

CHAPTER FOUR THE CIVIC IMPACT OF RHETORIC

As described in the previous chapter, Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's commitments to public life are preliminary indications of how committed they were to civic education. However, public spirit only elucidates one dimension of civic education. If education is to be truly civic it must ensure that students not only learn to associate in public but that they also use this public association to engage in evaluative or normative conversation. Furthermore, civic education will be more likely to succeed in this regard if it convinces students that these normative evaluative conversations are aesthetically interesting and worth participating in. In this chapter I look at these normative and aesthetic dimensions of civic education. In particular, I ask two questions. First, did the educators' actions and ideology inhibit political conversation by neglecting normative and evaluative issues? And secondly, did their actions serve to create a type of normative conversation that would be sufficiently interesting so as to draw students into the political arena?

The theoretical problems in answering the first question are not insurmountable as long as some attention is paid to the amorphous boundary between fact and value, and description and prescription. As other historians of the social sciences have argued,¹ the distinction between normative and non-normative scholarship is a legacy of the 1920's. Prior to this time, contemporaries understood the unveiling of factual truth as a process that would corroborate normative truths. Given that pre 1920 scholars had not yet begun to distinguish fact and value with as much assiduousness as later social scientists, one needs to be careful in describing the emphasis on fact or on objectivity, and the concurrent decline in moral philosophy courses that overtly dealt

¹ Julie Reuben, *Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) 176-210.

with values, as developments which necessarily marginalized normative conversation. In other words, since scholars still believed that the revelation of objective facts would also reveal normative truths, the decline in overt attention to values did not necessarily mean that people thought they were marginalizing morality.

However, what they thought does not of necessity cohere seamlessly with what they actually did. At the same time that scholars were conflating moral and descriptive truth, they were touting the ideal of objectivity in the social sciences while repudiating advocacy and agitation. Scholars did not think that the effort to distinguish advocacy and objectivity necessarily marginalized morality from scholarship but the emerging distinction certainly suggests the incipient marginalization of normative scholarship. Certainly value free social science could not have emerged without this precursor. As I will show, Porter and Wilson retained a strong concern for normative and evaluative thinking. Eliot, on the other hand, favored a rhetorical mode which was an incipient threat to this type of thought.

The theoretical problems in answering the question of whether their rhetoric encouraged students to become more civic is somewhat more impervious to convincing solution. This is because there is no consensus on what type of conversation impels citizens to participate in politics. Conversation which is too heated or too full of invective is likely to discourage citizens from participating for fear of being wounded. Likewise, conversation which is too consensual or too conciliatory may also discourage participation since the drama of discursive conflict and the excitement of adversarial discourse is depreciated in favor of more cooperative conversation.

In most of this chapter I adopt the position of rhetorical historian Kenneth Cmiel and political theorists like Hannah Arendt and Michael Walzer who argue that

the civically vitalizing effects of civility and tolerance are often outweighed by the desiccating effects of civility. In the first part of the chapter I adopt these arguments as a way of gauging Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's rhetoric. However, in the latter part of the chapter I discuss their rhetoric by reference to a less extreme standard that acknowledges that at least some of the features of civics and civility are mutually beneficent.

Porter

Porter's defense of classical education and moral philosophy peg him as an educator who tried very hard to use the college as a forum for tackling normative concerns. However, Porter's rhetorical proclivities worked against these civic commitments in two ways. First, he held on to a system of learning languages that had become antiquated, and secondly, he used a rhetorical style whose civility might have worked in the classroom but was probably less able to spark strong civic interest in larger political forums.

Porter's endorsement of Greek and Latin Study

Porter was a faithful heir to the old time college curriculum and its devotion to the study of classical languages. His defense of this pedagogical tradition rested on rationales very similar to those articulated in the Yale 1828 Report. He recognized that the study of the classics, and its constant resort to gerund grinding, grammatical exercise and recitation made college study arduous. He counseled however, that these exercises in tedium would lead to greater and more edifying ends:

The discipline which is required for the higher education is not a simple gymnastic of the intellect, it is not the training of the curious philologist, or the sharp logician, but it is a liberalizing discipline which prepares for culture and thought, and which gradually lifts the mind from the hard and dry paradigms of

the pedagogue, and the enforced syntax of the class-room, to the comparative judgment and the aesthetic culture of the philosopher and critic.²

The grammar and the exercises in syntax were good in themselves since they encouraged students to become disciplined but their ultimate purpose was to provide students with a sufficient grounding in Latin and Greek so they could better appreciate the literary and political insights of classical writings. The classics, in fact, had supplied bountiful tools of political analysis for previous generations of college graduates and Porter thought that the material still had valuable civic import in his own day. The problem with this rationale was that grammatical means most often displaced nobler intellectual ends. Instead of reaching the point where the classics could be read as literature or as political epiphany, many students were mired in the endless task of learning the grammar. For the average student, the experience could be summed up quite well by Cornell's president A.D. White, who had attended Yale in the 1850's:

"The studies which interested me most were political and historical; from classical studies the gerund-grinding and reciting by rote had completely weaned me. One of our Latin tutors, having said to me: "If you would try you could become a first-rate classical scholar," I answered: "Mr. B----, I have no ambition to become a classical scholar, as scholarship is understood here."³

White's criticism was biting enough but it was sharpened by a more widely known complaint registered by Charles Francis Adams who, in a speech entitled "A College Fetich" recalled his encounter with the old-time college curriculum as a complete waste:

In memory it looms up now, through the long vista of years, as the one gigantic nightmare of youth....it was thought of very much as a similar amount of

² Noah Porter, *The American College and the American Public*, 46-7.

³ Andrew D. White, *Autobiography of Andrew Dickson White* (New York: The Century Company, 1905) 30-31.

physical exercise with dumbbells or parallel-bars might be thought of, - as a thing to be done as best it might, and there an end....there is no more mental training in learning the Greek grammar by heart than in learning by heart any other equally difficult and, to a boy, unintelligible book....I utterly disbelieve it. It never did me anything but harm, - a great deal of harm. While I was doing it, the observing and reflective powers lay dormant; indeed, they were systematically suppressed. their exercise was resented as a sort of impertinence. We boys stood up and repeated long rules, and yet longer lists of exceptions to them, and it was drilled into us that we were not there to reason, but to rattle off something written on the blackboard of our minds.⁴

Porter, of course, felt compelled to answer these criticisms not only in his own work but by inviting speakers to Yale who could give a rousing defense of the classics.

Matthew Arnold, for example, delivered one of his many sermons on the value of high culture in Yale chapel and to combat Adams more directly, Daniel H. Chamberlain was invited to speak at the Yale Kent Club on March 11, 1884 to deliver an address entitled "Not a College Fetish". For Chamberlain, Greek oratory, as it was embodied in the figure of Demosthenes was worthy of emulation:

. . . in the great art of oratory, the most powerful and attractive of all forms of literary art, Greek literature presents Demosthenes. For my own part, there is hardly a career in statesmanship, and the conduct and shaping of public affairs, which seems to me better deserving the study of the statesman of to-day.⁵

Although future statesmen needed to model themselves after Demosthenes, this in itself was not enough. To truly learn the art of persuasion, to master those tools by which one could begin to guide other men, one needed to discipline one's mind by learning Greek:

The study of language is . . . in no sense a mere prescription of the schools, an ancient educational superstition, a "college fetish." It is a primordial necessity for the exercise of the human mind and reason, for the unlocking, the

⁴ Charles Francis Adams Jr., "A College Fetich," an address delivered before the Harvard Chapter of the Fraternity of the Phi Beta Kappa (New York: Charles Dillingham, 1884) 17-19.

⁵ D.H. Chamberlain, "Not 'A College Fetish,'" (Willard Small: Boston, 1884) 24.

development of one's own powers of mind, for influencing, guiding, and controlling the minds, actions, and lives of other men.⁶

These eminently civic defenses of the classics illustrate how Porter's fidelity to orthodox learning was grounded in civic intent. Unfortunately, however, Porter's civic intents were subverted by the lack of civic consequence inherent in his pedagogical sympathies. Students were supposed to be learning about question of great civic import but for the large majority the curriculum as C.F. Adams said, "systematically suppressed" the "observing and reflective powers."

In sum, Porter's attempt to uphold civic education was compromised by an intransigent commitment to the study of classical languages which often only served to dull the students' analytical faculties. In the next section I show how Porter's civic intents were also threatened, if not compromised by a rhetorical practice that favored civility.

Porter's Civility

In a rare display of political activism, Porter found it within himself to condemn the South's attempt to turn Kansas into a slave state. In an 1856 sermon Porter declared "It is plain as day-light, that where the spirit of Slavery is, there is not liberty."⁷ But even in his opposition to slavery, Porter felt constrained to offer his apologies to those he had offended:

It is painful to say these things here in God's house, and the more especially because, in saying them, I contravene the sentiments and feelings of some

⁶ D.H. Chamberlain, "Not 'A College Fetish,'" 26.

⁷ Noah Porter, "Civil Liberty," 20.

whom I love as God's people; but I say them because we I believe that they exist, and are to us and our children matters of solemn concern.⁸

While Porter appealed to principle, it was a form of rhetoric that was not adversarial; it was essentially reconciliatory. Moreover, even while committing himself to a politically volatile principle, Porter never spoke so concretely as to mention the political party that would actually uphold these principles. Instead, he condemned partisanship and concluded his abolitionist appeal in language that anybody could have heartened to:

I consider it one of the most solemn and imperative obligations under which it is possible for an accountable being to lie, that we all, on whom the elective franchise is devolved to employ it intelligently, prayerfully and in the fear of God for our countries liberties , the rights of man, and the kingdom of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ and that we persuade others to do the same.⁹

The attempt to avoid offense, and to reduce polarization on abolition is also evident in The Elements of the Moral Science. While Porter upheld the "natural" right to liberty as a "universal condition of wellbeing" he was willing to qualify it:

It may not morally require or justify the sudden emancipation of an enslaved class, unless it can be assured or proved that liberty will bring a blessing to them and the community; but it does require that the ultimate emancipation of every human being should be contemplated as possible and obligatory.¹⁰

In framing his appeal for abolition in a manner that was conciliatory rather than combative, Porter demonstrated his extreme reluctance to involve himself in the thick of contentious political battle. In fact, outside of curricular issues and a rather tempered feint into the slavery question, Porter remained politically reticent. As George Merriam put it in a collection of memorial reflections on Noah Porter,

⁸ Noah Porter, "Civil Liberty," 20.

⁹ Noah Porter, "Civil Liberty," 20.

¹⁰ Noah Porter, *The Elements of Moral Science* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884) 408.

[Porter] especially disliked what may be called family quarrels, -feuds dividing the community or church or state. He has told how in his New Milford pastorate he aimed successfully to prevent the slavery issue from dividing the church into adverse factions. In his early politics he was an anti-slavery Whig, but when the Republican party arose he gave it his vote and support, and, while rarely taking active part in politics, remained a Republican in his sympathies to the last. The same temper which held him back not only from the abolitionists but from the free-soilers kept him away from the mugwumps. Aggressive revolt was not his element.¹¹

Porter's non-combativeness also extended to his teaching style where he was more apt to reach for the phrase that would placate rather than offend. As one of Porter's graduate students recalled:

There was in our class a student whose only ability displayed itself in a certain clumsy skill in making logic-traps. He once pushed Dr. Porter with a Socratic series of question: - "Belief in Christ is necessary to salvation? Certainly, for any to whom knowledge of Christ has been given?" and so on, and finally, "How are we to regard the spiritual prospects of a man like Ralph Waldo Emerson?" The logic of the implication was as strong as the conclusion was ugly. Dr. Porter did not hesitate. "The Scripture tells us," he said, "that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him. I suppose that holds good even in Concord Massachusetts!" The twinkle that lit up his face was answered by a laugh from the whole class - and the session ended.¹²

This pedagogical style had much continuity with Porter's occasional forays into matters that were directly and concretely related to partisan politics. The conciliatory gesture, the appeal to Christian love and forgiveness, were deep rooted in Porter's style of teaching and it was this affinity which prevented him from embracing a more combative style of debate. As one student vividly recalled:

As a pulpit or platform speaker, he suffered from some want of fire, some deficiency of dynamic force. He was interesting, but he was rarely eloquent. Oratory demands passion, and passion had small place in his temperament...His method was quite different from that of another eminent theological professor, who dealt with his students like a fencing-master with

¹¹ George S. Merriam, *Noah Porter, a Memorial by Friends*, 125.

¹² George S. Merriam, *Noah Porter, a Memorial by Friends*, 115.

his pupils, - flashing his steel against theirs, training them in combat, but never letting himself be beaten. That was by no means Dr. Porter's way.¹³

While Porter was capable of using a semblance of invective and polemic when writing about curricular and theological issues, in the classroom and in the pulpit, his manner was so mild that it probably contributed to his reluctance to participate in the more raucous and blatantly controversial sphere of politics in so far as this sphere demanded a more combative use of spoken language. Porter's rhetorical proclivities compromised his ability to inculcate or emulate civic dialogue. In sum, Porter's tendency to stay away from pathos and from adversarial debate, compromised the civic value of his pedagogical and clerical practices when civics is understood as being compromised by excessive civility.

