose and vision into citizenship." Liberal education was to instill in them their responsibility to "lead the multitude into right ways of responding, thinking, and voting" (Jones, 1971, p. 240).

Evidence for literature's central role in liberal education and in transmitting genteel values abounds in late nineteenth writing. Scholars, writers, professors, college administrators, politicians and arbiters of culture all

sought an opportunity to praise and encourage the role of literature in higher education.

The study of literature had no more eloquent proponent than history professor, Princeton President, and United States President Woodrow Wilson. Writing in an issue of the Atlantic Monthly of 1893, Wilson clarified genteel expectations of literary study in the liberal arts curriculum:

...scholarship cannot do without literature. It needs literature to float it, to set it current, to authenticate it to the race, to get it out of closets, and into the brains of men who stir abroad... [Literature] also has a power to instruct you which is as effective as it is subtle, and which no research or systematic method can ever rival. 'Tis a sore pity if that power cannot be made available in the classroom. It is not merely that it quickens your thought and fills your imagination with the images that illuminated the choicer minds of the race... but it does a great deal more than that... It acquaints the mind, by direct contact, with the forces which really govern and modify the world from generation to generation. There is more of a nation's politics to be gotten out of its poetry than out of all its systematic writers upon public affairs and constitutions. Epics are better mirrors of manners than chronicles; dramas oftentimes let you into the secrets of statutes... If this free people to which we belong is to keep its fine spirit, its perfect temper amidst affairs, its high courage in the face of difficulties... it must continue to drink deep and often from the old wells of English undefiled, quaff the keen tonic of its best ideals, keep its blood warm with all the great utterances of exalted purpose and pure principle of which its matchless literature is full. The great spirits of the past must command us in the tasks of the future... Even though it [literature] puzzle or altogether escape scientific method, it may keep our horizon clear for us, and our eyes glad to look bravely forth upon the world. (1893, in Graff, 1989, p. 85-89)

Wilson's paean to literature and its place in education was typical of the genteel sentiment of his day. His

position (and that of his class) was what has been called by Veysey and others, representative of the forces of "liberal humanism" which considered literature the cornerstone of liberal education, and the major civilizing force in education which was intended to create the "gentlemen" who were the Genteel Tradition embodied.

The role of the English department became crucial to the aims of the genteel class. It became that department's newly invented function to use the literatures of the past and present, and all in English, to connect modern America with the classical past and to the present; to join the modern captain of industry's values to those permanent values of the past.<sup>7</sup> The "general doctrine" of the Genteel Tradition contended that the Western Tradition was

a seamless whole, a unity that overrides time and nationality, church and race. One began with the Greeks, one swept majestically along the shores of Egypt into the Roman empire, and thence through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment into the progressive nineteenth century, wherein, wrote the Reverend Josiah Strong, there is a tremendous rush of events which is startling. In this great sweep particulars melted into the oneness of 'Art,' which was universal, 'Beauty,' which was ennobling, and 'Wisdom' (sometimes 'Faith'), which was expressed by Greek Thinkers. The Old Testament was the work of the Jews; Plato and Socrates were Greeks; Christianity eventually suffused the Roman world; Gothic cathedrals and The Divine Comedy embodied the medieval vision; the great Renaissance painters were Catholics; Milton was a Protestant; Montesquieu, though skeptical, was progressive; Goethe, perhaps a pagan, believed in self-culture as Tennyson... And there was always Shakespeare, who was not for an age but for all time. They all represented mankind yearning for the Ideal. Therefore the true believer ... strove like Arnold's poet in Resignation to see life unroll before him as one placid and continuous whole. If the panorama was

spotted by wars and racial hatreds, religious strife and political dissension, these were accidents, not substance. The believer strove for insight... The unity of the development of mankind was certified by philosophy, by Christianity, and by evolution. (Jones, 1971, pp. 200-201)

Jones's ironic, if not caustic, overview of the Genteel Tradition sums up its almost religious faith in the Western Tradition and its self-appointed responsibility to preserve it. This quasi-religious fervor in the efficacy of literary education is characteristic of the period. It is as though the onrush of modern thought and science into the late nineteenth century dashed religious faith and its premises of stability and belief.<sup>9</sup> A psychological and spiritual vacuum was created, as well as a need to fill it. In many ways, during the period of departmentalization, literature and its values were looked to and taught as substitutes for the religions once so cherished in American social and collegiate life.

The founding and rise of the English department during this period was intrinsically related to the ideals and aims of culture, and liberal education expounded by the Genteel Tradition. The decline of the classical curriculum, and the dominating presence and ideology of a new elite contributed to the need for a new discipline to anchor liberal education and interpret its educational and social goals for a new age. The English department was given this responsibility, and the study of classical and contemporary literature in the vernacular was given prominent place for discharging

that responsibility. This led to the new discipline not only of English, but of literary study.

