

INTELLECTUAL MANHOOD:
BECOMING MEN OF THE REPUBLIC AT A SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, 1795-1861

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Professor Harry L. Watson)

“Intellectual Manhood” explores antebellum southern students’ personal and civic development at the University of North Carolina, the first state university to open its doors to students. Historians have characterized southern colleges as crucibles of sectional loyalty and culture, aimed at teaching students how to be southerners and gentlemen above all. This dissertation, however, demonstrates that southern education was more nuanced: it was cosmopolitan, southern, and American. Students described its goal as “intellectual manhood,” which they strove to achieve by learning to think, read, write, and speak their way to adulthood. Though collegiate vice and dissipation threatened to impede young men’s development, formal and informal education at the University emphasized a culture of mental and moral improvement. In the process, students incorporated values conventionally associated with middle-class society—industry, temperance, and discipline—and adapted them (at times uncomfortably) to youth culture and the southern gentry’s traditional honor-bound, rugged worldview.

Young men entered college with ambitions to serve the republic as virtuous, confident, and competent citizens. The University’s formal and informal structures reinforced those ambitions. A core liberal arts curriculum, including ancient languages, science, math, rhetoric, and ethics, emphasized that knowledge and virtue comprised

men's honor and greatness. Student-organized literary societies existed at the crux of male education and friendship and reinforced these ideals by pushing students to work hard for academic distinction. Societies also provided informal instruction in oratory and debate, which qualified students for civil society and participatory democracy, and they maintained large, cosmopolitan libraries to enhance students' studies and provide opportunities for private reading and amusement. For many students, learning occurred in private contemplation of histories, biographies, and novels. Higher education also occurred in an informal curriculum of dancing and singing schools, balls, courtships, and rendezvous with local prostitutes. These private and social experiences influenced young men's social and emotional development, as they confronted conflict resulting from temptation, anxiety, heartache, and melancholy. In all of these collegiate spaces, students engaged in a living curriculum of higher learning and pursued "intellectual manhood." The resulting elite male culture favored intellectualism, bourgeois values, and both national and regional belonging.

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INTRODUCTION

A hush came over the University of North Carolina's Dialectic Society when Charles Alexander, a senior, rose from his stately wooden chair at the front of the room to address his fellow members on the importance of higher education in 1827. "The mere idea of our having been at college," Alexander explained, "acquires for us considerable influence among the common people. They look up to us and imitate as much as possible our every action – but what can a youthful adventurer a mere individual hope to accomplish for the benefit of virtue or the world? Why! almost any thing he wills to undertake & dares to persevere in." Alexander went on to say this: "We may now be youth of promise, but we must long exercise the most indefatigable industry before we arrive at intellectual manhood."¹

As the newly elected president of the Dialectic Society, it was customary that Charles Alexander address his classmates in this manner—to underscore the importance of an educated elite to social stability, to excite ambition to do great things for the world in the spirit of education, and to encourage diligence in the pursuit of an exalted masculine ideal: "intellectual manhood." After all, these students ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-one and they went to college to become men. They came from

¹ Charles Wilson Harris Alexander, Address, 14 March 1827 in the Dialectic Society of the University of North Carolina Records #40152, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter Dialectic Society Records).

wealthy, mostly slaveholding families from North Carolina and elsewhere in the South.² As members of an elite cohort of students at the republic's first state university, they believed that they were destined to create, uphold, and interpret republican laws and customs, become model citizens, and occupy positions of political and social eminence. Indeed, students gave countless speeches like Alexander's in the antebellum period, demonstrating an awareness that mental and moral improvement in youth—the chief objects of antebellum higher education—provided a solid foundation on which to fashion lives worthy of fame and distinction.

What is significant about scenes like this, and Alexander's remarks in particular, is that they stand in stark contrast to long-held characterizations of young southern collegians preferring to fight, duel, or pull pranks than to study. Of course students did all of those things (and more), but a more serious, intellectual culture co-existed with the rowdy campus culture that historians commonly depict as southern "college life."³

² Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 43. Censer's study focuses on planters who owned seventy or more slaves in a single holding within one county in North Carolina. She argues that planters, though a narrow elite, were the most "cohesive" group in antebellum North Carolina as far as values and characteristics went, especially regarding youth and education. She has found that 77 of 113 planters with sons sent at least one to college (68% percent of North Carolina planters); 37 of 113 planters with sons sent two or more sons to college; "Eight other planters had sons in professions who probably attended college." Her data verify the importance of education to elites.

³ Two principal works that emphasize southern exceptionalism are Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). Also see L. Ray Drinkwater, "Honor and Student Misconduct in Southern Antebellum Colleges," *Southern Humanities Review* 27 (Fall 1993); Jennings Wagoner, "Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University: The Antebellum Years," *History of Education Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1986): 155-179; Charles Coleman Wall, Jr., "Students and Student Life at the University of Virginia, 1825 to 1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1978); Stephen Tomlinson and Kevin Windham, "Northern Piety and Southern Honor: Alva Woods and the Problem of Discipline at the University of Alabama, 1831-1837," in *Perspectives on the History of Higher Education*, 25 (2006): 1-42. There are two exceptions, which provide a fuller view of southern student life, though with little analysis: E. Merton Coulter, *College Life in the Old South* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 115; William E. Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina before 1860* (New York: Carlton Press, 1964), 225-27. On American college life more generally, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz discusses multiple student cultures in *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). Unfortunately,

Indeed, there was an alternative: “intellectual manhood”—a model of masculinity often neglected by historians of the region but nevertheless important to many young men.⁴

When Alexander referred to “intellectual manhood,” he meant what most students simply knew as manhood, which included a range of intellectual and moral qualities that had, throughout history, distinguished educated men as society’s best men: a well-trained and -disciplined mind, stored with knowledge of language, nature, and morality; eloquence and “oratorical genius”; and correct literary taste. Moreover, these timeless and universal qualifications for manhood stood in marked contrast to students’ attitudes about boys, who had not yet learned to discipline their mind, morals, or tongues. Thus, when students referred to “manhood” and “becoming men,” they were not talking about avoiding femininity, but leaving boyhood.⁵

What is perhaps most significant about Alexander’s remarks is how he instructed his classmates to become men. He emphasized perseverance and industry—values often

she only devotes a few pages to the early and antebellum republic. See also Roger L. Geiger and Julie Anne Bubolz, “College as it was in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 80-90.

⁴ Historians have considered the obvious examples of intellectual manhood (and womanhood)—notable thinkers, authors, and academics in the Old South. Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). These works show that intellectuals were far less isolated than Drew Faust has suggested in *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). This dissertation is more concerned with intellectual manhood as an idea and how it existed in the imaginations of young men—ordinary individuals who otherwise were insignificant due to their age and, therefore, absent in most intellectual histories. For similar studies of academic masculinity, see Kim Townsend, *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others* (New York, 1996) and Patricia M. Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Intellectual manhood closely parallels the notion of masculine “academic citizenship” that Mazón develops.

⁵ When students spoke or wrote about “manhood” they almost always referred to the sort of masculine ideal that Alexander called “intellectual manhood,” and I will use the terms interchangeably. Similarly, when I refer to “becoming men,” I mean maturing from boyhood to adulthood. See E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), chap. 3.

cited as “bourgeois” or “middle-class”—as absolutely necessary for elite youth to become men.⁶ While Alexander and his classmates were self-consciously elite and unabashedly ambitious to become masters of their households and communities, they were perfectly comfortable adapting these national, middle-class values to their conceptions of elite southern manhood.⁷ These themes that Alexander and his classmates pondered in their literary society in 1827 were at the core of elite young men’s maturation and higher education at the University of North Carolina in the antebellum period, demonstrating important connections between education, intellectual life, and national values to traditional ideas about and expressions of elite white culture in the Old South.