Eliot

On the surface it would appear that Charles Eliot helped to foster the kind of debate and conversation that would integrate students into forums where they could develop civic skills. This is apparent for three reasons.

First, Eliot was not known as a man who tried to curb expression. Unlike president Butler of Columbia and president Porter of Yale, Eliot is not famous as a figure who threatened academic freedom. In fact, if anything, Eliot was comparatively unwilling to let issues of religion or politics interfere with hiring decisions. Overall, the faculty of Eliot's administration experienced less academic restrictions than their antecedents and could expound on issues that would traditionally have been shut out of academic discourse.

¹³ George S. Merriam, *Noah Porter, a Memorial by Friends*, 112-13.

Second, if Eliot's attitude toward academic freedom helped unfetter some traditional restraints on faculty expression, these expressive tendencies were also encouraged by the growth of a Harvard bureaucracy. The imposition of protocols and procedures may have served to standardize some element of the academy, but the proliferation of rules and departments also served as a buffer between faculty and administration. Whereas the old-time college faculty were vulnerable to the autocratic dictates of the college president, eccentric and dissenting faculty in the university were sometimes shielded from this iron hand by codified procedures that limited administrators from interfering at will in the classroom.

Third, Eliot welcomed the expansion of the curriculum from the constraining pedagogical and ideological intents of the old time college whose professed aim was the inculcation of discipline and piety. These curricular expansions turned Harvard, into a more heterogeneous institution -- at least when compared to the old time college.

Eliot's tacit consent to bureaucratic procedures, his embrace of secularized hiring practices, and his promotion of increased electives all seem to encourage the admission of difference into an institutions that had once been institutionally more homogenous. This institutionalization of difference would seem to be a promising development in encouraging the rise of civic sentiments in so far as civic life depends on the vitalized exchange of opinion as a way of attracting people to participate in politics.

In spite of these institutional tendencies toward greater civic activity, there are two features in Eliot's vision that seemingly serve to compromise them. First, Eliot placed great import on the value of civility to a degree that may have compromised his commitment to civic life. Second, Eliot also was party to a system of

departmentalization. Instead of encouraging faculty to air their differences in public, or providing incentives for the passionate display of difference, increased departmentalization isolated expression or tempered opinion so completely that the impulse to respond was muted. This lack of communication in what Lawrence Veysey has called “patterned isolationism” led faculty to refrain “from too rude or brutal an unmasking of the rest” and led in turn to people “continually [talking] past each other failing to listen to what others were actually saying.”

As a source of “cohesion and stability” this drift toward civility and toward departmentalization worked wonders in promoting steady university growth. But as a way of fostering the exchange of opinion regarding the larger aim of a Harvard education, expression was often drowned out by an attention to manners and by the effects of departmentalization. I will examine each of these in turn.

Eliot's endorsement of courteous speech and "patterned isolationism" in the Harvard English Department.

Courteous Speech

In an article entitled "Democracy and Manners" Eliot argued that the "safe conduct of democratic society" depended on the inculcation of good manners and that there were few occasions, if any, where manners could be cast by the wayside. As Eliot saw it, manners "smooth the rough places and make things pleasant in human intercourse."¹⁴ Eliot insisted that manners deserved to be maintained at all costs and that the "combative persons who see many proper occasions for righteous indignations,

¹⁴ Charles Eliot, "Democracy and Manners," First published in *Century Magazine*, 1911, *Charles W. Eliot, the Man and His Beliefs*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) 636.

hot strife, and unyielding pertinacity" were wrong in practicing a more contestatory discourse.

Eliot understood that good manners could "conceal...aversions or condemnations" as well as "repress passion in both speech and action" and that this concealment and repression might in turn put a drag on "moral earnestness and reform zeal". But in spite of Eliot's acknowledgment that uncivil speech had some trace of virtue, he was not willing to embrace heated agonistic conversation, unless it was tempered by some degree of civility. Eliot admitted that "manners which are merely a superficial polish, with no groundwork in genuine good will and sympathy" might lead to problems. But overall, good manners and a softened conversation were not inimical to the formation of strong convictions:

Long experience among civilized men has proved that good manners are compatible with holding strong convictions and expressing them firmly on fit occasion. They cannot and should not prevent earnest contentions, but they can take the bitterness out of strife, and prevent personal animosities between sincere and strenuous opponents.¹⁵

Eliot's prescriptions come close to echoing many of the manners manuals that circulated among the middle classes in nineteenth century America. Like Eliot, the manners manuals instructed men and woman "to avoid arguments and direct contradiction that might fan the flames of anger," and that instead of talking stridently, speakers should employ "modest diffidence." As John Kasson has noted, these predilections led to situations in which the discussion of politics "came under . . . prohibition."¹⁶ Where proponents of agonistic politics would attack Eliot for unduly confining discourse within certain parameters of style, Eliot thought that his

¹⁵ Charles Eliot, "Democracy and Manners," 636.

¹⁶ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility; Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990) 158-59.

prescriptions were in fact enlarging the possibility of democratic conversation. In fact, at least one nineteenth-century social commentator would have been inclined to share Eliot's faith that less agonistic conversation would actually be more consonant with the discourse appropriate for a large democracy. As Frederic Mayyat, a nineteenth century English observer of American life reasoned, in hierarchical societies, people tended to control their emotions in the presence of superiors but were quite willing to indulge their anger when in the company of inferiors. This however, was not the case in a democracy; "where all are equal, where no one admits the superiority of another, even if he really be so, where the man with the spade in his hand will beard the millionaire, and where you are compelled to submit to the caprice and insolence of a domestic or lose his services, it is evident that every man must from boyhood have learnt to control his temper."¹⁷

In prescribing a tempered disposition we find in Eliot, a man who was concerned with maintaining what he thought was a civil and democratic discourse and it is with due respect that we acknowledge the pertinence of civility to vitalized political dialogue. But however persuasive this advocacy of civil speech may be, within the context of Harvard's patterned isolationism, these prescriptions seem distant from the agonistic rhetorical modes that Walzer and Arendt associate with vitalized civic life. Eliot may have exhorted Harvard students toward citizenship and he may even have been active himself, but in so far as turning Harvard into a institution that would harbor the strife and agonistic rhetoric upon which civic life feeds, it is questionable whether Eliot's prescriptions on manners played a supportive role.

¹⁷ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility; Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America*, 158-59.

"Patterned Isolationism" in the Modern Languages

If Eliot's sympathy with courtesy circumscribed his most overt opinions on politically acceptable discourse, they are further illuminated by the development of the Harvard modern language curriculum and the rise of what Laurence Veysey has called "patterned isolationism". In what follows I provide an account of this "patterned isolationism"--which tended to buffer contestatory conversation--as it occurred in the development of a modern language curriculum. While the study of modern languages should have increased communicative skills, these skills did not necessarily translate directly into increased conversational vitality. I conclude this sub-section by showing how Eliot's attempt to buffer confrontation by means of polite language was paralleled by his tolerance for forms of departmental organization in the modern languages that avoided controversy.

These developments not only serve to contextualize Eliot's overt discursive affinities, they also are suggestive of Eliot's own opinions about how universities should channel conversation. As president, Eliot exercised considerable power not only in hiring faculty and in setting salaries, but in shaping the internal and external boundaries of the Harvard curriculum. While Eliot did not care to rule Harvard as a despot, he exercised considerable institutional control. In view of this power, any arrangement that Eliot did not take issue with at least suggests that he gave it his tacit approval.¹⁸

¹⁸ Eliot recognized as much in an article entitled "The university president in the American Commonwealth." While Eliot advised that it would be inappropriate for a president "to be a despot of any sort" or to force a measure which the majority of the faculty would disapprove of. Eliot admitted that the president was "an administrative officer who has a large influence on the policies of the institution, on the selection of the teaching staff, and on the directions of the university expenditure." Charles Eliot, "The University President in the American Commonwealth," Originally published in the "Educational Review," 1911, *Charles W. Eliot, the Man and His Beliefs*, vol. 1

While a comprehensive description of Harvard's institutional backdrop has already been written, my purpose here is to provide a sketch of the curricular developments that expressly dealt with changing communicative ideals. Before Eliot attained the presidency, Harvard was a college that devoted much time and energy to the inculcation of oratorical skills. Perhaps the most striking description of these rhetorical skills was offered by Henry Adams who attended Harvard from 1854-1858:

If Harvard College gave nothing else, it gave calm. For four years each student had been obliged to figure daily before dozens of young men who knew each other to the last fibre. One had done little but read papers to Societies, or act comedy in the Hasty Pudding, not to speak of all sorts of regular exercises, and no audience in future life would ever be so intimately and terribly intelligent as these...Self-possession was the strongest part of Harvard College, which certainly taught men to stand alone, so that nothing seemed stranger to its graduates than the paroxysms of terror before the public which often overcame the graduates of European universities...Henry Adams...was ready to stand up before any audience in America or Europe, with nerves rather steadier for the excitement....¹⁹

In spite of its repute for imbuing its students with public speaking skills, Harvard, like many other American colleges, was regularly blasted for its dreary recitative pedagogical methods and its undue attention to Latin and Greek at the expense of emerging disciplines including, but not limited to, English and English literature.²⁰ In the ante-bellum period, the study of literature was almost non-existent in American colleges. To be sure, passages from prominent works in classical literature were assigned, but they were used almost exclusively as tools for teaching vocabulary and grammar. As one student of the time complained: "The literatures of Greece and Rome were used solely as material for vocabulary and grammatical

(New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) 218-19, 228.

¹⁹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, 69.

²⁰ For the most famous of these see Charles Francis Adams Jr., "A College Fetich."

drills....There was not a man in the faculty who had ever done anything in pure literature"²¹ As another student recalled,

In a Latin or Greek recitation one may be asked to read or scan a short passage, another to translate it, a third to answer questions as to its construction, and so on; or all this and more may be required of the same individual. The reciter is expected simply to answer the question which are put to him, but not to ask any of his instructor, or dispute his assertions.²²

This orthodox classical curriculum which was dominated by recitation, parsing, and gerund grinding, was gradually replaced by the rise of English in the college curriculum. But even with the displacement of the classics, the study of modern languages did not necessarily have as their focus the study of literature or the practice of communication. As humanities and English professor Gerald Graf has noted in Professing Literature, the introduction of English and modern languages into the curriculum may have changed the subjects of study but not necessarily the way in which they were taught. The recitation, parsing, and gerund grinding of the classical curriculum was merely transferred to the new subject matter. Attention was paid to single words and to their etymologies, all to the detriment of larger, more literary concerns. If an often used textbook like Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres offered insights into the belles letters, its reception was undermined by dreary pedagogy. Often the student was merely asked to memorize the grammar text instead of using it as a compliment to literary readings.

²¹ In William Belmont Parker, *Edward Rowland Sill: His Life and Work* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915) 13-21. Also in D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996) 15.

²² Lyman Hotchkins Bagg, *Four Years at Yale* (New Haven: Charles C. Chatfield & Co., 1871) 552.

In this desert of aestheticism, there was an occasional oasis typified best by James Russell Lowell's stint at Harvard from 1855 to 1886. Lowell shirked the formalities of grammatical theory for what Graf has called a "misty impressionism":

A student would trudge blunderingly along some passage, and Lowell would break in.... quickly find some suggestion for criticism, for elaboration or incidental and remote comment. Toward the end of the hour....free discussion yielded to the stream of personal reminiscence or abundant reflection upon which Lowell would by this time be launched...and so Lowell gave out of his treasures, using that form of literature which was perhaps the most perfectly fitted to his mind, free, unconstrained talk....the listeners? They went away, a few carelessly amused at the loose scholastic exercise...but some stirred, quickened in their thought and full of admiration for this brilliant interpreter of life....²³

As Graf and English professor D.G. Meyers argue, instructors who focused on the articulation of formal and abstract grammatical structures coexisted with an emerging band of men like Lowell whose impressionism (and Arnoldian sympathies) led to an unexamined celebration of the aesthetic. This schism continued to plague modern language departments in the latter half of the nineteenth century as faculty divided on the one hand into the generalists and the aesthetes who avoided theory on the presumption that the value of a text could be conveyed without it, and the philologists who shirked "mere literature" as they sought to emulate the German embrace of positivist linguistic scholarship.