As this thesis contends, literary study in American higher education previously had been used to teach Greek and Latin, or the Classics, or as models and rules for grammar and style. In this period, however, literature was studied as a discipline -- a body of work which not only contained aesthetic and social meaning, but also represented the ideals and values of the American past and industrialized present. The institutionalization of literature in this way and at this time not only embodied America's late nineteenth century struggles with maturity, but also set literary study on a course it has continued to pursue.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I mean by culture here a very particular nineteenth century meaning of the word which this chapter goes on to explain. For now, however, it is important to know that culture in the late nineteenth century referred to conditions of birth and breeding which led to "the education of the heart" (quoted in Witt, 1968, p. 239). It usually referred to the propertied classes and was used in contrast to qualities inherent in the working classes. Culture indicated regard for "the higher elements of the life of civilized man, for art [and] literature" (p. 240). On the other hand, those who possessed culture were morally responsible for passing it on, and were convinced that education, and literary education in particular, was the means by which this should be done. Peter Witt captures culture and its relationship to property and missionary zeal when he quotes J.B. Harrison's 1878 Atlantic Monthly article "Certain Dangerous Tendencies in American Life:"

The people who believe in culture, in property, and in order, that is in civilization, must establish the necessary agencies for the diffusion of a new culture. Capital must protect itself by organized activities for a new object -- the education of the people. (in Witt, 1968, pp. 240-241)

<sup>2</sup> Eliot's role in late nineteenth century changes in the liberal arts curriculum and in the acceptance of vernacular literature in that curriculum is characterized by John Jay Chapman in a contemporary reminiscence of Eliot and his mission:

The savage terrible hordes of America waked up in 1870, to the importance of salvation by education. Perhaps they valued education too highly, and in their ignorance demanded more than even education can give. Yet these hordes were ingenuous in their desire to be saved. As the Frankish tribes in the sixth century submitted to Rome, so the Americans in the nineteenth submitted to Massachusetts...The whole process was important, significant, big with influence upon the future. The Pope during this epoch was Charles William Eliot. (in Witt, 1968, p. 242)

In support of the place of English in the curriculum, Eliot wrote in his 1869 Atlantic Monthly article "The New Education:"

English literature should be the first literature which an American boy studies. It is a shame that so many

boys of seventeen read the Georgics before the Midsummer Night's Dream, Horace before Milton, and Xenophon before Napier. (in Witt, 1968, p. 257)

We should also note that under Eliot's presidency, Harvard's English offerings began to multiply and literature entrance exams took on great importance.

<sup>3</sup> On July 9, 1892, the National Education Association appointed the "Committee of Ten" for the purpose of setting major directions and priorities in American education. Charles W. Eliot, President of Harvard, was named chairman and oversaw the arrangement of a series of nine "conferences" to discuss nine subject fields, one of which was English. The Conference on English met at Vassar College. Its report "represented a summary and reconciliation of the contemporary points of view about the teaching of English" (Applebee, 1974, p. 33). The report of the Committee of English began with a statement of the purpose of English study:

The main objects of the teaching of English in schools seem to be two: (1) to enable the pupil to understand the expressed thoughts of others and to give expression to thoughts of his own; and (2) to cultivate a taste for reading, to give the pupil some acquaintance with good literature, and to furnish him with means of extending that acquaintance. (in Applebee, 1974, p. 33)

For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of the English Conference's report was its recommendation that high schools provide a compulsory, continuous four year English course that would meet five hours a week, with three of the five hours devoted to the study of literature.

It is with the English Committees' report of the "Committee of Ten" that English studies in America became not only an acceptable subject, but the subject considered most important, above and beyond, even, Latin and Greek. Because the Committee reported that literature was the most important unit within the English curriculum, the study of literature in the vernacular ascended to a distinct and influential place in American education.

<sup>4</sup> The perceptive American literature critic F.O Mathiessen, in his book Theodore Dreiser eloquently interpreted Santayana's intent in the quoted passages as follows:

Santayana coined the phrase "the genteel tradition" to describe what he considered was the most dangerous defect in American thought. Observing our dominant New England culture, Santayana believed that its deep-rooted error was that it separated thought from experience. Among the legacies of a colonial culture is the habit of thinking of creative sources as somehow remote from itself, of escaping from the hardness and awfulness of everyday surroundings into an idealized picture of civilized refinement, of believing that the essence of beauty must lie in what James Russell Lowell read about in Keats rather than what Walt Whitman saw in the streets of Brooklyn. The inescapable result of this is to make art an adornment rather than an organic expression of life, to confuse it with politeness and delicacy. (Quoted in Wilson, 1967, p. 25)

<sup>5</sup> Henry James (1843-1916), the expatriate novelist, who was an interesting case of gentility and rebellion against it, neatly summed up the genteel aesthetic by describing its attitude toward contemporary fiction. In the 1884 "The Art of Fiction," he developed a theory of the novel and articulated what came to be known as a Realist aesthetic which ran counter to genteel expectations of contemporary art. He wrote that "Art, in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction" (1884, in Perkins, 1985, p. 600).