* * * * *

Elite southerners ascribed great meaning to higher education, but historians have not adequately addressed southern education *as education*. Much of this has to do with the treatment of the South in the historiography of American education writ large. Major works in the field, from Lawrence Cremin’s *American Education*, to Frederick Rudolph’s *Curriculum*, and to Karl Kaestle’s *Pillars of the Republic*, have upheld the northern model of schooling as normative and relegated southern schools to a derivative, if not

⁶ There now is sufficient evidence of a southern middle class and its involvement in southern education, both formal and informal. Three important studies are: Frank J. Byrne, *Becoming Bourgeois: Merchant Culture in the South, 1820-1860* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006); Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). An often-neglected work that shows the embrace among elites of middle-class values is Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

⁷ I concur with scholars who have argued that there were no hegemonic masculinities in the early and antebellum republic, but multiple styles co-existed and interacted with one another. See Amy Greenberg’s explanation of the two competing masculine ideologies in antebellum America—restrained and martial—though they were constantly “in flux.” Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

deficient, position in the margins of American intellectual life.⁸ Historians of the region have usually examined what seemed to be exceptional about southern education, usually what southern education and students did *not* do, rather than what they could and did do.⁹ One picture that emerges is of the backward South—a region that promoted the study of dead languages and literature (classics), even as the North began to embrace more practical curricula based on modern languages and sciences.¹⁰ In this interpretation, southerners, including students, cared little about freedom of thought or progress. Instead, they looked longingly to antiquity, where model slaveholding republics thrived. Education, in this context, was a means for students to maintain reputations as gentlemen and to defend their social and political status as elite slaveholders in a country slowly encroaching upon their rights.¹¹

⁸ Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 57; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). Christie Anne Farnham addressed this issue in *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994). So has Jennifer Green in *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3-4. Yet little else has been done to rectify this interpretation.

⁹ There are a few exceptions. See Wayne K. Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words: Classical Teaching and Social Change at South Carolina College, 1804-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* (August 1999): 469-498. Unlike other studies of southern higher education, Durrill’s essay takes teaching, learning, and ideas seriously. For a less analytical account, see the essays in J. A. Chandler, Franklin L. Riley, and James Curtis Ballagh, *The South in the Building of the Nation: A History of the Southern States Designed to Record the South’s Part in the Making of the American Nation: To Portray the Character and Genius, to Chronicle the Achievements and Progress and to Illustrate the Life and Traditions of the Southern People* (Richmond, Va.: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909-1913).

¹⁰ On the widespread use of the classical curriculum in the early republic, see Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). Classical learning has been misunderstood as only pertaining to ancient languages and literature, when in practice it included the study of rhetoric, moral and political philosophy, mathematics, and natural and physical science. On the broad definition of the classical curriculum, see Stanley M. Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-Bellum American College* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1975), 158.

¹¹ Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), 196-217. Chapter Four of this dissertation engaged Eaton’s argument more explicitly by looking at freedom of thought and desires for progress in North Carolina students’ literary society debates. On this interpretation, also see John S. Ezell, “A Southern Education for Southrons,” *Journal of Southern History*

Another picture that emerges in the literature is of the unruly South, where young men's honor and rugged individualism made higher learning difficult, if not impossible.¹² Typically, historians have described and analyzed collegians' rowdy, "boys will be boys" experiences of pranks, fights, duels, and other unseemly behavior to show how manhood was constructed alongside a distinctive southern identity. These historians typically echo Bertram Wyatt-Brown's argument that "entry into young manhood took more social forms" for southern youth than for northern youth.¹³ Robert F. Pace's study of twenty-one antebellum southern colleges and universities—the most recent book-length study since Merton Coulter's *College Life in the Old South* (1929)—paints a similar picture of elite collegians: too obsessed with personal honor to allow criticism from faculty or peers, and too caught up in rowdy adolescent behavior to care about the consequences of their actions.¹⁴ They mistrusted antebellum faculty, despised the methods of instruction (rote memorization and recitation), cheated, and avoided work. In fact, students' rowdy behavior and lack of interest in education have prompted another historian to argue that southern colleges were "seldom havens of intellectualism or contemplation."¹⁵

17 (August 1951): 303-327; Durrill, Durrill, "The Power of Ancient Words," 497-498; Michael Sugrue, "'We desired our future rulers to be educated men': South Carolina College, the Defense of Slavery, and the Development of Secessionist Politics," *History of Higher Education Annual* 14 (1994).

¹² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford, 1982); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch": The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1 (Feb., 1985): 18-43.

¹³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 164. This image, and southern students' deportment in general, has been the focus of much of the literature on southern collegians, particularly in ways related to honor and region. See Drinkwater, "Honor and Student Misconduct in Southern Antebellum Colleges"; Pace, *Halls of Honor*, chaps. 1 and 4; Wagoner, "Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University," 155-179; Wall, "Students and Student Life at the University of Virginia, 1825 to 1861"; Tomlinson and Windham, "Northern Piety and Southern Honor," 1-42.

¹⁴ Pace, *Halls of Honor*.

¹⁵ Glover, *Southern Sons*, 83.

Of course these observations of southern youth have some measure of truth in them. At the University of North Carolina, students gambled, swore, drank, fought, cut the tails off of professors' horses, saturated the chapel pulpit with paint, strung cows up to the bell tower, caroused with nearby prostitutes, and raped local slave women. Moreover, southern students who attended northern universities were commonly disparaged for being brash, impulsive, and violent. Henry Adams explained why in the 1850s: "Strictly, the Southerner had no mind; he had temperament. When a Virginian had brooded a few days over an imaginary grief and substantial whiskey, none of his Northern friends could be sure that he might not be waiting round the corner, with a knife or pistol to revenge insult."¹⁶ By the time of the Civil War, northerners used similar characterizations to create a distinctive southern prototype that was at once unthinking and violent.¹⁷ Northerners also began heaping class critiques onto southern students, depicting them as pampered aristocrats who would rather idly drink away their time while slaves did their work. The prevailing image of southern youth (fig. 1) suggested antipathy to work and discipline and an innate disposition to idleness, and dissipation. In contrast, northern youth were industrious, sober, and virtuous. Critiques of southern students and education, not surprisingly, emanated from northern class critiques of the slave system rather than of southern youth themselves.

¹⁶ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, ed. Ernest Samuels (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 57-58.

¹⁷ David F. Allmendinger, "The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life," *Journal of Social History* 7 (Autumn 1973), 75-85; Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977); Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977); Horowitz, *Campus Life*; Rodney Hessinger, "'The Most Powerful Instrument of College Discipline': Student Disorder and the Growth of Meritocracy in the Colleges of the Early Republic," *History of Education Quarterly* 39 (1999), 237-62; Jeffrey A. Mullins, "Honorable Violence: Youth Culture, Masculinity, and Contested Authority in Liberal Education in the Early Republic," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 17 (2003), 161-179.

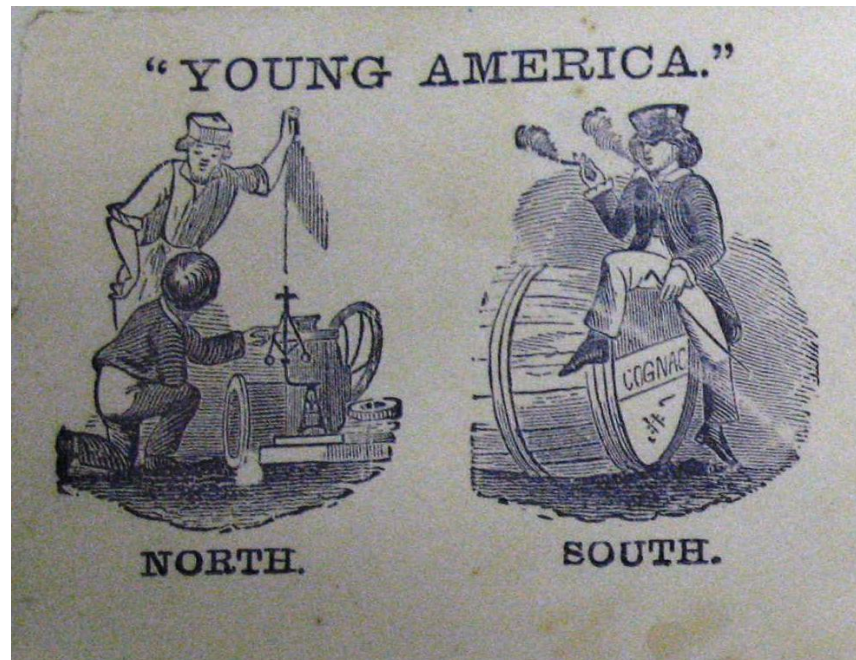


Figure 1 - “Young America.” Clipping from the Civil War Pictorial Envelopes Collection #3409-z, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Image courtesy of the Manuscripts Department, UNC-CH.