The generalists liked to let books and students speak for themselves and tried as much as they could to disencumber students and literature from the rhetorical rules and formalistic arguments that had deadened the discipline in the age before the institution of composition. The presumption was that if the student could get beyond this set of mediating rules, beauty and eloquence would be discerned of itself. The philologists, on the other hand, were uncomfortable with the approach of the

²³ Horace Elisha Scudder, *James Russell Lowell; a Biography* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901) 393-95.

generalists. Although no one at Harvard summed up the difference neatly, they indubitably would have concurred with Johns Hopkins' famous philologist, Basil Gildersleeve who sneered at the generalists as "litterateurs" whose "florist conception of literature" disposed them only to look for "aesthetic charm." As Gildersleeve asserted "aesthetic charm is beside the question;" real students of language and literature would know how to look beyond it as a way of recovering a scientific focus on fact and certainty.²⁴ The long and short of the philological response was that it "took the side of letter, fact, and science, curling its lip at the mention of spirit, value, and art."²⁵

It is Graf's argument that these two groups were sufficiently compartmentalized that they did not have to meet on any common ground. In following Laurence Veysey's description of "patterned isolationism," Graf argues that late nineteenth-century English departments were able to buffer antagonisms by keeping distance between faculty members. While this process of hedging off differences may have allowed departments to expand without undue conflict, it prevented the respective wings of the department from bringing their disagreements out into the open where students might learn from them.

In short, departmentalization helped to create a large and more plural campus but it failed to create a vitalized intellectual discussion because it worked against bringing different viewpoints into relation to one another. This lack of disciplinary intersection had an adverse effect on the development of agonistic politics within the university, and Eliot was implicated in this change.

²⁴ D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach* 26.

²⁵ D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach* 28.

Eliot was a modernizer on many fronts but of particular interest here was his position on the transformation of studies that were of direct use in facilitating public communication. As early as his inaugural, Eliot indicated that he was interested in changing the curriculum toward studies that would foster new forms of discourse. American higher education, Eliot observed, was "literally centuries behind the precept of the best thinkers upon education. A striking illustration can be found in the prevailing neglect of the systematic study of the English language."²⁶

Eliot backed his criticism with concrete administrative action, and in 1872, he hired, for the first time, an instructor in English composition to teach full-time. Shortly thereafter, as part of his efforts to make Harvard an institution that would seriously confront the task of communication, Eliot changed the Harvard entrance exams so that they would test an applicant's competence in English.²⁷

The composition course, which became a requirement in 1885, was distinguished by the writing of a daily theme which would then be corrected by an instructor.²⁸ Taught almost exclusively by generalists who regarded the philologists' work with no small amount of skepticism, it was taught with the belief that writing was best learned by practice rather than by directly grappling with grammatical rules. As longtime faculty member Charles Grandgrent put it in a retrospective of the department, "[f]or instruction in writing, the Department has little by little decreased its dose of theory and has come to depend more and more on actual practice closely

²⁶ Charles Eliot, "Inaugural Address as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869," 1-38.

²⁷ D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 41.

²⁸ J. Donald Adams, *Copey of Harvard* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960) 121.

supervised."²⁹ Although the instructors wearied of the task of correcting mountains of themes each week and were dubious of whether the composition course actually taught students how to write,³⁰ Eliot succeeded in anchoring the course into the core of the curriculum. As the elective system gave almost free reign to student choice by 1884, "Freshman A", as the composition course was called, remained the only prescribed course which every Harvard student had to take.³¹ By the late 1880's A.S. Hill, who had taught freshman A for many years, was able to observe: "In most, if not all, American colleges, the teaching of English stands better than it did ten years ago. English is no longer looked down upon, no longer deemed unworthy to be on the same footing with Latin, Greek, and mathematics. It is recognized as forming, and as deserving to form, an important part of the higher education...."³²

For the most part, these composition courses were taught by men like Barrett Wendell, Russell Briggs, and Charles Copeland who entertained generalists' and

²⁹ Charles Grandgent, "The Modern Languages 1869-1929," *The Development of Harvard University Since the Inauguration of President Eliot 1869-1929* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 75.

³⁰ As William Phelps, who was an instructor of English in the early 1890's, recalled: "I did not believe in the Harvard system of compulsory English compositions or in the enormous labour required of the instructors....although many of these Freshmen and Sophomores wrote abominably when forced to sit in a room and compose a theme on a assigned subject, whenever they wrote a letter asking excuse on account of sickness, their style was correct and respectable. I knew of no work anywhere that so well illustrated the law of diminishing returns as this forced English composition." William Lyon Phelps, *Autobiography with Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939) 273.

³¹ Charles Grandgent, "The Modern Languages 1869-1929," 68-69.

³² Adams Sherman Hill, *Our English* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1889) 72.

aesthetes' distaste for the methodological formalism and theory which philologists like Harvard's Francis Child and George Kittredge made part and parcel of their domain. But in divvying up the teaching in this fashion, the modern language faculty, with Eliot's tacit acquiescence, effectively compartmentalized and covered up issues³³ which could have vitalized the discipline by exposing the students to the political implications that stem from studying language in one manner rather than another. To be sure, the Harvard philologists and the generalists who taught English composition would snipe at each other but they hardly ever talked with one another.

Although the buffering of disciplinary differences may have dissipated potentially destructive animosities, the lack of publicly aired argument did not come without costs. Most notably, in failing to confront one another directly, issues of

³³ In this essay, the issues which separated philologists and generalists have revolved around the emphasis which each of these groups was willing to put on the value of refined aesthetic sensibilities on the one hand and scientific accuracy on the other. I have taken it as a given that these differences have political consequences because they try to confer meaning on the world in divergent fashions. If some of my readers might think of this difference merely as an aesthetic or existential issue, it should be mentioned that these differences also tended to parallel divisions in gender and social class. Philologists like Basil Gildersleeve disparaged the generalists for lacking manliness. This gender charged difference was complemented by the fact that the generalists were advocates of a refined high brow language whereas the scholarly philologists were more apt to accept conventional usage:

"...the scholarly philologists....edged toward arguing that technical vocabularies were the heart of educated language and that a refined literary language had no special standing. Verbal critics saw themselves as defending traditional standards threatened by populist democracy. The new philological experts began to see verbal critics as elitist blowhards." Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 150.

These gender and class issues have great political import and while I have chosen to concentrate on other political issues than gender and class, suffice it to say that these political dimensions were obfuscated by "patterned isolationism".

political import, that might have been uncovered in open debate, remained occluded. If the generalists' celebration of literature seems to bleed into all the politically problematic issues that emerge from the Arnoldian defense of high culture, the formalistic and scientific method of the philologists was also open to political criticism.³⁴ For the most part however, these political issues failed to be articulated. In avoiding an open debate on their differences, the Harvard English department succeeded in casting issues of political import in terms that seemed to be merely about differences in method. Bliss Perry, who had an opportunity to observe the Harvard English department firsthand, gave compelling substantiation to this history:

it was difficult for a stranger to discover any common denominator of their activities. What was the underlying philosophy of the Department, its ideal aim, its relation with liberal studies as a whole?...Fundamental questions were avoided in our meetings; the precious time was consumed in the discussion of wearisome administrative details. The separate parts of the English machine seemed to be in competent hands, but how were the parts related?³⁵

If the Harvard English department was a little republic it was hardly one which was willing to talk about the summum bonum of English studies. If the English faculty built hedges around themselves as a way of safeguarding their terrain, Graf points out that the lack of "some hard thinking and open debate" prevented the department from

³⁴ As Elizabeth Renker argues, the philologists' celebration of science was prejudiced toward the interests of one gender. Philology was "a powerful tool for effecting defeminization of literary study....[t]he philologists' impassioned creation and defense of a 'science' of English was a particularly effective way of establishing its 'hardness' and dispelling the aura of the feminine that clung to the subject." Elizabeth Renker, "Resistance and Change: The Rise of American Literature Studies," *American Literature* 64 (1992):348, 350. Also quoted in D.G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach*, 26. For an exploration of the metaphor of gender in English composition see Miriam Brody, *Gender, Rhetoric, and the Rise of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Bliss Perry, *And Gladly Teach*, quoted in Gerald Graf, *Professing Literature*, 111.

identifying the political significance behind their different approaches to the discipline.

As Graf put it:

....the conflict between investigators and generalists was finally not simply methodological, but part of the large crisis of literature and the arts in a mass society, where a gulf had developed between the "highbrow"...and the "lowbrow".....Instead of acknowledging the crisis and seeking to make it part of the context of its work....the literature department acted as if representing the cultural tradition were sufficient, though its diffuse researches could hardly add up to a coherent tradition in the minds of most students or other outsiders. As long as the cultural crisis of literature was not part of the context of literary studies themselves, problems tended to be seen as problems of method....and this in turn favored the drift toward positivist research, seemingly the only pursuit that had direction and therefore commanded the respect of administrators and rival departments.³⁶

While Graf and Perry's description is troubling in and of itself, it also rings in as an indictment of Eliot.

To begin with, if Eliot was as powerful an administrator as he claimed to be, Graf's description indirectly implicates Eliot in a process that was obstructing more public conversations about the relationship between the study of English and issues of class, gender, and civic conversation. Eliot's resistance to using Harvard for the inculcation of civic discourses is revealed here in the corollary between the results of patterned isolationism as it is described by Graf and Veysey, and Eliot's discursive prescriptions in "Democracy and Manners." "Patterned isolationism" as Veysey describes it, became intrinsic to the growth of the university in the 1890's. In order to grow, the university had to be able to dissipate intellectual conflict. The fact that the university were able to mute conflict is especially remarkable given the fact that professors were by disposition and training inclined to defend their beliefs. But in spite of this, serious conflict rarely broke out. Why not? As Veysey put it, part of the

³⁶ Gerald Graf, *Professing Literature*, 96.

reason lay in the fact that "frank dialogue" was obstructed by a concern for courtesy.

This, in turn, led to a tacit failure to communicate:

each academic group normally refrained from too rude or brutal an unmasking of the rest....in this manner, without major economic incentives and without a genuine sharing of ideals, men labored together in what became a diverse but fundamentally stable institution. The university thrived, as it were, on ignorance. Or, if this way of stating it seems unnecessarily paradoxical, the university thrived on the patterned isolation of its component parts, and this isolation required that people continually talk past each other, failing to listen to what others were actually saying.³⁷

Since courtesy and civility were necessary for preserving a modicum of peace and for helping Harvard to grow, Eliot had every incentive to promote this sort of discourse as he did in his essay "Democracy and Manners." However, the ideal of courtesy and civility can be taken too far if it deadens the ready exchange of ideas or if it deadens the contestatory and impassioned quality that can emerge when speakers with convictions do not think overmuch of whether they are stepping on their adversaries' toes. Although Eliot did not ever articulate this line of thought, he did wonder in 1894 whether all his ostensible "devotion to ideals" had merely been the act of a "philistine" characterized solely by a multifold increase in "lands, buildings, collections, money and....students".³⁸ The doubt ends there, but had he pursued it, he might at least have considered whether the possible lack of ideals had anything to do with the patterned isolation and emphasis on courtesy which he promoted and tacitly condoned.

³⁷ Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 337-38.

³⁸ The reflections come from a letter to Henry James from Charles Eliot. "I thank you for including in the list of my serviceable qualities 'devotion to ideals.' I have privately supposed myself to have been pursuing certain educational ideals; but so many excellent persons have described the fruits of the past twenty-five years as lands, buildings, collections, money and thousands of students, that I have sometimes feared that to the next generation I should appear as nothing but a successful Philistine." Quoted from Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 438.

In muting departmental argument, and in failing to articulate these arguments in open forums to their students, Harvard modern language professors, in particular, failed to elicit the type of dialogue that might have turned the classroom conversation from the discussion of method to the larger and more compelling discussion of what the ends of modern language study should be. Had Eliot and his associates taken more seriously the possibility that attention to courtesy could replace the vitality of "strife" and "pertinacity" with too "easy compromising", there might not only have been a greater presence of ideals in conversation, but Eliot's summation of his achievements might not have been so doubtful. Had he been willing to embrace a more agonistic and contestatory model of communication, perhaps his apprehensions would have been less acute. If Eliot had not been such an ardent exponent of courtesy, he might have made Harvard's intellectual conversations into a better model of civic discourse by drawing more people into the internecine battles being waged between generalists and specialists. But given the administrative and bureaucratic structures of "patterned isolation" and Eliot's concomitant endorsement of courteous speech, the agonistic debate that might have functioned as a model for a more vitalized contestatory civic discourse failed to present itself as strongly as it might have.

Eliot: Ornament and Induction

If the vitality and contestatory nature of Eliot's civic conversation was threatened by his advocacy of courteous speech and patterned isolationism, it was also endangered by his complicity in the shift from more dramatic and ostensibly more stylized discourses to a form of discourse where passion and ornament were muted. In the following two subsections I examine how Eliot's repression of passion and his sympathy with induction further jeopardized his commitment to civic conversation.