James's "Protestant communities," are, of course, the Calvinistic novel-reading middle classes who, by the 1890's, supported the publishing industry. James's point is not that they were opposed to art and reading, but that their genteel aesthetic narrowed interpretation of classic literature to their provincial tastes and dominated the contemporary publishing industry. This gentility, James wrote, created "in the English novel (by which of course I mean the American as well), more than in any other, ... a traditional difference between that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature" (1884, in Perkins, 1985, p. 610).

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note Norton's attitude toward democracy and his own social position when using him as a spokesperson for the values of the Genteel class. These attitudes are illustrative of the elitism which, by and large, clung to

those values and to gentility's sense of itself. Obviously, when transferred to the classroom by teachers and students, this class awareness will affect academic expectations and curriculum. Jones (1971) characterizes these qualities in Norton as follows:

He was a complex personality. Many thought him a snob. Apropos of Lowell's famous address, "Democracy," he wrote that democracy was likely to work 'ignobly, ignorantly, brutally.' The progress of democracy in Europe saddened him by its 'destruction of old shrines, the disregard of beauty, the decline in personal distinction, the falling off in manners.' (p. 238)

Such sentiments were typical of the genteel class; they colored its conception of the humanist tradition and its purpose in the higher education curriculum.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Witt (1968) documents the urgency and significance that the relationship of literature and "culture" held for writers, teachers, and intellectuals in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I take the liberty of quoting several pieces of his research which dramatize the high esteem in which vernacular literature was held at the time the English department was becoming institutionalized. Jonathan Baxter Harrison, author of the 1878 Atlantic Monthly article "Certain Dangerous Tendencies in American Life" wrote:

Men who could really teach English literature, and show people how to read and understand it, so as to receive culture from it, would be among the most valuable missionaries of the new order of things. If there are such men it would be profitable to employ them. (Witt, 1968, p. 241)

Arlo Bates, a professor of English at Massachusetts Institute of Technology told a Lowell Institute audience in Boston in 1895:

He is greatly to be pitied who, in reading high imaginative work, has never been conscious of a sense of being in a fine and noble presence, of having been admitted into a place which should not be profaned. Only that soul is great which can appreciate greatness. Remember that there is no surer measure of what you are than the extent to which you are able to rise to the heights of supreme books; the extent to which you are able to comprehend, to delight in, and revere the masterpieces. (Witt, 1968, p. 246)

Bates entirely captures the place of literature in the cultured nineteenth century image of society in the same talk:

We all recognize that we live in a society in which familiarity with these works is put forward as an essential condition of intellectual, and indeed almost of social and moral, respectability. One would hesitate to ask to dinner a man who confessed to a complete ignorance of 'The Canterbury Tales;' and if one's sister married a person so hardened as to own to being unacquainted with 'Hamlet,' one would take a good deal of pains to prevent the disgraceful fact from becoming public. We have come to accept a knowledge of the classics as a measure of cultivation. (Witt, 1968, p. 246)

Of course, Bates is referring here to classics in English -- a casualness on his part which is itself revealing about the status of English literature in his day.

\* Terry Eagleton (1983) is emphatic about this point. He writes:

If one were asked to provide a single explanation for the growth of English studies in the later nineteenth century, one could do worse than reply: 'the failure of religion.' By the mid-Victorian period, this traditionally reliable, immensely powerful ideological form was in deep trouble. It was no longer winning the hearts and minds of the masses, and under the twin impacts of scientific discovery and social change its previous unquestioned dominance was in danger of evaporating...It is no wonder that the Victorian ruling class looked on the threatened dissolution of this ideological discourse with something less than equanimity. Fortunately, however, another, remarkably similar discourse lay to hand: English literature. (p. 23)

## CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have presented the "cultural text" (Scholes, 1985) of literary study in American higher education from its roots in classical Greek education to its institutionalization in the new English departments of the late nineteenth century. One major theme dominates this text: literary studies, whether in translation or in the vernacular, have been used to transmit a predominantly white, male, Eurocentric value system and tradition. In American undergraduate education, an "aristocracy" of seventeenth century ministers, eighteenth century politicians, and nineteenth century "preachers of culture" supplemented and preserved the literary canon and ideology which composed this tradition. Little has changed. Courses and methods similar to those constructed in the late nineteenth century continue to dominate undergraduate English departments.