While college students across the South *and* North enjoyed their fair share of alcohol, tobacco, and pranks, many of these students who played hard, also studied hard, talked to one another about literature, debated current affairs, and pondered the duties of educated men.¹⁸ Historians have typically examined this more serious side of college life through the lens of performance. In this view, higher education taught young men to *perform* the role of gentleman through proper deportment and manners, dress, and speech.¹⁹ Though important to elites, social performance was not all that mattered.

¹⁸ David F. Allmendinger, “The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (Autumn 1973), 75-85; Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977); Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977); Horowitz, *Campus Life*; Rodney Hessinger, “‘The Most Powerful Instrument of College Discipline’: Student Disorder and the Growth of Meritocracy in the Colleges of the Early Republic,” *History of Education Quarterly* 39 (1999), 237-62; Jeffrey A. Mullins, “Honorable Violence: Youth Culture, Masculinity, and Contested Authority in Liberal Education in the Early Republic,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 17 (2003), 161-179.

¹⁹ Glover, *Southern Sons*. Also see Evelyn D. Causey, “The Character of a Gentleman: Deportment, Piety, and Morality in Southern Colleges and Universities, 1820-1860,” Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2006.

Thanks to studies of young men's emotions and imaginations by Steven Stowe, Steve Berry, Peter Carmichael, Jennifer Green, Anya Jabour, and Amy Murrell Taylor, historians have a better understanding of young men's inner, emotional lives. These historians have shown that attitudes about age, in particular, were crucial to young men's experiences.²⁰ Youth was much more than chronological age; it was a special stage of life, distinguishable from childhood and characterized by young men's independence from parental authority and by their autonomy of thought and action. This stage of life was widely believed to be the most important because it set the course for the remainder of an adult male's life.²¹ Students were sensitive to and earnest about their age, and they believed that they were in the midst of important emotional and intellectual development. Their concern with maturation influenced their experiences in both formal and informal structures of higher learning, as they spent time in contemplation of who they were and

²⁰ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Stephen W. Berry, II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and his introduction to *Princes of Cotton: Four Diaries of Young Men in the South, 1848-1860* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6; Amy Murrell Taylor, *The Divided Family in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Anya Jabour, "Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Spring 2000): 83-11 and "Masculinity and Adolescence in Antebellum America: Robert Wirt at West Point, 1820-1821," *Journal of Family History* XXIII (October 1998): 393-416; Jennifer Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²¹ There is a rich literature on American youth. Important examples include: Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); John R. Frisch, "Youth Culture in America, 1790-1865," Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1970; Harvey Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*; Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975); Anya Jabour, "Masculinity and Adolescence in Antebellum America: Robert Wirt at West Point, 1820-1821," *Journal of Family History* XXIII (October 1998): 393-416; Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977); Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

who they wished to become. This dissertation, therefore, is concerned with exploring these processes at work as students thought, wrote, and read their way into adulthood.

Because broad studies of college education cannot answer questions about how learning occurred at the most intimate and personal level, I have chosen to go deeply into students' educational experiences at the University of North Carolina during the years of the early republic. This study, however, is not a history of the University of North Carolina. Instead, it is a history of the learning and maturation that occurred there among communities of educators and learners in the antebellum period. Similarly, this is not as much a history *about* the South as it is a history that occurred *in* the South. In many ways, North Carolina—a slaveholding state in the upper South—developed differently than Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia economically, socially, and politically. Yet, these are the states whose collegiate education we know most about. The view of southern education in these states reflected many of the unique features of the political culture and economy of larger slaveholding states, but they have come to represent education throughout the region. North Carolina offers a different view. As one of the poorest, least developed, and most isolated states in the early republic, North Carolina never produced the extreme wealth of Virginia or South Carolina: it lacked concentrated oligarchic power among landed gentry, and its political culture, in many ways, favored national rather than regional, belonging. North Carolina was among the last southern states to secede from the Union in 1861; once part of the Confederacy, many North Carolinians actively dissented. Like the Old North State itself, the University of North Carolina was in the South but not entirely of it, and we see these tensions between nation

and region in the institution's founding, the formal curriculum, student life, and students' engagement with the idea of intellectual manhood.

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The University of North Carolina's founding was part of a larger movement of establishing new colleges for the new republic.²² Chartered in 1789, following a vague state constitutional mandate for at least one university to instill "useful knowledge" in the state's youth, the University's value to North Carolina was primarily civic. Riding a wave of enthusiasm following a long battle for ratification of the federal Constitution, the new state's leading Federalists envisioned a public university that would teach the children of North Carolina's gentry to protect liberty, insure the stability of republican government, help North Carolina adapt a national, republican identity, and promote national happiness by acquiring knowledge and cultivating virtue.²³

The University's future seemed uncertain between 1795, when its doors first opened to students, and 1816. Funding difficulties, scarce supplies, curriculum disputes,

²² David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), esp. 186-215. Also see Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1993).

²³ I have relied on several histories of the University of North Carolina in this study. The principal work is Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina from Its Beginning to the Death of President Swain, 1789-1868* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1907). Others include Charles Lee Smith, *The History of Education in North Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888); R.D. Connor, Louis Round Wilson, and Hugh Talmage Lefler, *A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina, 1776- 1799* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1953); James Vickers, Thomas Scism, and Dixon Qualls, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay Publishers, 1985); William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Darryl Lynn Peterkin, "'Lux, Libertas, and Learning': The First State University and the Transformation of North Carolina, 1789-1816," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1995. In addition to these works, two online resources are very thorough: "The First Century of the First State University," *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/> and "True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students at the University of North Carolina," *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/> (accessed 03 February 2010).

political skirmishes, and at least two substantial student rebellions, kept enrollments low. After 1816, however, the University gradually grew from a politically volatile, impoverished and relatively unstable “embryo college” to a regionally and nationally relevant institution of higher learning.²⁴ Enrollments rose steadily in the 1830s and 1840s, largely through the recruitment efforts of the University president, former state Governor, David L. Swain. By the time of the Civil War, the University of North Carolina’s student body had grown by nearly four hundred percent and was second in size only to Yale.²⁵ For these reasons, this study focuses largely on the period of tremendous growth between 1820 and 1861 and its influence on the structures and experiences of men’s higher education.

Much of the University’s stability and growing academic reputation after 1816 resulted from the trustees and faculty settling upon a core liberal arts curriculum; this curriculum played an important role in providing a formal framework for intellectual manhood. In 1792, William R. Davie, the University’s founder, introduced a very liberal and practical curriculum that emphasized schooling in modern, rather than ancient, languages and literatures as well as the sciences. Though adopted in 1795, Davie’s plan flew in the face of convention. Rev. Samuel E. McCorkle, an important leader in the University’s founding, led critics who believed that such learning elevated reason and science over truth and religion and was sure to undermine all order and stability at the new university.²⁶ Debates about the curriculum ensued for years, though ultimately culminated in a plan of education in 1804 in which the study of Greek and Latin

²⁴ Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 24-37. “Embryo College” is Snider’s phrase.

²⁵ Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 42-64. On the transformation of the University between 1789 and 1816, see Peterkin, ““Lux, Libertas, and Learning.””

²⁶ Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1865*, 70-71.

languages and literature played a central role. In 1818, the Board of Trustees added a requirement that students would study science and mathematics in every year of collegiate study. The rise of science, as we shall see, played an especially significant role in the process of cultivating intellectual manhood and in creating a culture for progressive thought at the antebellum University of North Carolina.²⁷ This curriculum received few challenges; it was revised again in 1818 and scarcely altered thereafter.

However “classical” the curriculum became, it remained practical insofar as it remained committed to making men out of boys through the process of mental improvement—the organizing principle of the classical curriculum, which was rooted in the faculty psychology of Scottish common sense philosophy.²⁸ According to faculty psychology, the mind was divided into faculties, or mental powers: reason, emotion, and will. These faculties were thought of as muscles that could be improved through exercise. These faculties, or mental powers, comprised the mind’s furniture—its natural structure, which provided “original and natural judgments” to all people and thus, a common “human understanding,” or “*the common sense of mankind.*”²⁹ In other words, genius was innate to all humans, and the point of education was to develop genius by furnishing it with knowledge and disciplining its faculties, thereby “expanding its

²⁷ In all, debates over, and ultimate acceptance of, a classical liberal arts curriculum at North Carolina reflected national patterns. There were periodic waves of criticism of classical learning in the early and antebellum republic—the most substantial being in the 1820s, when professors at Yale criticized the study of dead languages. This critique, however, culminated in the famous 1828 Yale Reports, which vindicated the study of Latin and Greek and silenced any substantial debates over classical learning in the United States until after the Civil War.