Eliot's Attraction to the Plain Style

Compared to the Harvard of the 1890's, pre-Civil War Harvard was a veritable hot bed of oratory, much of it characterized by impassioned and contestatory speech. Michael Wigglesworth who was a Harvard student in the mid-seventeenth century, recalled that after one college speech he was so transported as to be inspired to write his own: "after the hearing of a well-composed speech, lively expressed, the understanding of the auditor is so framed into the mould of eloquence, that he could almost go away and compose the like himself, either upon the same or another subject. And what's the reason of this? Why, his mind is transported with a kind of rapture, and inspired with a certain oratoric fury, as if the orator together with his words had breathed his soul and spirit into those that hear him."³⁹ For the next two hundred years, oratory continued to be a cherished art cultivated in the classroom and outside of it.

In class the much vilified recitative technique that encouraged "learning by rote" exercised the memory, thereby enabling elocutionists to argue beyond the written page.⁴⁰ This helped students to argue in forums where persuasion depended more on what one carried in one's head than on what one could jot down through more leisured research.

The classics too, no matter how badly taught, offered up exemplary speeches that the students could emulate.⁴¹ Outside the classroom, students spent a great deal of

³⁹ Kathleen Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age; the Transformation of Political Speechmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 25.

⁴⁰ Jo McMurtry, *English Language, English Literature; the Creation of an Academic Discipline* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1985) 67.

⁴¹ David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985)

time in the college literary and debating societies, which at Harvard included Phi Beta Kappa, Porcellian, and the Hasty Pudding Club.⁴² As Thomas Harding has argued in his extensive history of the literary societies, forensic debate formed the core of the societies. Subjects of debate ranged over a wide array of subjects but very often included political and topical matters. In terms of exercising speaking and debating skills, the literary societies functioned quite well as inculcators of civic eloquence.⁴³

Finally, the college encouraged public speaking and declamation in various speaking competitions held throughout the year, the most prominent being the awarding of the Boyleston Prize of Elocution. The event was regarded as a source of public entertainment but it also served to promote self expression in a public setting.⁴⁴ As Henry Adams has noted, if Harvard offered nothing more, at least its curricular and extra-curricular forensic activities served to inculcate a form of discourse which could be used in a public forum. While the debating societies and the speaking competitions continued to have a presence in college life, they lost prominence as curricula became less recitative and as students found their entertainment in burgeoning athletic events and other distractions.⁴⁵

⁴² Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States 1815-1876* (New York: Pageant Press International Corp., 1971) 22.

⁴³ See also Gerald Graf's chapter on "Oratorical Culture and the teaching of English" in Gerald Graf, *Professing Literature*, 36-54.

⁴⁴ Jo McMurtry, *English Language, English Literature; the Creation of an Academic Discipline*, 76-77.

⁴⁵ Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States 1815-1876*.

These civic traditions, as they were embodied in oratory and forensic battles, became less manifest in the latter half of the nineteenth century as the oratorical culture in the curriculum and the extra curriculum began to be displaced by classes that emphasized the written word over the spoken, by students who were more interested in going into business than other more overtly political facets of public life, and by college entertainments that celebrated athletic achievement over any success at the lectern.

While I want to show how Eliot was implicated in this marginalization of civic education at Harvard, I should note that it had begun much earlier. Edward Channing, the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard from 1819 to 1851,⁴⁶ began the process by changing the focus of the study of rhetoric from the spoken to the written word. Rhetoric, as it had been taught by the ancients had usually incorporated the written word, but it was generally taught instrumentally, as a way of improving the reasoning and eloquence of the orator.⁴⁷ However, Channing realized that the style of discourse in which political deliberation and communication were taking place had changed since ancient times and that the inflammatory and impassioned rhetoric of old was being displaced by an ostensibly more deliberative body politic. This realization on Channing's part caused him to rethink the aim of college rhetoric. As Wallace Douglas has argued, in an essay critiquing the profession of English in America, Channing thought of writing rather than speaking as a communicative act that was more consonant with the studied style of the modern body politic:

⁴⁶ Nan Johnson, *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991) 70.

⁴⁷ Wallace Douglas, "Rhetoric for the Meritocracy; the Creation of Composition at Harvard," *English in America, a Radical View of the Profession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 103-04.

Channing's contribution to the development of composition begins in his attempt to purge 'rhetoric' of its ancient connotations of public controversy carried on by members or clients of a ruling class before an uneducated, uninformed, and untrained audience...Channing saw that, if the art of which he was a professor were to retain any credibility, it would have to be given an image more in keeping with the actualities of a society where opinion was more and more coming to be formed by the report and the article, rather than by the debate. To do this, he first changed the locus of the oratorical situation from the public assembly to a generally private room, the medium from the spoken to the printed word, and the agent from the orator to the writer.⁴⁸

While Channing initiated the shift from the spoken to the written, it was Eliot who brought it to fruition by instituting the elective system. The elective system dissolved a curriculum which mandated that all students engage in recitation and declamation and required, as the only prescriptive course, that all students take an English composition class.

Whether in fact Eliot thought that his move toward rhetoric based on writing rather than declamation and recitation was consonant with a move toward a new style of political discourse is not easy to fathom because he did not comment much on the issue. If writing might be inherently less dramatic and contestatory than speech, it was certainly not a problem that Eliot cared to explore. Although the time constraints of living a busy life are probably the main cause for Eliot's disinterest here, they are no doubt compounded by the fact that his interest in repressing passion in communication, led him to accept the new emphasis on writing, and its more mediated translation of passion, without any criticism. Eliot did, however, make some related observations which help to flesh out his position on rhetoric. His reflections on the press are especially pertinent here, as Eliot said:

The public press no longer invites its readers to sustained thought. Instead of a book, it gives them a six-page magazine article...The average reader of the newspaper or the short story reads to forget, not to remember. He rarely has

⁴⁸ Wallace Douglas, "Rhetoric for the Meritocracy; the Creation of Composition at Harvard," *English in America, a Radical View of the Profession* 124.

any intention of digesting and assimilating what he reads. For the most part, he rejects what he reads without even swallowing it. In former times reading seems to have involved some deliberate thinking on the part of the reader. It no longer does. Much of our daily reading is correctly described as mental dissipation."⁴⁹

But if Eliot was concerned about the vitality of communication and its effect on thought, he did not go so far as to consider that the dissipation might be due to the emergence of written composition and its tendency to temper the passion of the spoken word. Instead, Eliot attributed the lack of "quiet and intense" thinking to "the incessant hurry and trivial activity of daily life" as well as the brevity of articles and books. Interestingly, Eliot chose to associate "intense thinking" with "quiet," without stopping to consider whether in fact the two were really as complimentary as he supposed. There is nothing to suggest that Eliot ever wondered whether it might be the relative quietness of writing which, in having to mediate the tonal and more visceral passion of the audible word, failed to spark the kind of reaction and interest produced by speech.

The possibility that writing might make communication more dispassionate did not concern Eliot because he was intent on tempering passion in his own communication. Above all, Eliot endorsed an education that was devoted to cultivating "the power of expressing one's thoughts clearly, concisely, and cogently."⁵⁰ Clear language, in Eliot's view, stemmed from making sure not to allow emotion to boil too close to the surface of one's prose. As one reviewer described Eliot's mode of expression:

⁴⁹ Charles Eliot, "Education for Efficiency," Originally published in "Education for Efficiency." 1909 Houghton Mifflin Company, *Charles W. Eliot, the Man and His Beliefs*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) 168-88.

⁵⁰ Charles Eliot, "Wherein Popular Education Has Failed Us," 217-18.

For the masses his method would be unpopular. Passion is sternly repressed. The stream of lava runs on black, cool on the surface, with only a glint now and then telling of the fire beneath. There are very few gestures, and those calm and restrained. The voice is steady, varies little in tone, has few modulations reflecting interior moods. There is seldom any formal salutatory or peroration. There always is a cumulative effect, but it is the effect of a steady marshalling of facts and arguments; it is an effect due to clarity, cogency, sincerity, the absence of all claptrap and fustian, all flattery, and all appeal to the sentimental. The attitude of the man implies profound self-respect, and an equally deep sense of obligation to be equal to the opportunity of convincing men and women. The tone and method are conversational rather than declamatory. the motive is conviction rather than persuasion; or if persuasion, persuasion going hand in hand with conviction. He has studiously avoided what he has described as 'the fatal habit of prolonged, unpremeditated eloquence.' One sitting down to listen to him speak is 'safe against specious rhetoric and imaginative oratory' - to quote another of his sayings which throws a side light on his ideals of eloquence."⁵¹

As another review noted "It is the note of repressed, rather than of accentuated, passion, that is his especial mark of distinction."⁵² For Eliot, the tendentiously dispassionate effect of writing showed up in his speech and it was noted by many commentators including Charles Thwing, president of Western Reserve University:

Orderly in arrangement, comprehensive in survey, progressive in narrative, free from ornament, with paragraph, sentence phrase stripped of adjective and adverb, each page marches on with other pages toward the desired conclusion. His paragraphs move on like Macauley's, yet without Macauley's declamatory, periodic constructiveness. Of its type, no better example is found in American literature.⁵³

Whether in fact speech can be "free from ornament" as Thwing claimed is open to question,⁵⁴ but it is nonetheless true that Eliot favored a type of language which he

⁵¹ George Perry Morris, "Charles W. Eliot; President of Harvard University." *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, March 1902.

⁵²"A Great Public Speaker." *Boston Herald*, 2 July 1900.

⁵³ Charles Franklin Thwing, *Guides, Philosophers and Friends* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927) 30.

⁵⁴ For example, Miriam Brody says that poststructuralist linguistic philosophy regards the concept of ornament very skeptically: "In works of rhetoric and composition, writers asked that writing be perspicuous or clear, meaning that writing

once described as "simple, direct and appropriate."⁵⁵ Unlike today's poststructuralists, Eliot subscribed without question to a distinction between form and content, between ornamented and non-ornamented language. As he put it, "What an orator says always seems to me very much more important than how he says it."⁵⁶ In keeping with this faith in a "substance" that could presumably be conveyed through a simple and non-ornamented language, Eliot thought of eloquence less as an aesthetic quality and more as a capacity to persuade through the use of a language which was direct and free from any distortion. If there was to be passion and conviction in an argument, it would come less from ornament and more from the ability of the of the speaker to translate the world beyond language into terms that were intelligible to one's audience. In forwarding this viewpoint, Eliot quoted Emerson with satisfaction, "Know your fact; hug your fact. For the essential thing is heat, and heat comes of sincerity....Eloquence is the power to translate a truth into language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak."⁵⁷

should be true, that it should reflect the object it intends to describe. Ornamentation, linked to pleasure and decoration, feels ephemeral. Ideas of ornamentation permit the pretense that some language is not ornamented, that some language does not decorate, but simply names an object....Poststructuralist linguistic philosophy and literary criticism uncovers these pretensions....Because the word is already a theory, to acquire a language is to acquire simultaneously a conceptual structure. If ornamental is used to refer to language in which the object world has been added on to, then all language is ornamental, and language is most deceptively ornamental when it least claims to be. Miriam Brody, *Gender, Rhetoric, and the Rise of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993) 198.

⁵⁵ Charles W. Eliot, "Letter to Senator George P. Hoar, April 3, 1899." Harvard University Archives Charles W. Eliot Collection, Letter Press Volume 92, 26a.

⁵⁶ Charles W. Eliot, "Letter to Senator George P. Hoar, April 3, 1899." 26a.

⁵⁷ Charles Eliot, "Emerson," First published in "Atlantic Monthly," 1903, *Charles W. Eliot, the Man and His Beliefs*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) 524.

Eliot's induction: "Know your fact; hug your fact."

Eliot's attention to fact is not of itself, civically impoverishing; after all, facts empower political arguments in a way that more abstract and hermeneutic arguments often cannot. But Eliot's celebration of fact, and of induction, was not an unequivocally positive contribution to a civic rhetoric. The attention which some of Eliot's colleagues gave to induction help us understand why this is so.

Eliot was by no means the only one who was concerned with the importance of fact or whether their study was as important as the study of words in formulating good communication. In an 1891 Scribner's article, Harvard's own Josiah Royce wrote on the distinction between words and things as a "false abstraction" in a way that helps to illuminate Eliot's position:

men love purely abstract catchwords, and love judgments founded on such terms. Which would you rather study, 'words' or 'things?' . . . if it meant to suggest that we could become rationally conscious of things without all the while reflecting upon our own words and the sense of them, the suggestion became too near the absurd for serious criticism . . .⁵⁸

Instead of accepting this "absurd" dichotomy, Royce affirmed that "the exclusive opposition between 'words' and 'things' has no meaning . . . truth is at once Word and Thing, thought and object, insight and apprehension, law and content, form and matter"⁵⁹

As Royce saw it, the acknowledgment of more amorphous boundaries between an education-in-culture (or devotion to word) and an education-in-science (or devotion to fact) had actually reinvigorated cultural studies by infusing them with more rigorous

⁵⁸ Josiah Royce, "Present Ideals of American University Life," *Scribners Magazine* 10 (1891): 376-88.