We do not advocate that literary education should or can be divorced from the moral and civic functions that have guided it since such aims were established in early Greek education. We do argue, however, that literary study, and its moral and civic implications, must be responsive to the changing conditions of contemporary life. Historically, the Western literary canon has been used to transmit the values of a select minority. It no longer makes sense to teach

these values in an age, and in a country, which has no alternative but to recognize the imperatives of cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity.

We believe it is time to liberate undergraduate literary studies in American higher education from their patriarchal, monochromatic, and genteel origins. We conclude this dissertation with recommendations which address how undergraduate literary education can be improved. We suggest three approaches which will modernize the discipline and introduce into the classroom the history of undergraduate literary studies we have presented here.

#### Theory in the Classroom

A survey of recent English department course offerings in undergraduate catalogues will indicate that literature today is taught in much the same way it was in the 1890's. The department is organized in the basic field coverage model, with courses arranged by period, genre, and author. Lists of modern course offerings verify that "in a period when literary studies have gone through the most fundamental conflict of principle in their history...this conflict has informed very little of the average student's study" (Graff, 1987, p. 251). Simply put, undergraduate literature courses are not incorporating the excitement and knowledge produced by the challenges and theoretical investigations which permeate literary studies on the graduate and professional levels.

Undergraduate literature courses can be markedly improved with the introduction of theory into the curriculum. By theory, we refer to that diversity of approaches to literature and texts outlined in the introduction of this dissertation: a method of discussing literature which is "an inclusive not an exclusive movement. That is, it welcomes and includes the scholarly and critical concerns with author, text, or canon, but it insists that other -- perhaps more rigorous and more 'worldly' -- questions be asked in addition" (Waller, 1985, p. 11).

We believe that the introduction of theory into undergraduate literary studies will direct teachers and students to ask questions about the role of literature in undergraduate education and about the interrelation of specific texts to society, history, and literature's modes of production and reception. These questions, in turn, will lead to the interpretation of texts in a more "worldly" context, a context which incorporates historical, political, social and economic facts into discussions of textual meaning which go beyond conventional considerations of the period, form, and style of a text. Locating the text within this larger "cultural text" can ultimately lead to discussions concerned with the text's authority, where this authority comes from, why it endures, and what place it has in the education of students today. Such discussions can revivify the well-worn, "great tradition" interpretations

and approaches which are the standard fare of introductory literature courses; courses taught to students who are most often compelled to attend them, not out of desire or interest, but to fulfill requirements.

Our recommendation to include theory in the undergraduate curriculum is based on a second, equally important potential of theory to enliven and enrich the classroom. At the heart of the diversity of approaches which theory embraces, is the recognition that discussions about problems and issues associated with literary study are as much a part of this study as are discussions about texts. At the present time, the very value of literary study and the literary canon are hotly debated in graduate schools, in the scholarly press, and even in the popular media (see recent articles in the New York Sunday Times, June 5, 1988; Newsweek, December 24th, 1990; Harper's, July, 1988). Undergraduates should be exposed to these debates because ultimately the contemporary literary "conversation" focuses on the value and position of literature in their own educations.

Gerald Graff (1987) dwells on this aspect of literary theory in Professing Literature, his "institutional history," of the rise and development of academic literary studies in the United States. Graff contends that English departments have done disservice to students and teachers by carrying on debates about theory and curriculum behind

closed doors -- in faculty meetings, scholarly journals, and Modern Language Association conventions. Students therefore, according to Graff, are denied familiarity with the issues and with the urgency that make sides in the debates worth choosing.

Graff argues, and we agree, that the undergraduate literature course would benefit considerably if teachers, instead of trying to "insulate the curriculum from political conflicts," chose a "more realistic strategy" that recognized "the existence of such conflicts." In this way, Graff continues, whatever "may be instructive" in the debates would be prominent "within the curriculum itself" (pp. 252-253). Graff's position is summed up with a question that his book sets out to answer: "why not try to let students in on whatever matters of principle are at issue?" (1987, p. 252). We concur with Graff that teachers who are willing to address these "matters of principle" in the classroom will be teaching their students not only about how literature works, but how it matters -- to them and to their cultures.

Thus, because theoretical approaches expand possibilities for discussing specific texts and because theory introduces discussions which focus on the purpose and methods of literary study, we recommend that introductory literature courses introduce theory in the classroom. It can be accomplished without much disruption by adding courses in

theory to undergraduate literature offerings and by teaching standard courses in ways that are theoretically up to date.