²⁸ Donald H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 66-67.

²⁹ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual and Active Powers of Man* (1785) quoted in Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 152.

powers.”³⁰ And usually educators meant *all* faculties. Nineteenth-century Americans believed that one’s character reflected balanced faculties, for the improvement of the mind needed to remain equal to the improvement of the emotions and will. Mental discipline structured the school day, classroom learning, study, and student thinking about education in the abstract. The result: students and educators remained committed to an understanding of education whereby the *process* of education mattered as much as, if not more than, knowledge, because mental improvement made a boy’s still malleable mind manly.

The University’s antebellum growth and significance had much to do with developments in print, transportation, and communication that accompanied the Market Revolution, which in turn greatly influenced how students learned.³¹ Between 1820 and 1860, advances in print and transportation technologies made educational materials easier to obtain, and students experienced a flood of print materials, including fictional works, periodicals, and advice literature.³² Supplies, including paper and blank books, became more readily available during this time, especially diaries, which became popular among southern youth as part of a romantic impulse to commune with the self. New reading and writing enterprises mediated the formation of adult personas for college youth and served as proxy forms of new relations between private experience and identity occurring among the middle-classes in the North and South. The antebellum college sought to ensure that

³⁰ Yale Report quoted in Michael S. Pak, “The Yale Report of 1828: A New Reading and New Implications,” *History of Education Quarterly* 48 (Feb., 2008): 50.

³¹ Charles Grier Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³² Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

North Carolina did not fall behind the rest of the nation by preparing students to participate in a modern world. The University therefore began to include new and more modern subjects, including additional science and mathematics offerings, and students increasingly latched onto newer intellectual ideas such as romanticism and self-culture. These developments influenced how the faculty taught and how students learned.³³

During this time of great change, student-organized literary societies played a crucial role in engaging students in the world around them. Founded not long after the University opened its doors to students in 1795, the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies were the only institutions of student life for most of the antebellum period.³⁴ Following a tradition of student literary associations that had begun in the early eighteenth century, they were intended for and governed by youth.³⁵ In the words of the Dialectic Society, students met to “cultivate a lasting Friendship with each other and to promote useful

³³ Durrill argues that these developments influenced South Carolina College, though he focuses exclusively on the ways in which intellectuals used the new culture to crystallize their proslavery defense. This was not so at North Carolina. See Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words,” 469-98.

³⁴ Battle, *History*, 72-76. James Leloudis, “What Should a University Be? Students, Curriculum, and Campus Life at the University of North Carolina” in Lisa Tolbert, ed. *Two Hundred Years of Student Life at Chapel Hill: Selected Letters and Diaries*. Southern Research Report #4. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for the Study of the American South, IRSS Faculty Working Group in Southern Studies, 1993), 4-5. For a list of social organizations that appeared in the antebellum period, see Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 60. There were no organized collegiate athletics at North Carolina (or elsewhere) until after the Civil War. Students did not begin to join fraternities in the 1840s and 1850s, even in spite of faculty injunctions not to, and they existed underground for several years. Societies found these social fraternities to be divisive. For a student’s reaction to the rise of fraternities in the late antebellum period, see William Gaston Lewis, Inaugural Address, 09 March 1855, Dialectic Society Records. On the rise of fraternities, see Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 13-50.

³⁵ Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 25. By the American Revolution, colonial students had formed literary societies, sometimes with the urging of college presidents, at Yale, William and Mary, Princeton (College of New Jersey), Columbia (King’s College), and Rutgers (Queen’s College). See Potter, “Speech Education,” 238-240. Following the Revolution, the number of American colleges and universities tripled in an effort to see the new republican experiment to fruition, and literary societies likewise grew in number and in significance. See Robson, *Educating Republicans*, 186.

Knowledge.”³⁶ Membership was not compulsory, but every student belonged to one society or the other. Each competed vigorously with its rival for membership as well as for academic distinction and honor in the college community based on the academic performance of its members. Students met privately each week in ornate chambers that they filled with fine furniture, extensive and cosmopolitan libraries, and portraits of famous alumni, whose successes encouraged them to take their society membership, if not their entire education, seriously. In these halls, members read aloud from the most renowned books in their libraries, practiced delivering speeches, and participated in debates covering a range of social, moral, historical, and political questions. These activities, they believed, were important elements of a manly life that they would do well to practice as youth.³⁷

In all, between 1795 and 1861, young men came from across North Carolina, from as far west as Iowa, and as far south as Louisiana to receive a liberal arts education at the first state university to open its doors to students. By the time of the Civil War, more than 1,685 young men had been graduated from the University; hundreds more had attended without receiving a diploma.³⁸ The formal and informal structures of University life provided these students with the resources and opportunities to fashion intellectual manhood. The materials they left behind—letters, diaries, notebooks, compositions, speeches, and literary society records—show that college provided intellectual and emotional opportunities and resources that fostered mental and moral improvement,

³⁶ Membership pledge of the Dialectic Society, Dialectic Society Minutes, vol. 3, Dialectic Society Records.

³⁷ Lindemann, “The Debating Societies,” in “True and Candid Compositions,” *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp05-02/chp05-02.html> (accessed 03 February 2010).

³⁸ A full listing of university graduates is available in Battle, *History*, 787-820.

providing a culturally relevant higher education and laying the foundation for intellectual manhood.

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The pages that follow address two fundamental questions: What was *educational* about higher education in the Old South?³⁹ And what was *manly* about it? To answer these two interrelated questions, I imagine higher learning as most nineteenth-century Americans saw it: a liberal arts program designed to facilitate mental and moral improvement of youth through the study of the ancient languages, mathematics and science, rhetoric and logic, belles letters, and moral and political philosophy. This was a complex and dynamic system of acquiring knowledge, cultivating virtue, refining morals and manners, and making professional connections that occurred almost uniformly throughout the early republic's major colleges and universities.⁴⁰ Higher learning occurred outside of the classroom as well, most notably in literary societies, but also in moments that hardly seem educational by any formal standard—in moments of anxiety, heartache, and even mischief. Because process, rather than product, was important to a

³⁹ I have found Deborah Lowenberg Ball and Francesca M. Forzani's thinking about education research helpful in formulating these questions. See "What Makes Educational Research 'Educational'?" *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 36, No. 9 (2009): 529-540.

⁴⁰ Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, 14, 138-56. There are three major interpretations of a southern liberal arts education. One interpretation emphasizes the importance of classical erudition to southern gentility. See Evelyn D. Causey, "The Character of a Gentleman: Deportment, Piety, and Morality in Southern Colleges and Universities, 1820-1860," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2006; Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). Another interpretation explains that teaching southern students about the ancient world was uniformly aimed at justifying slaveholding and the viability of a slave society. See Wayne K. Durrill, "The Power of Ancient Words: Classical Teaching and Social Change at South Carolina College, 1804-1860," *Journal of Southern History* (August 1999), 469-498; Sugrue, "'We desired our future rulers to be educated men.'" A third interpretation is that classical learning was especially important to southerners because it justified the southern honor ethic. See Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 16-22. These explanations rest squarely in a long intellectual tradition of juxtaposing the romantic and nostalgic southern "cavalier" and the industrious and practical northern "yankee." Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee* (1957, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

nineteenth-century liberal education, valuable learning occurred in a variety of spaces and, most often, in the nexus between informal, extra, and formal curricula.⁴¹

I follow students as they moved between dormitories and lecture halls, debating society libraries, chapels, and even local brothels, creating multiple spaces for, and cultures of, learning at the University of North Carolina. Because ideas about youth were so important to learning in each of these spaces, Chapter One, “Youth is the Time,” considers why students attended college, what expectations and ambitions they had for themselves as men, and what challenges they faced in a world far removed from parental guidance. Age was at the foreground of this new moral landscape. It was central to the emotional and social challenges students faced and to the methods students found to overcome those challenges and fashion mature, manly lives. In particular, students relied on important tools of the American middle class to bridge the emotional transition to manhood, especially emulation and encouragement to improve their minds and morals.