⁵⁹ Josiah Royce, "Present Ideals of American University Life," 376-88.

and scientific methods. Royce concluded by noting that the new scientific education which ostensibly paid attention only to the practical need of the body "began a process that is now transforming with the highest purpose the training of the soul." Instead of despiritualizing the education-in-culture, science had helped to create a university that was "more genuinely spiritual in its enthusiasm and its scholarship, and really far less Philistine in its concerns than was the American College of former days."

Although Royce was speaking about Columbia one might begin to think, albeit wrongly, that Royce had been speaking about Eliot's Harvard. In some ways, Royce's observations do hold true, for in introducing science into the curriculum, Eliot aimed not to forsake the piety and spirited existence which was ostensibly instilled through a study of ancient rhetoric and grammar, so much as to instill this spirit at least in part, through the inculcation of positivism. Put another way, Eliot was not willing to accept these emerging distinctions between a science that was merely empirical and a humanities or religious education which ostensibly held all the "spiritual" and "moral" cards. Eliot simply believed that science was entirely capable of imbuing humanity with meaning: "It would be a fearful portent if thorough study of nature and of man in all his attributes and works, such as befits a university, led scholars to impiety. But it does not; on the contrary, such study fills men with humility and awe, by bringing them on every hand face to face with inscrutable mystery and infinite power"⁶⁰

The tension between a worldly science and a more spiritually focused religion or on a humanist education devoted to the production of meaning was also lessened in Eliot's view because he presumed that the articulation and unveiling of nature's ways

⁶⁰ Charles Eliot, "Address at the Inauguration of Daniel C. Gilman on February 22, 1876," *Educational Reform; Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1898) 42-43.

would uncover evidence of God. In a private response to the curricular debates he was having with president James McCosh of Princeton, Eliot wrote:

If the universe, as science teaches, be an organism which has by slow degrees grown to its form of to-day on its way to its form of to-morrow . . . then, as science also teaches, the life-principle or soul of that organism for which science has no better name than God, pervades and informs it so absolutely that there is no separating God from nature, or religion from science, or things sacred from things secular.⁶¹

Eliot's pantheism championed empirical observation over hermeneutic and scriptural interpretation as the way to reveal God's presence in the universe. In effect, Eliot argued that science was a practice that developed meaning and promoted a spiritual and exalted life and that it was not merely an instrument for conferring material comfort and prosperity on its beneficiaries.

In trying to reconcile the focus on "sense" with the need for a spiritual and exalted life, Eliot was attempting to bridge a gap that Royce had associated with the schism between the scholars who professed to focus on words and those who professed to focus on things. There is one occasion when it appears that Eliot participated in Royces' attempt to break down the dualism and to acknowledge, as Royce did, that "the exclusive opposition between 'words' and 'things' has no meaning . . . [that] the truth is at once Word and Thing, thought and object . . . form and substance". It is intimated by the fact that Eliot once quoted Ruskin in passing "To be taught to see is to gain word and thought at once, and both true."⁶²

⁶¹ Charles W. Eliot, "What Place Should Religion Have in a College?" Address delivered before the Nineteenth Century Club, February 3, 1886, *Harvard Archives, Charles W. Eliot Collection, Box 334, Folder 36 1-16*; Hugh Hawkins, *Between Harvard and America; the Educational Leadership of Charles W. Eliot*, 129-30; George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 192.

⁶² Charles Eliot, *The Conflict Between Individualism and Collectivism in a Democracy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910) 51.

In quoting Ruskin and in asserting the exaltation inherent in induction itself, Eliot would seem to be transcending these distinctions but unfortunately the verdict is much more mixed. Eliot did make distinctions between words and things, between hermeneutical word play and inductive fact as well as between a speech that was "specious rhetoric" and one that gained power by "know[ing] your fact, hug[ing] your fact." Eliot endorsed a vision of the cultivated gentleman who would know his texts but who would have also cultivated his powers to observe, first hand, the world around him. But in spite of this laudable ideal, he still supported and practiced the use of a language that was ostensibly transparent, that would cut through the superadded and occlusive qualities of culture (and its associated ornament) in order to confront and articulate the unmediated beauty inherent in nature itself.

To fellow sympathizers of induction, Eliot may have seemed to give sufficient attention to the possibility that the object world cannot be perceived except through language. In actuality, however, there is not a lot of this linguistic theorizing going on in Eliot's work. His lack of theorizing caused him to promote a plain language (as elucidated in the previous subsection) which was reinforced by his sympathies with induction.

Eliot's affinities for an eloquence based on fact are in keeping with his call for induction and in his call for "the improvement of the observing senses." Toward the end of his tenure, Eliot took an around-the-world-trip during which his longstanding sympathy toward induction was given full voice. More importantly however, it also served to articulate Eliot's ambivalence toward a pedagogy which shirked first hand observation in its recourse to traditional texts. While Eliot had professed that "an interpenetration of humanism with science and of science with humanism is the

condition of the highest culture"⁶³ it was clear that Eliot was uncomfortable with an education that did not make some appeal to the ostensible existence of an unmediated fact. Put another way, Eliot did not directly disparage the idea of an education that attends to texts rather than to a world outside the text, but he did think that such an education was not a particularly good catalyst for the "progress of civilization".

Later in the same winter I arrived at Cairo, and visited the University of Cairo, the largest university in the world; and there I found the students grouped in circles round their teachers, and the circles around teachers were very numerous. Teachers and students sat on straw piled on the stone floor; and every teacher was doing exactly the same thing I had seen in the infants school at Tangier . . . He repeated long passages from the Koran, or from some commentary on the Koran, generally using both the original and the commentary, I was told. The students took notes of what he dictated, and were called upon later to repeat what he had said. Still there was a single source of ideas, still a single book, a book in the highest degree authoritative; and the teacher was dictating to the student what he should know, what he should believe, and how he should live. In this process there was abundant training of the memory and of the power to absorb the thought of another, and to hold in the memory philosophy, religion, and law thirteen centuries old . . . that method in education accounts for the lack of progress in civilization of the Mohammedan peoples. It relied on memory applied to revelation, and on submissive interpretation of revelation. In consequence there has been no advance in natural science made in any Mohammedan country for several centuries.⁶⁴

In promoting induction and progress, Eliot came close to slighting texts, memory, and tradition; the very resources that were the bread and butter of orators who had been trained under the auspices of strong traditions of civic education.⁶⁵ Eliot's unease with a non-inductive pedagogy was also alluded to in the same trip during a stopover in China "We Americans, like the Chinese, have dwelt in our

⁶³ Charles W. Eliot, "A New Definition of the Cultivated Man," 6-7.

⁶⁴ Charles Eliot, *The Tendency to the Concrete and Practical in Modern Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1907) 24-25.

⁶⁵ Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers a History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986) 37-38.

schools too much on two faculties - discrimination between the shades of meaning of different words and phrases, and memory for words, phrases, narrative, description, and even argument."⁶⁶

Eliot's proclivities would appear to put him in a camp that was antagonistic to a longstanding tradition of civic education. This is especially true since civic education had long been associated with the humanities -- a pedagogy that had highlighted the importance of normative questions (as they are conveyed through authoritative texts), memory (as a resource for cultivating forensic power), and "words" and "shades of meaning" (for their ability to imbue a speaker with the capacity to shape his words to the sensibilities of varying audiences).

* * * *

As we have seen, Eliot made some gestures toward aesthetics and was of course responsible for hiring many of the prominent generalist/aesthetes, the most renowned including, Irving Babbitt, Barrett Wendell, Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Copeland, and Russell Briggs. These generalists injected their lectures and discussions with an attention to beauty (whatever this was) a degree of "drama", "showmanship", and "temperamental flair"⁶⁷ which was generally lacking in the more formalistic methods of the philologists and in the classicists who still made their students recite and parse. More importantly, their willingness to inject their own discourse with the ornament of affectation and theater attracted many fold more

⁶⁶ Charles W. Eliot, *The Tendency to the Concrete and Practical in Modern Education*, 14.

⁶⁷ Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 221-27.

students than the philologists who clung to a language that ostensibly shirked all ornament in the hopes of scholarly accuracy.

One would think that this movement would serve to confirm a place for Eliot among humanists, at least in so far as humanism can be associated with the use of learning (and specifically language) for the purpose not only of describing the world but of imbuing it with meaning. While Eliot might have exhibited some humanist tendencies, he cannot wrap himself too tightly in the label because his discursive and organizational proclivities did not always abide by the humanist's traditional regard for civic education. There are three qualities in Eliot's administration that call the civic dimensions of his humanism into question. These include his commitment to courtesy, his complicity in forming an institution characterized by "patterned isolationism," and his attachment to induction and to non-ornamented style of speech.

As we have seen, the first of these tendencies tended to elevate civility over conflict. The second caused him to condone university arrangements that served to dampen intra-disciplinary contests rather than using these differences to provoke heated debate. The third led him to make gestures to aesthetic subjects only to compromise them by practicing a discourse that was usually dispassionate and factual. While no style is categorically uncivic, it would seem that Eliot's *was* in so far as it was out of keeping with the dramatized and affected techniques that drew students in droves to the lectures of the generalists. Moreover, Eliot increasingly emphasized writing over the spoken word and in striving, for obvious reasons, to "keep the peace" in his own institution, he prescribed a civilized and courteous discourse. While an increase in writing and courteousness may be symptomatic of greater democracy, it cannot incite or inflame as readily as a discourse which is more willing (or able) to uncover and articulate human emotion; as such, Eliot's discourse was predisposed to

lose some of its civic vitality in so far as vitality depends on revealed pathos. Finally, in condoning the same sort of courteousness in his modern language faculty, Eliot wittingly or unwittingly impeded Harvard from becoming a contestatory and agonistic model for political discourse outside Harvard's hallowed halls.

If one situates Eliot's discourse within a wider rhetorical typology, it is apparent that Eliot favored what is known as a "plain" style of delivery. It is a declamative form which has become very popular in twentieth century; it is what Strunk and White favored and what journalists often use. As historian Kenneth Cmiel has pointed out, the idiom has certain virtues, not only is it informative and comprehensible to a wide audience, it is usually as Eliot put it, "courteous." Unlike the grander and loftier style that orators like Cicero used to emotively move and sway audiences, it is ostensibly used to promote discussion rather than mere feeling. Nonetheless, its aversion to figures of speech and to lavish ornament has political deficiencies. As Cmiel says,

The plain style....creates the illusion that language can be like glass, a medium without the infusion of a self. It pretends the facts can speak for themselves in ways that the old rhetoric never did. The very style has helped perpetuate the belief that there are technical, apolitical solutions to political problems. It is perhaps the most deceptive style of them all. The plain style.....[was] devised to address a large and diverse public...[but it] helped submerge civic contention.⁶⁸

The plain style is conducive to addressing a large audience, but in establishing a monopoly on the ostensibly unadorned fact, and in presenting and describing the world in a manner that occludes the possibility that the facts are actually being mediated or translated by the elocutionist, it helps, as Cmiel puts it, to "submerge civic contention." As we shall see, the anti-civic tendencies of Eliot's use of a plain style was

⁶⁸ Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 260.

compounded by his sympathy for the culture of professionalism and the technical discourses which emerged from this culture. The professional/technical style and the plain speech that was sanctioned and encouraged by Eliot have had, to be sure, many beneficent effects. The plain is accessible to a wide and diverse public, and the technical created tools which could, in theory at least, provide humans with more of the leisure upon which civic life depends.

Nonetheless, Eliot's legacy is an equivocal one. For while he expanded the democratic character of language in his use of plain speech, he contracted it in his anti-civic submersion of contention and impassioned discord. Likewise, Eliot's expansion of departments that used technical speech may have theoretically reduced the amount of time humans need to labor outside the bound of the political, but it served to exclude from discussion many topics that once were publicly discussed and passionately disputed.

Wilson

Wilson's affinities with Eliot

There are many passages that can be cited which support the idea that Wilson was actually much in accord with Eliot's inductive proclivities and his sympathy with a direct and factually oriented discourse. Perhaps most obvious in this regard was Wilson's appreciation of a speech which Eliot gave while Wilson had been attending graduate school at Johns Hopkins. In a letter to his wife Wilson observed:

Pres. Eliot is a man worth seeing and worth hearing. His features are of that striking, clear-cut type who bespeaks energy, intelligence, and high purpose, and his address was such as you would have expected from a man of such a mien. His subject was "liberal education," and his treatment held a mixed

audience of about seven hundred people in the intense silence of eager attention for full an hour and a half.⁶⁹

Although Eliot was capable on occasion, of using simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech,⁷⁰ in his address at Johns Hopkins, there was precious little of what most people might call adornment.⁷¹ There is nothing more in Wilson's affirmative response that allows us to get a clear handle on what Wilson liked in Eliot's delivery, but other of Wilson's reflections do indicate why he might have been receptive to Eliot's direct and energetic style even if he was ultimately ambivalent about its positivist bent.

For example, in Wilson's index rerum⁷² Wilson quoted Lord Francis Jeffrey who elaborated on the "extravagance and affectation" that could befall a young man

⁶⁹ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 8, 46.