### Literature and Cultural Studies

The introduction of theory into the undergraduate literature curriculum will also facilitate the incorporation of cultural studies into the English department. We strongly recommend this innovation.

Many of us who have taught undergraduate literature courses have been discouraged by our students' lack of cultural and historical consciousness. This ignorance has highlighted the clear need to teach history and culture along with literature if students are to connect with the social, historical, and literary circumstances of individual texts. Yet, numerous of us who have attempted to teach culture and history in the literature class have been made painfully aware of the constraints of time and "coverage" which this activity encounters.

For example: many of us who have tried to introduce cultural history in the Western or American Literature survey course have been challenged and perhaps defeated by this task. We have been faced with teaching a history course and a literature course simultaneously, and frequently one or both of the disciplines has been compromised. We have found that there is too little time to "cover" American history from the Civil War to Viet Nam in the second semester American Literature course, for example. At the

same time, however, we have known or have come to realize that Whitman's poems, Thoreau's Walden, Emerson's Essays, and Kate Chopin's The Awakening will only make sense to students if they know something about the facts and ideas, customs and traditions which made up nineteenth century life and gave rise to these writers' visions. We have, therefore, sped through lectures on Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Nationalism, the role of women, the differences between Southern and Creole cultures -- and we have seen students overwhelmed by information overload, confused by watered down history and incomplete textual interpretations.

We recommend that undergraduate literature courses avoid these pitfalls by building cultural history into the curriculum. There are numerous, uncomplicated ways to accomplish this. Interdisciplinary courses, for instance, can effectively connect language to history, texts to their modes of production and response, political and social power to literature, and the reading of texts to social practices.

Gerald Graff (1987), Robert Scholes (1985), Cary Nelson (1986), and Christine Froula (1983), among many other scholars and teachers, have suggested how English departments can incorporate interdisciplinary cultural studies into the undergraduate literature experience. They share the belief that a constructive first step is to alter the "field coverage" model of the department and make it one which emphasizes courses that teach broad literary issues,

such as introductory courses in theory, literature and culture, women's studies, and the literature of other marginalized groups. A second step is to supplement these core courses with more specific interdisciplinary ones which contain the more conventional focus on periods, genres, and authors.

A movement toward changing the English department in this direction is slowly underway, but it is currently limited to selective, four-year colleges around the country. Graff's Professing Literature documents "programs that situate the study of literature in cultural history", at "Minnesota, Brandeis, Duke, Northwestern, Stanford, Johns Hopkins, Cornell, Pittsburgh, Carnegie-Mellon, Yale, Columbia, the Berkeley and Santa Cruz campuses of the University of California, and the Albany and Buffalo campuses of the State University of New York" (Graff, 1987, p. 258). These programs consist of core courses "in literary and cultural theory, methods, and exemplary problems." They are supplemented with elective courses in which theories presented in the core courses are applied to standard genre, period, and author courses. These programs, according to Graff, are growing rapidly. Unfortunately, however, they have been limited to graduate programs in the institutions which offer them.

It is difficult to understand why the concerns of these courses "would not be as relevant and as needed in

undergraduate study as well" (p. 259). Such courses, and sets of courses, which have been designed at the graduate level already, would not necessarily require additional faculty or time when put into practice in undergraduate literary study. We recommend that English departments immediately begin to take steps to introduce this "core theory plus applied elective" interdisciplinary model into undergraduate literature courses, using the successes of graduate department offerings to base their models on.

### Rhetoric

A third approach to improved undergraduate literary studies emphasizes an approach to literature, i.e. Rhetoric, which was first popular in classical Greek and then Roman education, but fell out of favor with the onset of the study and criticism of literature in the vernacular. The rhetorical approach, which we recommend here, treats literature as one form of social discourse among many -- social discourse referring to the methods we use to communicate with each other and our society. In the classroom, Rhetoric emphasizes the generic study of discourse in addition to the study of literature as a specific category of the genus. Thus, the literature class is made to encompass numerous forms of the "social conversation" which forms discourse, including history and science texts, popular fiction, music, etc.

The rhetorical approach, according to Terry Eagleton, examines "the way discourses are constructed in order to achieve certain effects...Its horizon" would be "in grasping such practices as forms of power and performance" (1983, p. 205). The focus of courses which followed a rhetorical orientation would "treat 'literature' as a name which people give from time to time for different reasons to certain kinds of writing within a whole field...of discursive practices." Writing, therefore is treated not merely as "a textual object to be aesthetically contemplated" but "as forms of activity inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, authors and audiences, and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they are embedded" (pp. 205-206).