The mental discipline prescribed by and found in the formal curriculum and pedagogy suited the development of youth. In classrooms, students learned to improve their minds by exercising their reasoning and moral faculties, through both “classical” and scientific education. Chapter Two, “Educating Young Men,” demonstrates the importance of mental discipline to southern students’ attitudes about education and the duties of educated men. Students participated in a curriculum that was neither arcane nor irrelevant. It promoted a way of thinking that was especially important in teaching students how to use intellect as a means of mastery over self and others. Most

⁴¹ On the notion of an informal curriculum, see Richard Storr, “The Education of History: Some Impressions,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 31 (Spring 1961): 124; Donald Warren, “The Wonderful Worlds of the Education of History,” *American Educational History Journal* 32 (2005): 108-15. For an exemplary study using this concept, see Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, chap. 5.

importantly, the curriculum provided intellectual mechanisms that helped students fashion manly lives that conformed to middle-class cultural values such as industry, sobriety, and morality as well as to traditional southern notions of honor and gentility.

Speech education was also an important aspect of the curriculum that bridged the transition from youth to manhood. Classes in rhetoric and belles lettres helped students learn to present their erudition and status in public displays of intelligence.

Complementing and supplementing this formal curriculum, student-organized literary societies demanded practical application of mental discipline acquired in the classroom for leadership training for local, state, and national service. Chapter Three, “Not merely thinking, but speaking beings,” examines this aspect of the formal curriculum and then argues that students used the participatory pedagogy of literary societies to hone their public presentation of intellectual manhood through speech and participatory government. Through weekly participation in debate, oratory, and composition, the Dialectic and Philanthropic societies stimulated thought and provided cultural resources for learning about government and statesmanship, oratory, and even friendship. These societies were especially important in helping students learn to speak like men in such a way as to command respect and esteem, protecting elite social and political authority through mastery of language.

Application of speech to real-life concerns made speech education truly manly. Chapter Four, “Every great public question,” is based on nearly 4,000 debate questions from the Dialectic and Philanthropic societies. Students held debates weekly each year between 1795 and 1861 in order to hone their rhetorical and forensic skills. The questions show that debates were valuable for more than speech education. They allowed

free discussion about many issues that historians have argued were off-limits to most southerners, including social and legal reform, slavery, and Indian removal. Though not always comfortable, students took up the most contested current affairs and used them to cultivate public identities that were rooted at once in national and regional ambitions for progress and civilization.

Young men's private and social lives also created opportunities for higher learning and maturation. Chapter Five, "Reading Makes the Man," explores students' engagement with books and libraries, and their responses to reading. Literary society libraries contained a broad and cosmopolitan array of titles and facilitated private intellectual experiences that helped students enter into a wider community of thinkers and citizens. Student engagement with biography, history, and fiction outside of the classrooms, moreover, shows the importance of many forms of literary culture to intellectual manhood. Students were tied to the expectation that southern gentlemen read certain literature, largely ancient and modern history, but not fiction. Yet, students increasingly demonstrated that they were interested in more national forms of popular culture, especially reading novels. The chapter explores how these two cultures interacted in the antebellum student life.

Finally, Chapter Six, "The Informal Curriculum," finds students in a complicated social world of dancing and singing schools, balls, and even rendezvous with local prostitutes, as they learned to perform the roles of elite men, to socialize in peer groups, and to establish or challenge existing age and gender boundaries. These informal experiences were very important to students' education at the University, and students often intellectualized them. Antebellum students wrote about their experiences with and

hopes for love and marriage—as well as the cultural and social differences between men and women—in private diaries and letters, but also in dozens of published articles in the campus literary magazine, *The North Carolina University Magazine*. These candid compositions demonstrate how students engaged in constructing gender roles through reading and writing. By using the cultural resources available to them at college, students transformed their social experiences into literary ones, and sometimes turned their literary experiences into social ones.

In all of these collegiate spaces, students engaged in a living curriculum of higher learning. Intellectual manhood, the ideal Charles Alexander evoked in the address with which I began, is a significant paradigm for delving deeply into their minds, imaginations, and experiences. Intellectual manhood should not be viewed as an archetypal or monolithic identity, however, for it consisted of many dimensions and expressions. Thinking, reading, and writing, of course, were the basic intellectual components. To be manly, however, knowledge and erudition had to be put to use publicly to order the world, to shape opinion, and to encourage the development of a distinctive American civilization. As Alexander explained, students had a duty to virtue, to the world, and to the common people to accrue wisdom to make and uphold laws and customs. Thus, one of the important functions of intellectual manhood was to learn one's position in the pre-existing southern social order.⁴² At the same time, these elite students adapted national values of the emerging American middle-class to achieve that goal.

⁴² Important works on southern mastery are: Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

They valued and extolled industry, sobriety, diligence, and self-control and upheld the importance of education. The resulting elite male culture favored intellectualism, bourgeois values, and both national and regional belonging.

CHAPTER ONE

“Youth is the Time”: Ambition, Conflict, and Inspiration

In 1857, William A. Wooster, an eighteen-year-old freshman at the University of North Carolina from Wilmington, North Carolina, wrote a class essay titled “home and College Life contrasted.” In it, he explained that the differences between home and college were “striking & plainly defined”; in fact, they were “diametrically opposite.” He wrote, “In College we have not the strong will of the Father, nor the pleading voice of a mother to check us in our career of sin. No kind friend is near to tell us when we err, or to smile approval when we do well.” Students’ destinies were “in a measure in our own hands and ‘tis here [in college] the great battle of life begins.”¹ Students, therefore, needed “moral courage” at college “more than at any other time of life” in order to succeed and to become men.

¹ William A. Wooster, “Home and College Life contrasted,” 31 October 1857, Wooster Family Papers #2120-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter SHC). The nature of parent-child relations in the South is contested. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has argued that southern fathers imposed total authority over their sons, even at college. See his “Ideal Typology,” 5-28. Others take a more complicated view, arguing that young people’s social practices undermined parental expectations. See Steven M. Stowe, “The Rhetoric of Authority: The Making of Social Values in Planter Family Correspondence,” *The Journal of American History* 73 (Mar., 1987): 916-933; Jon L. Wakelyn, “Antebellum College Life and the Relations between Fathers and Sons,” in *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, & Education*, ed. Fraser, et al. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 107-126. Jane Turner Censer’s view is most accurate, arguing that parents preferred to emphasize affection instead of obedience, and entrusted to their children a degree of autonomy in the coming-of-age process. See her, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 54-64. See also E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), chaps. 2-3.

Wooster's essay underscores the anxiety that many young men felt when they left home for college. Their parents had maintained order and stability in the household, and mothers played a special role in controlling their impulses. But separation from home brought new challenges to students. While beholden to their parents by virtue of their age and unmarried status, young men nevertheless had control over their own mental and moral development for the first time. In other words, college students were neither boys nor men; they were youth.² As youth, they lived, as historians have pointed out, in a state of semidependence, which was at once thrilling and unsettling.³

As Wooster's essay suggests, youth was much more than chronological age; it was thought to be the most important stage of life, which set the course for the remainder of an adult male's life. The idea that youth looked to manhood, heightened the emotional experiences of college life. On one hand, it gave students a sense of optimism. Many students spent years preparing for college entrance exams and dreaming of the fame an education would bring them. Education, they were taught, was the foundation for the rise of all great men. They, too, would go to college, win the approving smiles of their parents, create a foundation for wealth and social distinction, and rise to careers of distinction in public life or in professions as doctors, lawyers, merchants, and farmers. On the other hand, what if they did not take their youth seriously? What if they laid the foundation for failed manhood? Was this not the constant fear of their parents, ministers,

² The idea of adolescence did not come into vogue until well after the Civil War. In the early and antebellum republic, Americans categorized all young males ranging in age from mid-teens to mid-twenties as youth or, simply young men. See Kett, *Rites of Passage, Adolescence in America: 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 11-61; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, chap. 3; C. Dallett Hemphill, "Isaac and 'Isabella': Courtship and Conflict in an Antebellum Circle of Youth," *Early American Studies* 2 (2004): 398-401 and *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chaps. 5-7; John Richard Frisch, "Youth Culture in America, 1790-1865" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1970), 94-114.