⁷⁰ Here are two examples of Eliot's occasional lapse into a lofty style which arose during his own inaugural and that of Gilman at Johns Hopkins: "there is an aristocracy to which the sons of Harvard have belonged, and, let us hope, will ever aspire to belong...the aristocracy which in peace stands firmest for the public honor and renown, and in war rides first into the *murderous thickets*." Charles Eliot, "Inaugural Address as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869 ." Also: "Here may young feet, shunning the sordid paths of low desire and worldly ambition, walk humbly in the steps of the illustrious dead...here may the irradiating light of genius sometimes flash out to rejoice mankind; above all, her may many generations of manly youth learn righteousness." Charles Eliot, "Address at the Inauguration of Daniel C. Gilman on February 22, 1876." 46.

⁷¹ The speech was, in keeping with Eliot's preference for the direct and factual, devoid of almost all figures of speech. The only figure of speech I could find came incongruously enough, during a passage celebrating science: "The student of natural science scrutinizes, touches, weighs....Like the hunter and the artist, he has open eyes and an educated judgment." Charles Eliot, "What is a Liberal Education?" Article originally printed in the "Century," June, 1884, *Educational Reform; Essays and Addresses* (New York: The Century Company, 1898) 110.

⁷² The index rerum was a scrapbook in which Wilson collected memorable quotes.

entering into a "refined and literary society." As Jeffrey related, the young man, in seeking to rise from mediocrity and in seeking to make an impression

imagines that mere good sense will attract no attention; and that the manner is of much more importance than the matter, in a candidate for public admiration. In his attention to the manner, the matter is apt to be neglected; and, in his solicitude to pleas those who require elegance of diction, brilliancy of wit, or harmony of periods, he is in some danger of forgetting that strength of reason, and accuracy of observation, by which he first proposed to recommend himself . . . -- he becomes an unsuccessful pretender to fine writing, or is satisfied with the frivolous praise of elegance or vivacity.⁷³

Reading this at the still young age of seventeen, it is likely that Jeffrey's prescriptions for a non-ornamental language had a considerable impact on Wilson, especially since he went so far as to copiously write them down. These sentiments were also reinforced by Wilson's father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson, who wrote long letters to his college-aged son counseling him in proper elocutionary methods. As the older Wilson once sagely advised, "The soul of oratory is thought, the body of oratory is the suitable expression of this thought - and usually the simplest words give this expression the best."⁷⁴

The exhortation to stay away from ornament, or at least to pay attention to substance, was echoed as well in some of Wilson's editorials to the *Princetonian*, Princeton's college newspaper. Wilson would write often of the decline in college oratory and the "tendency of all College speaking.....to become mere declaiming.... How many speakers give the impression that they care for what they say, except that it may sound well? Few men can develop much earnestness when their sole object is to

⁷³ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 107, 118.

⁷⁴Wilson, Woodrow. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Vol. 1. Edited by Arthur S. Link, 338. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

make a good appearance."⁷⁵ Wilson's discomfort with anything but simple and direct speech was also registered in a few of his many reflections on Edmund Burke. Despite being profoundly impressed by Burke's "musical" language, he also voiced his disenchantment with it on the grounds that it was not a type of expression that could properly "ravish":

[Burke's] speech on conciliation with America is not only wise beyond precedent in the annals of debate, but marches also with a force of phrase which, it would seem, must have been irresistible;-and yet we know that it emptied the House of all audience! You remember what Goldsmith playfully suggested for Burke's epitaph⁷⁶....It is better to have read Burke than to have heard him....His style of saying things fills the attention as if it were finest music. But his are not thoughts to be shouted over; his is not a style to ravish the ear of the voter at the hustings.⁷⁷

Burke lamented the nakedness of power and sought to add finery to it whenever possible, whether in courtly vestments or in an ornamented and metaphorical speech. It is probably this sort of ornament which Wilson was ambivalent about. Wilson appreciated Burke's refined prose but was wary of it because it failed to ravish or impassion audiences. Curiously, Wilson did not always feel obliged to follow his

⁷⁵ Wilson, Woodrow. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Vol. 1, 454-55.

⁷⁶ Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such,
 We scarcely can praise it, or blame it too much;
 Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on refining,
 And thought of convincing while they thought of dining:
 Though equal for all things, for all things unfit,
 Too nice for a statesman, too proud for a wit;
 For a patriot too cool, for a drudge disobedient,
 And too fond of the right to pursue the expedient.
 In short, 'twas his fate, unemployed or in place, sir,
 To eat mutton cold, and cut blocks with a razor.

Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 5, 649-52.

⁷⁷ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 5, 649, 651, 652.

own council here. When opportunities arose to embellish speech with passion, Wilson often balked. Wilson, in fact, would often deliver his speeches in an understated style, keeping his own passion and superadded gesticulations in check.

One of the more vivid contrasts between Wilson's style and that of a more "florid" speaker was described by one of Wilson's biographers Henry Bragdon. At the University of Virginia, where Wilson attended law school from 1879-1881, Wilson competed against one William Cabbell Bruce for a prestigious debating prize awarded by the Jefferson Society. As one fellow student of Wilson's recalled, Bruce's debating style was "acrimonious, opinionated, sometimes offensive" and as Wilson once remarked "[Bruce]..has yet to learn that personal abuse is not debate." Bruce was first to speak and he "affected by fiery declamatory style of the period, moving forward, drawing back, making large studied gestures, raising his voice to hammer home his points....he piled argument on argument to great effect, closing with a denunciation." When Bruce stepped down, Wilson delivered his own argument in marked contrast. "He stood still, using no gestures except an occasional lift of the arm. His heavy-jawed but "wonderfully mobile" face came alight as he spoke, and its changing expression did service for gesture. He was so composed that when the oil lamp on the desk flared up and smoked, he paused briefly to blow it out and then proceeded without a break in the stream of his oratory."⁷⁸

That overtly impassioned speech was not something Wilson usually practiced or approved of, is further corroborated by an incident which happened while Wilson was in the White House. As Kathleen Jamieson put it,

Wilson recoiled from the tone of passion in a protest by a group of blacks who objected to racial segregation of federal employees:

⁷⁸ Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson, the Academic Years*, 81-82.

[Wilson]: If this organization is ever to have another hearing before me it must have another spokesman. Your manner offends me...Your tone, with its background of passion.

[Mr. Trotter]: But I have no passion in me, Mr. President, you are entirely mistaken; you misinterpret my earnestness for passion.⁷⁹

Here then, are a few occasions when Wilson's taste for a communication that reached for emotional effect were somewhat muted. But in spite of these rhetorical affinities with Eliot, Wilson overall was more inclined to favor stylized forms of speaking. In particular, he was inclined to pay attention to form and to the value of elating literary sensibilities. He was more likely than Eliot to recognize subjectivity and passion as an inherent element in good communication. He was inclined to understand expression as a process that was intrinsic to forming identity. And finally, he was more attached to the value of agonistic conversation. I will examine these proclivities in the following three subsections.

Wilson: Form, "spiritual edification", and impassioned subjectivity.

While Wilson was sometimes guilty of distinguishing too readily between what Royce called the "abstract catchwords" of word and thing, he was more of an idealist than Eliot and was consequently more able to entertain ornament as a positive, if not inescapable, feature of using language.

Where Eliot constantly upheld professional education and science while promoting the development of sensibilities that could discern beauty as a side line, Wilson made central the development of aesthetic sensibility and its importance in a broad education:

In our attempt to escape the pedantry and narrowness of the old fixed curriculum we have, no doubt, gone so far as to be in danger of losing the old

⁷⁹ Kathleen Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age; the Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, 46.

ideals. Our utilitarianism has carried us so far afield that we are in a fair way to forget the real utilities of the mind. No doubt the old, purely literary training made too much of the development of mere taste, mere delicacy of perception, but our modern training makes too little.⁸⁰

Although Wilson's gripe extended to all the inductive sciences, he was particularly incensed at the philologists who he claimed, in keeping with the "scientific and positivist spirit of the age," were annihilating the "more delicate and subtle purposes" of literature by commanding it to "assume the phrases and the methods of science". Wilson was unhappy with this trend and criticized it by alluding to the expansive pretexts that were driving it:

It is plain that you cannot impart 'university methods' to thousands, or create 'investigators' by the score, unless you confine your university education to matters which dull men can investigate, your laboratory training to tasks which mere plodding diligence and submissive patience can compass.⁸¹

But where Royce and Eliot were happy to confirm this fetish with fact as an uplifting presence, Wilson was not, as he continued:

Yet, if you do so limit and constrain what you teach, you thrust taste and insight and delicacy of perception out of the schools, exalt the obvious and the merely useful above the things which are only imaginatively or spiritually conceived, make education an affair of tasting and handling and smelling, and so create Philistia, that country in which they speak of 'mere literature'.

In contrast to Eliot, Wilson was not eager to dissolve the boundaries between science and literature, if anything, he felt compelled to call attention to the aesthetic qualities in literature and the way in which scientific inquiry threatened to occlude them.

Rather than celebrating induction as a way of finding patterns that were pleasing (or even godly as Eliot claimed) Wilson condemned the "scientization"⁸² of literature for

⁸⁰ Woodrow Wilson, "Princeton for the Nation's Service," 457.

⁸¹ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924) 2.

⁸² Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 4.

its incessant cataloging and its vacuous scholarship. In turning the study of literature into a science, grammarians and philologists had effectively taken out the "ambiguity" and "spiritual edification" which Wilson saw as inherent to literature.⁸³ If Wilson accused science of being unable to touch what is "imaginatively or spiritually conceived" he was, in a Burkean sense, also attendant to the way in which science effectively tore off all the ornamentation of life and language and rendered it bare and devoid of spirit in the manner of a poorly displayed museum collection:

It is the business of scholars to assess evidence and test conclusions, to discriminate values and reckon probabilities. Literature is the realm of conviction and vision. Its points of view are as various as they are often times unverifiable. Its groundwork is not erudition, but reflection and fancy. Your thoroughgoing scholar dare not reflect. To reflect is to let himself in on his material; whereas what he wants is to keep himself apart, and view his materials in an air that does not color or refract. Reflection summons all associations, and they so throng and move that they dominate the mind's stage at once . . . Scholars, therefore, do not reflect; they label, group kind with kind, set forth in schemes, expound with dispassionate method. Their minds are not stages, but museums; nothing is done there, but very curious and valuable collections are kept there⁸⁴

The point of reading literature was not to become erudite but to spiritually edify; literature provided spiritual and moral instruction that was lacking in current scholarship. Wilson argued that the object of education and of thought should extend beyond the task of ascertaining what was verifiable to the act of establishing meaning. As Wilson put it:

There is, indeed, a natural antagonism, let it be frankly said, between the standards of scholarship and the standards of literature. Exact scholarship values things in direct proportion as they are verifiable; but literature knows nothing of such tests. The truths which it seeks are the truths of self-expression. It is a thing of convictions, of insights, of what is felt and seen and heard and hoped for. Its meanings lurk behind nature, not in the facts of its

⁸³ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 10, 19.

⁸⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 21.

phenomena. It speaks of things as the man who utters it saw them, not necessarily as God made them.⁸⁵

In getting away from the focus on exact scholarship and verifiable fact, Wilson was not trying to legitimate scholarly laxity (although he was guilty of this in his own historical research) so much as the worthiness of hermeneutical questions. Rather than asking merely "what is?" Wilson thought it important to ask "what does it mean for it to be?" Put another way, Wilson felt that the university should dwell not only on what a thing was, but what it was worth. The problem of scholarship as it was embodied in philology, natural science, and an emerging historical profession, was that it tried to divine the shape and manner of existence but not how or whether one should exist.

In focusing on the level of meaning, Wilson could not but shy away from a dispassionate writing that tried to abstract the self. For Wilson, literature had to speak "of things as the man who utters it saw them, not necessarily as God made them." The point was not to pretend to be a passive observer but to interject the self; in "real" literature, "the personality of the speaker runs throughout".

It is quite manifest that Wilson did not wish to consign this subjective quality to literature alone but thought of it as an essential element in persuasive oratory as well. In complaining to his wife about the "droning" quality of one speaker, Wilson said:

His voice . . . when first it reached the ear, satisfied because of its full sonorous quality, its strength, and its melody. But it never woke . . . he was repeating a memorized lecture, and so was a mere automaton, *not giving of his life* . . . What a mistake--what a suicidal mistake! Did he not know that the only fire which is the fire of true oratory is the fire of the orator's own life? Unless he gives his audience of himself, unless the audience now and again catch sight of the native, unartificial fires which burn in his heart of hearts . . . his finest phrases will fall cold and dead. They have no life apart from his.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 19.

⁸⁶ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 3, 137.