We consider Eagleton's modernization of Rhetoric too broad in its redefinition of the elements and functions of literature and individual texts. This detracts from teaching students about the specialized purposes and modes of existence of literature. However, we do recommend that undergraduate literature teachers should reconsider and utilize Rhetorical methods in the classroom, particularly Rhetoric's capacity to clarify the connections which exist between text, reader, culture, and history. This can be accomplished, in introductory literature courses, by focusing on the nature of language: its uses, its impact,

its capacities to serve a variety of purposes, among them -- literary. A freshman literature course titled "The Impact of Language," for instance, might include texts and discussions on propaganda, linguistics, history, popular fictions, etc. in addition to standard works by Sophocles, Shakespeare, Woolf, and Hemingway.

#### Final Recommendations

When undergraduate literature teachers use theory, cultural studies, and rhetorical methods to vitalize their courses, the history of undergraduate literary studies in American higher education presented in this dissertation will be of substantial practical value. The history we have documented elucidates why and how the new English departments of the late nineteenth century constructed the courses in vernacular literature which became paradigms for the discipline. We have seen that men of high social class and influence were frequently responsible for creating and purveying the tradition of texts and objectives which defined standard literature courses. These men were motivated by religious belief, by political/nationalist ideology, and, in the nineteenth century, by the conviction that innate breeding or social cultivation defined the "cultured" man who would benefit from both higher education and literary study.

If undergraduate literature teachers lay out this history in introductory courses by using, among other means,

some or all of the texts and documents we have reviewed, students will begin to have a very different introduction to literature and its established importance than they do at the present time. Literature's connections to power, to inculcation, to politics, to propaganda, to its purposes beyond education and art, and to its role in the students' own educations will become much clearer in the classroom. When this clarification occurs, common barriers which exist between students and literary study -- the lack of a solid theoretical base which encompasses and explains the discipline, the sacredness which attends texts, the inaccessibility of texts due to student unfamiliarity with cultural and historical facts -- will begin to fall. It is then that literature and texts will become more accessible and more enjoyable and more meaningful to a larger number and more diverse population of undergraduates.

We have broadly recommended that literary theory, cultural studies, and literary history should be included in undergraduate literary education. Each of these recommendations can be put into practice, we believe, without creating chaos in the order and structure of English departments today. These recommendations, however, are aspects of three overriding concerns with which we close. If literature is to retain its vital and central place in the Humanities undergraduate curriculum, as we believe it should, literary studies must turn from their present

emphasis on product to a new emphasis on process; from an emphasis on texts to a new emphasis on the relationship of readers to texts; from teaching the vague sacredness of tradition and texts to demystifying both the tradition and its canon. This can and should be accomplished, however, without losing the intangible, aesthetic and revelatory qualities of literature which should continue to be at the heart of why and what we teach.

It is our belief that theory, cultural history, and interdisciplinary courses should be used to teach students why and how literature has come to its central place in the undergraduate curriculum, why and how texts are selected, and why and how traditional literary studies should and can change. This will introduce more challenge, pertinence, and excitement into the undergraduate literature classroom than are currently found there. These methods will also lead to the representation of women and other "marginalized" groups in the undergraduate curriculum. We believe that if literary studies are to survive the present challenges to their status, uses, and values, teachers should move the undergraduate literature curriculum swiftly and cautiously in these directions.

## APPENDIX

### THE ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IN AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A great deal of evidence exists that "until the later decades of the nineteenth century, the study of literature in American colleges, as elsewhere, was ancillary to something else -- chiefly to the Greek and Latin languages and to rhetoric, oratory, and forensics. The idea that works of literature could be profitably treated 'as literature' was familiar enough in America... But this idea had little effect on school or college teaching until the formation of the departmentalized modern university in the last decades of the century" (Graff, 1987, p. 19). Graff's observation is accurate, but it is also true that the teaching in America of the Classics and of rhetoric, oratory, and forensics contributed to how English and literature would be taught when the English department was established at the turn of the century. New teaching emphases on the Classics, and the introduction of the study of the vernacular in a variety of subjects, are the curricular history on which the English department was founded as well as justified. A brief look at this history will put the departmentalization of English in the 1890's in perspective.

The rise of English as a discipline in the American higher education curriculum can be viewed as a struggle for recognition. It is a story which begins with the

introduction of spelling in the elementary schools of the mid seventeenth century and ends with the study of literature in English as a dominant feature of the discipline. In addition, by the late nineteenth century, the subject could claim a literary canon, and ultimately, the new subject of literary criticism -- a subject about a subject. Such proliferation gives evidence of the complete incorporation of literary studies into the discipline of English. Each of the stages along the way was informed by stringent, idiosyncratic ideals and objectives which identified the purpose of bringing vernacular literature and language into the classroom.