³³ On semidependence, see Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 11-37. See Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 56

and teachers, that they would squander away their youth on vice and dissipation? Indeed it was, and students shared it.⁴

Students faced a new emotional landscape at college, where feelings of excitement, hope, and optimism mingled with homesickness, loneliness, despondency, and anxiety. This chapter focuses on how students found and created ways to make sense out of this new emotional journey from youth to manhood. They relied on several important sources for making the transition. The institutional life of the college stressed that young men should constantly strive for eminence and distinction—college faculty placed ambition at the center of the educational experience and used emulation and merit to promote studiousness and morality. Yet, even more significantly, students helped one another mature into men. As they gathered in literary societies, competed for grades and distinctions, and emulated the great deeds of one another and history's great state and national leaders, young men found many ways to control their impulses and turn anxiety into hope. In the process, young men at the antebellum University learned how to speak the language of the emerging American bourgeoisie, who valued self-discipline, industry, sobriety, and emulation as means to manhood and even to greatness.⁵

⁴ An extensive body of literature addresses adult anxieties about male youth in antebellum America, but generally they do not focus on the anxieties youth experienced *as youth*. Many important works on which I rely are: David F. Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

⁵ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). On the relationship between southern and northern middle-class Americans, see Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle*

Students and the Idea of Youth

Students ranged widely in age. Freshmen were often as young as fifteen and many juniors and seniors were in their early twenties.⁶ Consequently, they varied greatly in physical development. Some students had barely hit puberty, and their smooth, beardless faces stood in marked contrast to older classmates, many of whom were able to sport quite respectable beards. Others were still in the midst of physical change, which did not escape the attention of older students. As soon as a freshman saw “a sprout upon his chin,” one student joked, he would stand before the mirror, captivated, for hours.⁷ Some younger students’ voices had not changed completely by the time they matriculated. When they assembled in any of the University’s wood-floored and paneled rooms, students’ voices sounded like the cacophonous timbres of a boys’ choir, resonating with high, medium, and low pitches—some even cracking—rather than the low grumble of a room of grown men.

While bodily differenced based on maturity influenced students’ experiences at college, the predominant anxiety among young men was about their preparedness for ideal manhood.⁸ One student wrote that among the “four distinct classes or stages” of life—childhood, youth, manhood, and old age—none was “of more importance, or

Class in the Old South (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 10-13; 42.

⁶ Battle, *History*, 787-815.

⁷ *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1852): 107-110.

⁸ My findings conform to Anya Jabour’s observation about young women in *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 30.

surrounded with greater difficulties, than that of youth....”⁹ The most common way that young men described youth was as a time of preparation before embarking on a dangerous voyage on the ocean of life. All of life was a voyage, they believed, and youth, though sailing happily through the stream would soon face “tempestuous waters,” as one student put in 1825.¹⁰



Figure 2 - A college youth. Ambrotype of James Hilliard Polk, taken while a student at the University of North Carolina, c. 1859-60. James Hilliard Polk Papers #5259-z, Southern Historical Collection, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁹ Benjamin David Rounsaville, Composition, undated (ca. 1806-1808), Dialectic Society Records. For similar views, see Thomas Bog Slade, Address, 10 September 1819; Massilon Field Taylor, “Is a knowledge of the classics necessary for a thorough education?” Debate, 9 March 1861, Dialectic Society Records; Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 08 August 1841, Box 6, Folder 82, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

¹⁰ Elam Alexander, Address, February 1825, Dialectic Society Records, 2.

By the 1840s, life's voyage had become a prevalent image in American popular culture, most notably through Thomas Cole's 1842 allegorical painting, *The Voyage of Life*.¹¹ The series depicts childhood, youth, manhood, and old age. Childhood is an idyllic period of peace, comfort, and protection from a guardian spirit. Cole's depiction of youth (Fig. 2) illustrates a young man, bidding farewell to his guardian angel. The youthful hero, closer to manhood than to childhood, takes control of his own fate at the helm of his boat. Surrounded by "the romantic beauty of youthful imaginings," he looks confidently to a castle in the air, which symbolizes his future eminence and distinction. In Cole's language, "The beautiful stream flows for a distance, directly toward the aerial [sic] palace; but at length makes a sudden turn, and is seen in glimpses beneath the trees, until it at last descends with rapid current into a rocky ravine," which is the scene of manhood (Fig. 3). In manhood, the hero speeds toward the ocean. According to Cole, "Demon forms" hover in the clouds and rock the boat. These forms are "Suicide, Intemperance and Murder," or the temptations that beset men in their direst trouble." Ultimately, through faith and perseverance, the heroic voyager reaches old age (not pictured) and he is within reach of the aerial castle. The guardian spirit returns and lifts him to Heaven. Faith and perseverance—evangelical middle-class virtues par excellence—had saved him.¹²

¹¹ Cole was the founder of the Hudson River School of painting. Born in England in 1801 to a woolen manufacturer, James Cole, he moved to the United States in his late teens and went on to become a renowned painter of American landscapes. In 1839, Cole began *The Voyage of Life*, an allegory in four canvases. Louis Legrand Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, ed. Elliot S. Vesell (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), xv-xviii, xxi, 214-217. See also Joy S. Kasson, "The Voyage of Life: Thomas Cole and Romantic Disillusionment," *American Quarterly* 27 (March 1975): 42-56.

¹² Noble, *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, 214-17. I have copied these images from an online collection from the National Gallery of Art, http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=52450 [youth] and http://www.nga.gov/cgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=52452 [manhood].



Figure 3- Thomas Cole's *The Voyage of Life: Youth*, 1842. Oil on canvas. 34.3 x 194.9 cm (52 7/8 x 76 3/4 in.)



Figure 4 - Thomas Cole's *The Voyage of Life: Manhood*, 1842. Oil on canvas. 134.3 x 202.6 cm (52 7/8 x 79 3/4 in.)

North Carolina students were consumers of the cultural values represented in Cole's work. Youth as a quest for aerial castles—a voyage of boundless possibilities—inspired many students. “Youth is the time,” one student wrote, “to lay a foundation, upon which we shall be hereafter enabled to raise a noble superstructure, which will perpetuate our name to all eternity.”¹³ Or, as another student put it, “the whole soul of youth is fixed upon the future.”¹⁴ For these reasons, upperclassmen frequently stressed to younger students that youth was the “morning of your life.”¹⁵ Youth naturally fixed their attention on ambition and hope, the future rather than the past or present. Like Cole's youthful hero, many college students simply enjoyed drifting along without care for the future, often to the discomfort of parents and faculty.

James Lawrence Dusenbery's writing about his college revelries demonstrates how

¹³ James Sneed, Address, 28 April 1803, Dialectic Society Records. See also Robert John Donnell, Composition, 03 August 1805, *ibid*.

¹⁴ Richmond Nicholas Pearson, [Junior] Oration, [ca. 1840], Senior and Junior Orations, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter NCC). From the 1840s, also see Edmund Covington, Diary, undated, Edmund De Berry Covington Diary #1506-z, SHC, 63.

¹⁵ “Random Thoughts. [Dedicated to the members of the Freshman Class],” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Feb., 1854): 27.

much students took to the lighter side of youth's halcyon days. Dusenbery was a creative and energetic youth from Lexington, North Carolina. He entered the University of North Carolina in 1839, when he was eighteen years old, and joined the Dialectic Society, where he made many close friends. Dusenbery and his friends lived together on the third floor of the West building, which had "always been characterized as the noisiest part of College," and deservedly so, Dusenbery thought. The students' "high crimes & misdemeanors of the past week alone, would stamp indelibly upon her front, the guilty stain. But what care we of the west for that?" Dusenbery mused. "We are a jovial, roistering company & our determination is to enjoy to the utmost the halcyon days of youth." Characterized by "Amity & good feeling," Dusenbery believed that he and his friends deserved a "glorious motto," which was: "That whilst we're here, with friends so dear,/ We'll drive dull care away."¹⁶

Other students were more sensitive to youth's evanescence. Writing in his diary in the 1840s, Edmund Covington remarked on his nineteenth birthday, for instance, "The light and invisible wings of 'Time' have passed over my head, and I, a thoughtless youth, have trudged slowly along." The passing of his "youthful pilgrimage" inspired him "to take a retrospective glance at the joys and sorrows of my short career."¹⁷ Similarly, when Walter Lenoir turned seventeen on March 13, 1840, he wrote to his father "I am now 17 years old. I am entering on one of the most important eras of my life, when most is to be accomplished, and when my path is beset by trial." He worried about the impending

¹⁶ James Lawrence Dusenbery, Diary, 29 August 184, James Lawrence Dusenberry Diary and Clipping #2561-z, SHC.