The idea that the self was part and parcel of language and that one could not attempt to separate the two without damaging the power of argument was also present in his prescriptions for writing history. To be sure, Wilson did entertain the notion, as did many of his colleagues in the late nineteenth century, that history should be allowed to "speak for itself"⁸⁷ but despite this waver toward the ideal of unmediated history, Wilson also maintained fidelity to the notion that interesting and meaningful expression could not be accomplished by appeal to the facts alone. In an article entitled "The Truth of the Matter", Wilson enlarged upon this sentiment. History, Wilson argued, could never be conveyed merely by a recourse to facts, "No inventory of items will even represent the truth: the fuller and more minute you make your inventory, the more will the truth be obscured."⁸⁸ While this illustrates Wilson's distrust of the "objectivist creed" in history, it can certainly be seen as a sentiment that applied to the act of narration in general. The central point was that a discourse which aspires to transparency was not something to covet. Good narration was accomplished not so much by conveying a predetermined historical understanding that preceded language so much as using the actual process of writing to reshape one's vision of the world. The kind of historian to hold suspect, Wilson believed,

⁸⁷ "Nothing is easier than to falsify the past; lifeless instruction will do it. If you rob it of vitality, stiffen it with pedantry, sophisticate it with argument, chill it with unsympathetic comment, you render it as dead as any academic exercise. The safest way in all ordinary seasons is to let it *speak for itself*; resort to its records, listen to its poets and to its masters in the humbler art of prose. Your real and proper object, after all, is not to expound, but to realize it, consort with it, and make your spirit kin with it, so that you may never shake the sense of obligation off. In short, I believe that the catholic study of the world's literature as a record of spirit is the right preparation for leadership in the world's affairs, if you undertake it like a man and not like a pedant. Woodrow Wilson, "Princeton in the Nation's Service," 274-275.

⁸⁸ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 166.

sees the end from the beginning, and all the intermediate way from beginning to end; he has made up his mind about too many things; uses his details with a too free and familiar mastery, not like one who tells a story so much as like one who dissects a cadaver. Having swept his details together beforehand, like so much scientific material, he discourses upon them like a demonstrator, - thinks too little in subjection to them. They no longer make a fresh impression upon him. They are his tools, not his objects of vision."⁸⁹

While Wilson tended to avoid forays into epistemology, there is an implicit epistemological position in this passage. If some historians practiced a type of writing where the word and the narrative were realized after the thought, Wilson seems to be suggesting that the actual practice of writing could reconstitute thought.

Although Wilson was unwilling to pursue questions about the relationship between the self, language, and an object world, his casual reflections on the state of nineteenth century and early twentieth century expression reveal a man who was trying to venture beyond the constraints of Eliot's dispassionate objectivism which merely posited that the best language served to convey fact without any distorting ornamentation. Because Wilson never fashioned a cogent theory of language his opinions tend to waver; nonetheless, his comments reveal at least some skepticism toward positivism and toward the idea that ornamented language was categorically inimical to truth and virtue.

If Wilson muted passion, he was not willing to hide it altogether. He said more than once that "Passion is the pith of eloquence. Not the passion which hurries into extravagance, nor that which spends itself in vehement utterance and violent gesticulation, but that which stirs the soul with enthusiasm for the truth and zeal for its proclamation. It is this that marks the difference between the accomplished speaker and the consummate orator."⁹⁰ And if Wilson was able to celebrate the adornment of

⁸⁹ Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 180.

⁹⁰ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 1, 636.

passion, so too was he able to distrust the concept of a speech so attendant to fact that it was left bereft of any "excellence" or vitality. The point is corroborated by another of Wilson's Princeton editorials in which he commented on the decline of debate at Princeton. Wilson argued, "we have witnessed here a divorcement of oratory from debate; that this has been brought about by false, indiscriminating criticism which exalts correctness to a supremacy--an undisputed throne--which does not of right belong to it; and that, as a result, we are coming to witness the death, the utter extirpation, of all true excellence in debate."⁹¹ As Wilson complained, the attention to correctness was fostered by a set of rules which encouraged debates to "throw away all ornament and content themselves with a bald, bare statement of fact and a spare outline of the logical phases of the matter at hand."⁹²

In elaborating this objection to a lack of ornament, Wilson argued for a more viscerally driven style of expression that would persuade through a more extemporaneous appeal to passion:

Oratory is persuasion, not the declaiming of essays. The passion and force of oratory is spontaneous, not carefully elaborated. Logical statement pure and simple is not oratory; nor is a polished style always eloquence.⁹³

Perhaps, in keeping with Wilson's ambivalence toward unalloyed logic and fact, the intent of his essay is not absolutely clear. On the one hand he advocated that oratory should be the communication (or at least the incitement) of "passion" and "force" and that it needed more than logic to drive it. However, if passion might serve to polish an argument, Wilson did not consider the idea. If anything, polish was associated with

⁹¹ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 1, 461.

⁹² Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 1, 461.

⁹³ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 1, 461.

refinement and studied perfection, a style that Wilson might have admired on paper (as he did in his attachment to Edmund Burke) but was uncomfortable in using in debate or public address. If Wilson had not yet settled on what type of emotion and style one should use to adorn expression, he was, nonetheless, attached to the idea that some form of embellishment was in order. This abiding belief is corroborated by a letter to his wife in which he described a talk he had given to a Johns Hopkins literary society:

Why I talked . . . about oratory, its aims and the difficulties surrounding its cultivation in a University, where exact knowledge overcrowds everything else and the art of persuasion is neglected on principle - just a corollary, you see, from what I was writing to you about the other day. Oratory must be full of the spirit of the world: that spirit is excluded from University life."⁹⁴

Although Wilson's deliveries were subdued in comparison to someone like Bruce, we should not take this to mean that Wilson was averse to all ornament and embellishment or that he shirked all figures of speech in favor a direct, plain, and ostensibly more factual form of expression. His professing in "Mere Literature", his letters to his wife and to his classmates complaining of too much exact knowledge, and his belief that one should interject the self into one's expression as well as use language to reconstitute oneself, indicate a man who was in theory, if not always in practice, quite skeptical of the more dispassionate and direct form of communication favored by Eliot.

Wilson's Discursive Understanding of Speech

Wilson's less dismissive stance toward ornate and impassioned language helps to distance him from the plainer rhetoric which Eliot favored. And if the plain style is more likely to submerge civic contention as Kenneth Cmiel claims, then Wilson's rhetorical practices seem entirely more civic than Eliot's. Of course, passion and

⁹⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 3, 493.

ornament are not the only gauges by which to measure the civic orientation of Wilson's language. In this section I gauge it by reference to Wilson's discursive understanding of speech.

Wilson was more vociferous than Eliot in encouraging the elocutionist to reveal himself through communication, and he realized if perhaps only obliquely, that the speaker not only expressed himself in language, but was in turn constituted by it. This discursive notion is central to conceptions of civic space because it identifies a feature of expression which is intrinsically associated with active citizenship. It is, namely, that an empowering and dynamic sense of political self is contingent upon the ability of subjects to remake themselves through communication with others. Moreover, this sense of discursivity defines the key communicative difference between the civically oriented ideology of republicanism and the more private orientation of liberal ideology. As Nancy Fraser puts it,

[the] civic republican view of the public sphere is in one respect an improvement over the liberal-individualist alternative. Unlike the latter, it does not assume that people's preferences, interests, and identities are given exogenously in advance of public discourse and deliberation. It appreciates, rather, that preferences, interests, and identities are as much outcomes as antecedents of public deliberation, indeed are discursively constituted through it.⁹⁵

This description of communication is much in keeping with Wilson's method for writing history as described previously.⁹⁶ To be sure, Wilson's description of

⁹⁵ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 109-42.

⁹⁶ Wilson felt that the kind of history writing to avoid was the kind where interests and ideas were formed exogenously, prior to the actual writing. The kind of historian to hold suspect, as Wilson put it: "sees the end from the beginning, and all the intermediate way from beginning to end; he has made up his mind about too many

writing history was an act which was done mostly outside what one would usually conceive as a public forum of discussion. Nonetheless Wilson wrote his histories with the public in mind and the manner in which he described his writing is consonant with the civic orientation of the discursive actor and his belief that identity and opinion are not formed a priori but are formed and reworked through the sharing of words.⁹⁷ We cannot know to what extent Wilson saw a homology between his prescriptions for writing history and more overt civic communication. Nonetheless, the parallel is there and it adds additional weight to my argument that Wilson's rhetorical proclivities were more civic than Eliot's.

In emphasizing the revelatory nature of language, and in recognizing, at least obliquely, that language served to remake the man, Wilson, more than any of the other men analyzed herein, identified and tenaciously expressed the central component of a civic life. To be sure, Wilson never acknowledged that language was always ornamented, but his revulsion toward the philologists and the historians who tried to

things; uses his details with a too free and familiar mastery, not like one who tells a story so much as like one who dissects a cadaver. Having swept his details together beforehand, like so much scientific material, he discourses upon them like a demonstrator, - thinks too little in subjection to them. They no longer make a fresh impression upon him. They are his tools, not his objects of vision." Woodrow Wilson, *Mere Literature*, 180.

⁹⁷ The description of this discursive process, as it takes place in writing, has been summed up very well by Miriam Brody in her description of psycholinguistic studies of writing: "Psycholinguistic studies discount as naive the notions of the writer inventing his subject completely before writing. What is imagined in the schooltexts as an organic relationship between two separate and autonomous worlds, thinking and writing, is more plausibly understood as one world, with thinking and writing in a continual inextricable design. Writers observed at work recast and reshape their subject as they compose. All these studies qualify images of the writer as a self-conscious proprietor of a cognitive domain whose contents he harvests before he composes." Miriam Brody, *Gender, Rhetoric, and the Rise of Composition*, 202-03.

make it unornamented reveals a man who at least was not subject to Kenneth Cmiel's indictment of the philologists and other advocates of plain language who were forwarding modes of expression that "submerge civic contention".⁹⁸

Wilson's sympathy for forensic speech

In addition to being sympathetic to a style that was less bound to "submerge civic contention", Wilson also had stronger commitments to debate and to agonistic conversation than Eliot ever did. These contrasts in expressive affinity also have potential consequences for the contours of civic space and deserve some mention.

There are dimensions of Eliot and Porter's characters that indicate some gravitation toward contestatory conversation. Evidence for this exists in Eliot and Porter's overtures on the right type of curriculum, Porter's continual attempts to discredit materialistic and atheistic epistemologies⁹⁹ and Eliot's abiding interest and interjection into the question of labor. However, these civic and contestatory actions were often muted by professional and rhetorical affinities that tended to curb a

⁹⁸ Of course, one could argue along with George Orwell, that it is actually euphemistic language which serves to cover up injustice and that it is this veiling which actually anaestheticizes people to horrors that deserve to be confronted more directly. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," *Selected Writings* (London: William Heinemann, 1958) 87. While the anti-civic dangers of the euphemistic style certainly need to be attended to (and one wonders whether they were attended to early enough with respect to the euphemistic clauses upholding slavery in the American constitution), it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to contend with them. The purpose here is to recognize the dangers which Orwell alludes to but to take the opposite tact and express how ostensibly transparent forms of discourse actually obstruct the civic as well.

⁹⁹ Porter went so far as to attack one of its proponents as an "enfant terrible." Noah Porter, "The Newest Atheism: Its Enfant Terrible," *Science and Sentiment* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1882) 331-74.

complete immersion in civic affairs. To some extent, Wilson too, put a rein on his agonistic tendencies when he became president of Princeton. But what is remarkable is that before his Princeton presidency, Wilson was very involved in agonistic conversation, at least that type that was practiced inside college debating and literary societies.

As a Princeton student and as a young faculty member, Wilson was an active practitioner and proponent of debate. At Princeton, Wilson was fortunate to have participated in the Whig debating society which, in spite of his laments about the decline of oratory, experienced its golden age in the seventies and eighties.¹⁰⁰ In addition to belonging to Whig, Wilson felt compelled to form his own secret debating society known as the Liberal Debating Club. Unhappy with the debating procedures of Whig and its arch rival, Clio, Wilson sought to institute a forum modeled after the British House of Commons.¹⁰¹ As the editors of the Woodrow Wilson Papers have noted, "the Liberal Debating Club reflect[ed] Wilson's emphasis upon debate as the vehicle for political combat and survival in the clash of ideas, along with his conviction....that college men should grapple with the real issues of the day, not discuss hypothetical or obsolete questions."¹⁰²

Wilson's attempt to practice agonistic expression, was not however confined to his undergraduate years at Princeton. As a law student at the University of Virginia he became a highly vocal member of the Jefferson Society despite his initial intention to be a silent member, and was even elected president of the club. As a graduate student

¹⁰⁰ Jacob N. Beam, *The American Whig Society of Princeton University* (Princeton: Published by the Society, 1933) 140.

¹⁰¹ Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson, the Academic Years*, 33.