#### English in Elementary and Secondary Schools

The story of English in higher education in America begins in the seventeenth century in the elementary schools and academies. No English was taught or studied in the several institutions of higher learning at that time. At both Harvard and Yale in the early years it was expected that English would not even be spoken within the college confines. The Harvard statutes of 1642 include the rule that "Scholars shall, under no consideration, use their mother tongue within the limits of the college, unless summoned to deliver in English an oration or some other public exercise" (Stahl, 1965, p. 4). A statute on the books at Yale until 1774 banned scholars from using "ye englishe [sic] tongue in ye Colledge with his fellow scholars unless he be called to

publick exercise proper to be attended in ye English tongue but schollars [sic] in their Chambers and when they are together shall talk lattin [sic]" (Stahl, 1965, p. 4).

Undergraduates, however, would have had some contact with the vernacular in elementary school and in the academies where spelling in English was taught from the "New England Primer" -- a text which managed, for the Puritans, to teach catechism and the rudiments of spelling in the native tongue. Later in the century undergraduates would have had the advantage of having studied the subject of reading in the vernacular. The teaching objective of this subject, however, was not to teach literature or to encourage either content knowledge or pleasure. It was to use texts in English as models for teaching the process of reading which could be later used to read Latin and Greek. Secondary objectives were to present the texts as models for spelling and grammar, and to inculcate moral and religious and patriotic values in the process (Applebee, 1974; Gerber, 1965; McMurtry, 1985).

A final phase of the development of English as a subject in the elementary and secondary schools was the introduction of grammar and rhetoric in English as a subject for study. According to Applebee (1974), "grammar was the first formal study of English to become a widespread part of the curriculum, and it did so by taking up the methods and approaches which had dominated in the teaching of the

classical languages" (p. 6). The "methods" and "approaches," therefore, were based on two objectives: learning the rules and learning to use them. For the undergraduate, such rules would be put to the service of relating English grammar to Latin and Greek. The popularity of grammar courses in the period 1750 to 1800 is attested to by the number of grammar texts published by, for example, Noah Webster in 1784, Caleb Bingham in 1799 and Lindley Murray, "the father of English grammar," in 1795.

The history of the development of English in America in the elementary and secondary school curriculum of the early period reflects the first stage in the development of the subject of English language and literature. That stage was one in which approaches to English were prescriptive. Examples of the language were used to demonstrate proper usage of the native tongue, as well as principles of Latin and Greek. In addition, the "prescriptions" were selected to contain the supplemental advantage of reflecting religious, moral, or nationalistic sentiments.

#### English in Higher Education

The first professorship of English in America was given in 1755 to Ebenezer Kinnersley, a close friend of Benjamin Franklin, in Philadelphia. Kinnersley's title was "Professor of the English tongue and Oratory." The title is significant because it nicely suggests the interests in English of higher education at the time. They were the grammatical and

speaking aspects of the language on which Kinnersley would lecture, and both those areas were closely related to the study of Latin and Greek. Harvard created its professorship of "Rhetoric and Oratory" in 1806, with John Quincy Adams as the first incumbent. (Indeed, the study of that distinguished position at Harvard in its evolution tells much about the discipline formation of English literature both in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries). The two professorships, however, do indicate that the subjects of rhetoric and oratory were, following the 1740's, separated from the more classically modeled subject of grammar, and as such indicate the forward movement away from the curricular controls of Greek and Latin.

This forward movement in the isolation of rhetoric as a subject of its own was extremely important in the development of English literature studies. It was not long before Scottish Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres Hugh Blair was lecturing in Scotland on the universality of rhetorical principles. These lectures were premised on the facts that diction and style in writing were equally as important as syntax, and that rhetorical principles could be illustrated in writing in English as well as Latin and Greek. In 1783, Blair published Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, and initiated a new direction for the study of English language and literature. Yale adopted the Blair text into its curriculum in 1785, Harvard in 1788, and

Dartmouth in 1822 (Applebee, 1974; Butts, 1939; Stahl, 1965; Curti, 1951).

A more important date, however, in the history of the establishment of English in American higher education is marked in 1819 when the College of New Jersey asked its 1819 admissions candidates to be "well acquainted" with English grammar. According to Applebee (1974), this request marked the first time in America that competence in any aspect of the vernacular had been required for entrance to any college (p. 8). By 1860, however, most colleges had introduced similar and even more specific requirements. Harvard's 1874 English admission requirement read as follows:

Each candidate will be required to write a short English Composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for 1874 will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, *the Merchant of Venice*; Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and *Lay of the Last Minstrel* [sic] (Stahl, 1965, p. 13).