¹⁷ Edmund Covington, Diary, 25 September 1841, 113.

tribulations of advanced youth and early manhood.¹⁸ Similarly, James Dusenbery noted in his diary in 1841, “Another week of my existence has passed away, fraught with all the vices [and] extravagencies [sic] of youth....We are apt to think, that, if we could roll back the tide of time & begin anew, the voyage of life, we would spend it profitably & not as we have done....”¹⁹ Students’ romantic ideas that youth was a blissful voyage gave them a sense that they would arrive at college, cultivate ambition, learn to become great men, and be able to enjoy life fully. Yet there were emotional and social obstacles that made students anxious about their futures.

The correspondence between Franklin Lafayette Smith, a sophomore from Charlotte, North Carolina, and his cousin, Gustavus Miller, a student at the University of Georgia highlights students’ sensitivity to the transition between boyhood and manhood and the degree to which maturation influenced students emotionally. When the two collegians returned to their respective campuses after Christmas in 1827, they exchanged several letters about the holiday, their journeys back to school, and about their futures. Many “hopeful ambitions” had brought them to college: the “approving smiles of doating [sic] parents,” “all the blessings of wealth,” and public notoriety as state and national legislators. As boys, they dreamed of reaching “that height of fame” to which all schoolboys aspired. But after a year of college, Smith seemed disillusioned. He wrote,

In youth we are too often apt to look forward to our passage through life as one decked with flowers and calculated to render us happy in every condition. Yet we find as we advance that these expectations are nothing but the illusions of a youthful imagination and that our present situation as far different from that which we had anticipated. This is indeed a world of disappointments. The little boy as he cons [sic] over his grammar looks forward with buoyant hopes to the

¹⁸ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 14 March 1840, Folder 78, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

¹⁹ Dusenbery, Diary, 12 September 1841.

time when he shall enter college his imagination paints to him scenes far different from those which then surround him. When the time arrives, how much he is mistaken!

Resigned to the disillusionment of college life, Smith wrote, “Such are the disappointments attendant on him who kneels at the shrine of hopeful ambitions.”²⁰

Smith’s letter suggests that youthful ambition could easily be dashed in college, and in this he was not alone. Throughout the United States, when young men left home to follow their ambitions, they encountered new emotional landscapes. Alone for the first times in their lives, collegians experienced loneliness, anxiety, fear, and despondency. So what caused anxieties like these? And what inspired students such as Franklin Smith? After all, despite his despondency, he went on to graduate at the top of his class and become a successful lawyer. What encouraged students like him to develop their talents and reach the heights of fame?

Emotion and Conflict in College Life

Many students encountered new emotions at college, owing to the separation from home and newfound independence. Homesickness was endemic at college. One student wrote to his brother in 1812 that he missed home so much that every minute seemed to him “apparently [sic] an hour, especially when I think on home.”²¹ Most students had to travel many days, typically by horse, wagon, or stagecoach to attend North Carolina. They could not travel by railroad until the late antebellum period. Consequently students

²⁰ F. L. Smith to Gustavus Miller, 01 February 1828, Box 2, Folder 17, Rufus Reid Papers #2712, SHC. Miller was well on his way to becoming “completely successful” by the standards set for university graduates, but he died of natural causes in 1835 before he realized his ambitions. Smith’s background is unclear and difficult to recover in the sources. See Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina from Its Beginning to the Death of President Swain, 1789-1868* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1907), 322-23.

²¹ John Cagrill Jones to Thomas Williamson Jones, 28 May 1812, Folder 2, Thomas Williamson Jones Papers #3684-z, SHC.

seldom saw their parents and only received communications from them at the slow speed of nineteenth-century mail services, delivered by stagecoach. Not surprisingly, then some students seemed to expect feeling homesick. In 1844, William Bagley wrote to his boyhood friend, Samuel Watts, who was a student at Randolph Macon College in Virginia, about the prevalence of homesickness among college youth. “Do you recollect the conversation we had in your father’s piazza before you left when I told you that you would soon become home-sick & you seemed so confident that you would not?” Bagley asked Watts. “Ah! I knew, for I had tried that thing myself & I expect that weeks appear to you something like years,” he explained. Bagley had felt exactly that way when he first arrived at Chapel Hill, he told his friend. Making matters worse he did not have any friends from home with him at college and felt alienated from life on campus.²²

Homesickness sometimes interfered with studies. In 1820, one student wrote to his cousin that his mind frequently wandered from his studies to thoughts of home. In addition to feeling dissatisfied with the teaching of philosophy and “chymistry,” which he wanted to study most, he felt listless in the absence of familiar faces. When reading history, he complained, “My mind is frequently & imperceptably [sic] abstracted from the treatise of the author, by the recollection of my relations, my friends & the pain of my acquaintance in Virginia, from whom, I so reluctantly parted & who are ever present to my mind, during my time of relaxation.” He felt confident however that his “homesick thoughts are wearing off, & I am in hopes within a few weeks to resume my wonted cheerfulness & be able to devote my attention solely to the acquirement of literary

²² William Bagley to Samuel Watts, 14 October 1844, Folder 2, Volume 2, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC,9-10.

knowledge.”²³ Similarly, in 1840, Walter Lenoir complained to his father that he felt like a stranger in Chapel Hill and explained, “[M]y thoughts are all at home.” Indeed, Walter had difficulty finding motivation to study, though he aspired to be a great lawyer and scholar. “My studies lose their usual interest, and I am dull and listless in the performance of my duties,” he wrote to his father. “And why is it, except that I have not heard from those I love most? Morning after morning, I go to the post office, and come away, disappointed and sad.”²⁴ Walter even toyed with leaving college altogether.

Many students were also bored and frequently noted the “dryness of the times about Chapel Hill.”²⁵ Aside from the two student literary societies, there were no other organizations for what we would call today “student life,” including organized athletics. Hugh Torrence wrote to a friend from home in 1828, for example, “The times have been very dull indeed since I returned I have no sport at all the only amusement I have when I am not at study, is my flute. I hope you have more lively times than these....”²⁶ And in 1842, James Dusenbery wrote in his diary, “The week has passed away without a single incident occurring [sic] to break the dull monotony of College life.”²⁷ Some students felt that the only thing that made them feel better were letters from home, which they read as much as twice or three times a day.²⁸

²³ D. Wilkins to Thomas Williamson Jones, 02 April 1820, Folder 2, Thomas Williamson Jones Papers #3684-z, SHC.

²⁴ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 01 February 1840, Folder 78, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

²⁵ John, T. Jones, 16 April 1836, Box 1, Folder 3, James Gwyn Papers #298, SHC. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Hugh Torrence to William Latta, 04 September 1828, Box 1, Folder 5, UNC Personal Papers, Misc. #3129, SHC.

²⁷ Dusenbery, Diary, 24 April 1842.

²⁸ Henry Francis Jones, Diary, Folder 1, Henry Francis Jones Diary #3019-z, SHC.

Freshmen, in particular, experienced intense alienation and occasionally violence in the name of juvenile fun. Hazing was common. The most insidious form of hazing in the antebellum period was called “smoking out.” This ritual involved closing at least one young man up in a room filled with dozens of lit cigars and leaving him to suffocate. One student recalled the gross details of “smoking” freshmen: “Heard of the Sophs smoking the [freshmen] till they vomited and one of them...was very ill which greatly frightened them.”²⁹ Younger students also wrote home about the prevalence of swearing, gambling, and fighting on campus. They worried that they, too, might fall prey to idleness and dissipation.

Many older students struggled to make the transition from being dependent to independent, especially when parents did not seem to support their ambitions to receive a higher education.³⁰ For example, William Sidney Mullins wished to become a great scholar and a renowned lawyer, but he did not enjoy much parental support. His father, John Mullins, was a well-respected Fayetteville grocer, and his mother, Athena, was a pious Methodist. His father had encouraged Mullins from an early age to value education, but his mother was skeptical of the influence of book learning on her son’s piety. The Mullinses were financially well-off (thanks to his mother’s wealth) and lived in North Carolina’s second largest town, but Mullins often dreaded vacation because of recurring domestic unpleasantness. “The session flies off rapidly and I shall soon be at home enjoying once more its calm content and peaceful pleasures,” he wrote in

²⁹ Henry Armand London, Jr., Diary, Folder 2, Vol. 1, Henry Armand London Papers #868-z, SHC, 65. See also Edwin W. Fuller, *Sea-Gift: A Novel* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, Publishers, 1873), 191-94.