¹⁰² Woodrow Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, Vol. 1, 245, 246.

at Johns Hopkins, he persuaded the college literary society to change its rules to that they would emulate British parliamentary procedure in the same manner as his Liberal Debating Club at Princeton. As a professor at Bryn Mawr and at Wesleyan, Wilson convinced the student body to do much the same,¹⁰³ arguing, in lines reminiscent of his argument put forward in *Congressional Government*¹⁰⁴ that America needed to look toward British models in order to create a more dramatic and efficacious form of government:

The function of our new organization is the function of debate, which is the basis for the special art of oratory. Highest oratory is arrived at through the cultivation of the art of debate. To imitate the House of Representatives would be patriotic, but not interesting. The House of Representatives does not do its own debating, but refers most of its business to standing committees...So we shall imitate the British House of Commons, thereby introducing a dramatic element....The ministers will support the questions they believe in, and the natural party line will arise without any arbitrary divisions.....¹⁰⁵

As late as 1899 Wilson was still involved in arbitrating debate and in emphasizing "the superiority shown in after life [post college] by men a man who has received a Hall [Whig or Clio] training over one who has not."

Having lived through the height of Whig Hall's existence, as well as its most dramatic displacement by the rise of the eating clubs and of athletics,¹⁰⁶ Wilson witnessed on a small scale events which paralleled a similar agonistic and spectatorial decline in the partisan politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson, the Academic Years*, 150, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *Congressional Government*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 72.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Wilkinson Bragdon, *Woodrow Wilson, the Academic Years*, 170.

¹⁰⁶ Jacob Beam, *The American Whig Society of Princeton University*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)

If Wilson was unhappy with American politics and constantly referred back to the British orators and institutions as models worth emulating, he was similarly unhappy with the decline in oratory and debate at Princeton. Much more so than either Porter or Eliot, Wilson took steps to conserve agonistic conversation and while his efforts met with mixed success, at least he served up, in his pre-college-presidential years anyway, a more agonistic vision of what should constitute civil and civic conversation.

Wilson entertained rhetorical tendencies that were substantially more civic than Eliot's. Wilson was more disposed to using ornament in so far as he liked to use language for the purpose of spiritual edification rather than mere illumination. Moreover, he also entertained an understanding of public communication that is more consonant with discursive descriptions of republican expression. Finally, he demonstrated an abiding commitment to agonal conversation in his promotion of parliamentary debate and in his participation in college literary societies.

Eliot and Wilson's contrasting rhetorical styles are suggestive of differing civic orientations. Where Wilson was more apt to encourage impassioned expression and forensic debate, Eliot's sympathies for these were either non-existent or compromised by the isolating effects of departmentalization and specialization which he helped to build. Wilson and Eliot differed in their rhetorical proclivities and in the way they sought to institute them at Harvard and Princeton. These rhetorical styles are suggestive in turn, of differences between Harvard and Princeton in their ability to harbor forums that would create republican citizens. Eliot led Harvard toward more dispassionate and isolated conversations. Wilson, on the other hand, reached for (if he did not ultimately grasp) a more impassioned and ornamented rhetoric characterized by contest.

There are a variety of dimensions to Porter, Eliot, and Wilson's civic commitments and in this chapter I have been measuring them by reference to their rhetorical proclivities. Although Wilson's civic commitments were ultimately compromised by his elite vision of Princeton education (as we shall see in chapter six), when measured against the agonistic, ornamental and discursive standards of rhetoric which Arendt, Cmiel, and Fraser describe as important requisites of civic life, he comes off in a better light than either Eliot or Porter. Wilson above all, was an avid participant and promoter of forensic debate. Moreover, he made a passing gesture to discursivity, and was fond of ornament and suspicious of an empirical method that seemed to marginalize evaluative judgment.

In contrast, Porter and Eliot's civic aspirations were more likely to be compromised by their rhetorical proclivities. Porter, of course, voiced unflagging support for normative education in his devotion to classical learning and the political and literary insight inherent in classical texts. Unfortunately, the civic intent inherent in Porter's defense of orthodoxy was compromised by the grammatical pedantry and toil that invariably accompanied classical schooling in nineteenth-century America. Instead of acting as a catalyst for political argument, the linguistic demands of Greek and Latin obliged students to spend almost all their time learning grammar and grinding gerunds. In Porter's earnest devotion to the required senior-year course in moral philosophy, he helped to support normative thought that might have had some civic import had it not been compromised by a pedagogy that emphasized memorization over critical thinking. Students might learn something in this class, but as William Graham Sumner observed, they often as not learned to "accept authority

too submissively” rather than receiving practice in “analysis and investigation.”¹⁰⁸ And if Porter’s attempt to uphold normative dialogue was compromised by his unflagging support for a corrupt pedagogy, his ability to support civic education was also compromised by his civility and by his efforts to placate and appease in politics and in the classroom.

While Eliot’s civic commitments were not compromised as Porter’s were by an intractable reluctance to adopt new pedagogies, Eliot did share with Porter a penchant for civil speech. This rhetorical proclivity tends to dampen the divisiveness upon which vitalized civic life may depend. In addition, Eliot’s civics were also compromised by his support of patterned isolationism and by his commitment to transparent and factual discourses.

* * * *

Up to this point I have gauged Porter, Eliot, and Wilson’s civic commitments largely by reference to an agonistic standard. While Arendt and Walzer present an interesting defense of this standard, it is also imperative to consider caveats that portray civility and civic discourse in a more harmonious relationship. One of the more provocative caveats was set forth as long ago as 1819 by Edward Channing who had just become Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory.¹⁰⁹ In his address, entitled, "The Orator

¹⁰⁸ William Graham Sumner, "Our Colleges Before the Country," Sumner's piece was written in 1884, *War and Other Essays* (New Haven, 1911) 355-73. Cited in Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University*, 72.

¹⁰⁹ Edward T. Channing, "The Orator and His Times," Address delivered in the chapel of Harvard College, December 8, 1819, on the occasion of the writer's induction into the office of Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, *Lectures Read to the Seniors in Harvard College* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856) 1-25.

and his Times", Channing reflected on the difference between the modern and the ancient orator and whether the change from an older more combative and agitated eloquence to a more "deliberative" modern oratory had been a change for the better. Channing first described the ancient orator and the rhetoric that had defined him. The ancient orator, "was always arming himself for the fight of eloquence, or, as it was called, to approve himself a man-at-arms in the war of pleaders". The orator "was a being formed of imagination and passion,-- the powerful slave of those who kindled and flattered him. He called for excitement, violent excitement..."

In spite of the drama and pathos of the old oratory, Channing claimed that the old oratory was "almost a lost art." In light of this decline Channing asked whether it was appropriate to resurrect Greek eloquence or to reject it "as the worthless ornaments of a voluptuous and decaying people." Channing's answer was that the rules of the ancient oratory were still to be respected but that they needed to be applied with a "wise regard to the altered condition of society." For Channing, early nineteenth century America was a more democratic society than anything that the ancients had experienced and because the ancient oratory attempted to sway and dominate the audience, it was simply unsuited for a country in which "the power of individuals is lessened" and in which "we do not encourage any man to aspire after an overwhelming greatness and sway." Where "extraordinary deeds", "tumults" and "revolutions" had been the province of past oratory, and where oratory had been typified by "a contest between a few leading men for a triumph over each other and an ignorant multitude" Channing imagined modern debate as more deliberative and egalitarian:

the [modern] orator himself is but one of the multitude, deliberating with them upon common interest, which are well understood and valued by all....The

subject is more thought of than the orator, and what he says must come from the subject rather than from his art.¹¹⁰

While the rhetorical contest of great men might be lost forever, Channing hurried to add that this did not mean that constructive dialogue had to disappear as well, or that "feeling and imagination" were banished forever from modern deliberation.¹¹¹ As he saw it, a relative lack of pathos did not at the same time necessitate a lack of conviction and principled action.

. . . give all classes a proper regard for the institutions, habits, and opinions that alone can establish their happiness; let the public conduct of men be invariably the result of settled principles, and not of vague, transient impulse, and you will find, indeed, that society is tempered and softened, but not tame and lethargic. The earthquake and whirlwind are stilled, but an active and abundant growth is going on everywhere.¹¹²

We find then, in Channing a nineteenth-century rhetorician who looked for inspiration to the ancients, but who did not think it was necessary to resurrect the more agonistic and inflammatory speech which the ancients sometimes practiced; active citizenship characterized by deliberative dialogue and settled convictions could still emerge even in the absence of inflammatory dialogue.

Plainly, Channing was casting his lot with more tempered discourse and if Walzer and Arendt's arguments might tend to cast suspicion on these sympathies because of the friction between civic life and civil speech, the attempt to associate civility with a modicum of civic life is nonetheless compelling. Greek oratory may have been highly theatrical, and its combative character may have moved audiences to the point that they looked at politics with rapt attention, but in spite of their interest in

¹¹⁰ Edward T. Channing, "The Orator and His Times." 17.

¹¹¹ Edward T. Channing, "The Orator and His Times." 19.

¹¹² Edward T. Channing, "The Orator and His Times." 20.

the drama, the majority of the audience were not inclined to proclaim their own opinions because the stakes associated with agonistic politics were too high. The polemical and combative style of debate exposed the orator to ignominy in the event that his own argument was overpowered by better trained and more skilled speakers. The dramatic and combative character of the agon may have encouraged people to become interested in politics but it did not encourage them to participate in a highly public fashion. The agon's drama was predicated on great oratorical ability and personal risk. These requisites meant that only the very courageous and the very skilled were willing to become actively involved in political debate.

The high stakes quality of speech in the agon was a discourse of danger which impels us to consider why a plainer language (like Eliot's) might have been a better civic style than the ornamented and agonistic rhetoric which Wilson sometimes practiced. Indeed, there are various reasons why these plainer rhetorical tendencies seem attractive. First the plain style aspired to be informative and clear which is certainly a prerequisite for a civic conversation that is civic in the sense of being broadly comprehensible. Second, political philosophers like Mark Kingwell have argued that a modicum of restrained dialogue, of civil (as opposed to civic) speech, is the only way in which "a society can hold itself together."¹¹³ Kingwell admits that restrained and polite civil speech have always been held suspect by the oppressed and by the disenfranchised. But he nonetheless upholds civility because its absence leads to denunciative and polarizing effects that often prevent diverse groups of people from joining together in the common endeavors upon which a civic self is grounded. Third, in the plain style there is a distinct movement away from the ornament upon

¹¹³ Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue, Justice, Dialogue, and the Politics of Pluralism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) 45.

which euphemism thrives. According to George Orwell, this movement toward a plainer style of speech, in so far as it is a move away from euphemism, is a salutary development because circumlocution and euphemism occlude political barbarism. When plainer, more direct forms of expression are used, it is harder to disperse the political action that might otherwise rally against this barbarism. Plainer less euphemistic speech is more civic in so far as it is less likely to blind and dissipate the movements that are motivated to act against political oppression.¹¹⁴

To the extent that these educators' discourse was imbued with these features, and to the extent that one finds the idea of transparent language plausible, their fondness for the plain can be seen as a positive contribution toward civic speech. There are nonetheless, two features in the plain style which threaten to impoverish civic conversation and these are especially present in Eliot.

The first feature was manifest in Eliot's attachment to induction and the extent to which this attachment was implicated in the development of discourses which aspired to neutrality and the objective description of facts. Discourses which aspire to neutrality and to professional detachment often fail to engage citizens because the discourses' political positions are veiled. Instead of inciting public discussion these discourses are more often guilty of submerging it.¹¹⁵ Of course, Eliot was willing to use facts and inductive techniques in order to bolster his own arguments. He did not ever speak of induction, research, or plain speech as acts that needed to be detached from the articulation or promotion of values. Since he did not do this he can hardly be

¹¹⁴ George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," 75-89.

¹¹⁵ Jay Rosen, *Getting the Connections Right, Public Journalism and the Troubles in the Press* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1996); Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*.

classified as a full fledged promoter of the type of value free discourse which really is implicated in the impoverishment of public discourse. But if he was not its progenitor, he was nonetheless one of its godfathers, since induction and the fetish with fact is certainly an important component in the development of a value-free anti-civic discourse.

The second feature of Eliot's style that was not congenial to the development of civic discourse was that Eliot's use of the plain style also made him a reluctant user of metaphor, lofty language and impassioned speech. As Channing argued, a plainer style that concentrates on substance rather than form may actually encourage greater deliberation without succumbing to lethargy. But there is a distinct possibility that Eliot still went too far in his attempt to speak plainly. To be sure one wants to be careful in suggesting that more ornament and contest be used in public conversation -- after all, if there are dangers in plain language, there are dangers in a politics that is over-aestheticized. Nonetheless, "great words," and the use of metaphor can make the civic forum more attractive and interesting than plain speech alone.

In the interest of expanding civic space, Eliot's discursive proclivities may not have been enough. And it is in Wilson's deliberate cultivation of the clash of argument and an ornamented prose and in Porter's unambivalent embrace of value laden speech that a more civically oriented university might have been found had it not been for Porter's attachments to a tired pedagogy and Wilson's attachment to elite education.