In addition to requirements such as these, American colleges were slowly but surely accepting the reality of the English literature and language discipline by creating professorships which indicated both the inroads the subject had made, and the dominant emphasis it was given. The period 1850 through 1890 marks the great blossoming of course content and teaching personnel in the field of English, although literature, in this period, was still not seriously studied as an academic subject. This was partially due to

the fact that the German university influence had instilled a scientific and research orientation into the American academy. In English, this was manifested in the ascendancy of linguistic studies during the mid and late nineteenth century. In 1857, Francis Andrew March was appointed Professor of the English Language and Comparative Philology at Lafayette College, the first position of its kind in America. In 1876, the renowned Harvard scholar, philologist, and teacher James Child was moved from Professor of Rhetoric to Professor of English. The significance of this move rests in the fact that the rhetoric professorship attempted to balance the study of rhetoric between the classical languages and English. The new title indicates the firm acceptance of English as a subject on its own.

Butts and others point out, however, that there were a number of early experiments with creating English courses and programs at colleges earlier in the century. Butts documents the experiments of fifteen colleges that experimented with alternate or "parallel" English programs which offered not only courses in the study of English language and literature, but integrated programs which could serve as alternatives or "parallels" to the classical program. The word "English" was used to differentiate these programs from the old, classical curriculum. Amherst's 1827 "parallel" course is an interesting example of this trend. "Emphasis was to be put upon English literature;

substitution of modern languages in place of the ancient languages;" (Butts, 1939, p. 137); and numerous other "modern" subjects. The justification for the new course was stated as follows: "In consequence of the demand which is at the present made by a large portion of the public for the means of an elevated and liberal education without the necessity of devoting so much time to the study of the Ancient Languages..." (p. 137).

Although Amherst's plan, like numerous other of these fifteen experiments, was short-lived, the existence of the experiments testifies to the recognition of the growing awareness of the need for English studies in the college curriculum, as well as the reasons for it. The "large portion of the public" was represented by the developing mercantile, industrial middle class who were in search of a utilitarian rather than a classical education. They wanted to get on with the business of creating industrial America, and had little time for looking backward. These early "parallel" programs were attempts to meet that reality. Later in the century, the domination of the elective principle and the idea of German scholarship would combine to finally lay to rest the model of the classical curriculum. At the head of the modern curriculum -- the curriculum molded to fulfill the needs of late nineteenth century industrialized, class-stratified America -- was the English department which would both create and elucidate the

new tradition American scholars and businessmen alike would embrace.

From the 1870's onward, the consolidation and stabilization of English literature and language courses moved swiftly. Harvard granted its first Ph.D. in English in 1876. In 1875, the University of Michigan created a course in American Literature. By 1879, Harvard under the dynamic leadership of Charles Eliot, had not only instituted fully its electives program, but had increased the elective offerings in English from three to seven (Applebee, 1974; Butts, 1939; Stahl, 1965; Rudolph, 1962).

In 1883, the Modern Language Association was formed. Its primary political and scholarly purposes were to lobby for and advocate the introduction of the study of modern languages in college curricula. As such, the Association argued against the dominance of the classical curriculum. It served, as well, to create an identity among scholars, and publicly, of English literature and language as an important subject for scholarship and advancement. While the MLA would eventually come to be synonymous with the dominance of the English department in scholarship, the thirty-nine teachers of English from among the twenty leading colleges represented at the first conference, is evidence of the lack of power and identity English continued to have in the 1880's.

The decade of the 1890's was the most fruitful for the development of English as a fully-integrated, accepted, and dominant aspect of what, by then, had become America's modern curriculum. In 1892, the influential "Report of the Committee of Ten" gave English in the secondary schools, and therefore in American educational thought in general, equal status with the classics. The Committee's Conference on English "recommended that a total of five periods a week for four years be devoted to the various aspects of English studies." The full committee watered down that recommendation. Nevertheless, English was "the only subject recommended for definite inclusion in the programs of study for every student during each of the four high school years" (Applebee, 1974, p. 33). In the same year, it is interesting to note, Yale offered a survey of English Literature to freshmen (Stahl, 1965).

Two years later, in 1894, the National Conference on Uniform English Requirements was established; an agency which developed lists of literary works and questions to guide college requirements and acceptances (Stahl, 1965; Applebee, 1974; Butts, 1939). In 1895, the first course on the contemporary novel in America was offered at Yale. In 1898, the "Yale Studies in English " began publication. By 1900, all the major universities in the United States were offering graduate degrees in English and American literature and language.

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