³⁰ William Bagley to D. W. Bagley, 13 September 1843, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC.

November 1840. But then he recalled his last vacation and added, “But are my dreams of happiness there to be rudely destroyed as usual?”³¹

One cause of the unpleasantness at home was Mullins’ escalating battle with his mother over religion. Over the course of his three years at North Carolina, Mullins had become disaffected with his mother’s Methodist faith. During his sophomore year, he fell in with the wrong crowd and even toyed with the idea of atheism.³² He disavowed the Methodist church completely and viewed it as an impediment to his intellectual and moral formation. He sneered at the demonstrable lack of education and eloquence among Methodist and Presbyterian preachers. So during his junior and senior years, he began attending the Chapel of the Cross, the newly built Episcopal church in Chapel Hill, which had been founded and presided over by a popular professor, William Mercer Green. Green’s sermons had lasting impressions on Mullins, who desired conversion to the Episcopal faith. Following one sermon in February 1841, for instance, Mullins recalled being “considerably affected by the sermon, and felt a still stronger desire to become a Christian.” He prayed to be “speedily converted,” but as an ambitious scholar, he desired a faith more suited to his intellect than to his heart.³³ These feelings erupted in confrontations when Mullins, on visits home during his senior year, was forced to explain to his mother his dissatisfaction with Methodism. After he attended the Methodist church with his family, for example, he “walked out to the pond and wept,” knowing that he was disappointing his mother anguished him. “I sat by the fire talking and receiving advice

³¹ Mullins, Diary, 04 November 1840. Judith Mitchell Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill: The College Odyssey of William Sidney Mullins, 1840-42,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1993, 57- 65.

³² Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 67.

³³ Mullins, Diary, 04 July 1841; 07 February 1841; 20 June 1841; 10 July 1841.

and entreaties of my mother until the stage came” that night to take him back to Chapel Hill. He left for college convinced that he would “treasure her admonitions and endeavor to let them guide my actions,” though they only continued to torment him as he grew increasingly callous toward evangelicalism.

William Mullins’ family life also fractured along other lines. His mother and father seemed to have had a strained relationship that affected his emotional life. Mullins’ diary entries refer (vaguely) to repeated unpleasant incidents that occurred in his family when he visited during vacations. “Family dissension have embittered all my hours and made that home, which should be a haven of bliss, a scene of torment,” he wrote in July 1841. “It is not a pleasant place,” he explained. “It is painful to confess this even to myself: it carries with it a sting and I feel degraded in my own eyes.”³⁴ Mullins never suggested any cause for this family strife, though it weighed on him heavily while he pursued his ambitions at college.³⁵ In all, Mullins came to realize that his transition to manhood—to complete independence—would not be as smooth as his boyhood imaginings led him to believe.

Age—especially the growing pains associated with independence—often discouraged many students. At college, they became anxious about their newfound independence. They tried to act like men, but in many ways still felt like boys, tied to family and to youth culture. In this state of “semidependence,” many students searched

³⁴ Mullins, Diary, 13 June 1841.

³⁵ Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 64-66. Ishkanian speculates that the source of domestic strife was that John Mullins had a drinking problem. She also uses census records, which indicate the youngest son lived at home for a long time, had a physical disability that caused the family grief. These are all possible, but the evidence does not offer any conclusive reason for the bitterness Mullins felt for his family life.

for consolation and inspiration to become the great men that they dreamed, as boys, of becoming.³⁶

Living Up to Expectations: Youth & Adult Encouragement

When it came to dealing with growing pains associated with separation from home, some students relied on family encouragement that engendered in them a desire to do well. For many students, their principal aim was to earn the praise and respect of their parents, and they often expressed deference to parental authority. This was the case for Walter Lenoir, whose father's "ardent wish" was that Walter "should one day be an accomplished scholar." Walter considered achieving this goal through higher education to be "the highest aim" of his "ambition."³⁷ He was a serious youth—the historian William Barney has described him as "serious, bookish, and frail" and the Lenoir's "favored child."³⁸ He attended the Bingham School in Hillsborough, North Carolina before he enrolled at the University of North Carolina in 1839.³⁹ Raised a conscientious Episcopalian, Walter was dismayed by the immorality of youth culture on campus and frequently cited his fellow students' idleness and dissipation as an impediment to his own progress. Walter also grew frustrated with his studies. He wrote home about boredom with classes often and begged to leave college and study independently. The only thing

³⁶ Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 11-37; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 56.

³⁷ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 17 February 1841, Folder 81, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC. Also see Richard Henry Lewis, 24 September 1825, John Francis Speight Papers #3914, SHC; Joseph John Summerell, Diary, Joseph John Summerell Diary #5296-z, SHC.

³⁸ William L. Barney, *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir's Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 32-36.

³⁹ Robert Curtis, "The Bingham School and Classical Education in North Carolina, 1793-1873," *North Carolina Historical Review* (1996): 328-77. For a student's impressions of education at the Bingham School see Peter Wilson Hairston to Samuel Hairston, 02 March 1833, Box 14, Folder 128, Wilson and Hairston Family Papers #4134, SHC.

that seemed to motivate him was his parents' continued "approbation," the "most powerful motive that impells [sic] me to action."⁴⁰ Walter's father—as well as David Swain, the university president—ultimately convinced him to remain at college, and Walter ended up doing quite well. He received a top distinction for his academic performance upon graduating. The "highest gratification" from having received a distinction at commencement, Walter explained to his parents in a letter shortly before he was graduated in May 1843, was that their "pleasure and approbation" were more valuable to him than "the applause of a nation."⁴¹

Parents usually were not the most immediate source of either ambition or encouragement. Nor were their entreaties particularly effective in light of the strong peer culture on campus. But the faculty were nearby and usually quite accessible. Faculty helped to bridge the transition from youth to manhood in several ways. First, and most obviously, they relied on discipline. In most cases, fears of being expelled, even temporarily "rusticated" (i.e. sent away from college) were the primary means of disciplining youth. Second, faculty required attendance at daily prayers and weekly chapel services. Since 1795, when the University first opened its doors to students, daily chapel services were an important inducement to morality, where young men learned how to lead virtuous, manly lives. Third, faculty also seemed to cultivate close relationships with some students. In Walter Lenoir's case, for example, he met privately with David Swain for encouragement about his future. Other faculty spoke with students in their homes and recommended books. These relationships honored students' growing

⁴⁰ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 01 February 1840, Folder 78, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

⁴¹ Walter W. Lenoir and Thomas Lenoir, 03 May 1843, Folder 87, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

sense of independence and still provided a sense of parental guidance that many students desired.

By the antebellum period, faculty at colleges and universities across the early republic began awarding distinctions to students in order to promote good deportment and studiousness, and the trustees of the University of North Carolina did so too in the 1830s.⁴² University faculty evaluated students' deportment, attendance at prayers and recitations, and their academic performance with terms such as "very good," "good," "respectable," and "tolerable." Reports were sent to parents at the end of terms, but these usually summarized a student's overall performance, but not by individual course. Still, if the intention was to make students more accountable for their academics, grading worked, though students often complained about its necessity and effectiveness.⁴³ In 1835, Charles Pettigrew wrote to his father, "The trustees passed a law that the parents of each student should be informed of the manner he was conducting himself in the institution." But he questioned the effectiveness of grading and explained that it was "very difficult to distinguish between men nearly equal." He also added, "the teacher is biased sometimes in favour of one to the disparagement of another."⁴⁴ Complaints aside, Charles believed that the grading system worked. "There has been a much greater amount of studying in college since this plan has been adopted," Charles wrote to his father, several weeks later in November 1835. All the students "wish a good account to be sent to their parents and friends. It would be a gratification and more than probably a

⁴² David F. Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975).

⁴³ Battle, *History*, 532. See also Lisa Tolbert, ed. *Two Hundred Years of Student Life at Chapel Hill: Selected Letters and Diaries*. Southern Research Report #4. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for the Study of the American South, IRSS Faculty Working Group in Southern Studies, 1993), 85.

⁴⁴ Charles L. Pettigrew, 11 October 1835, Pettigrew Family Papers #592, SHC.

permanent good to have an account of what the faculty consider us in our college duties.”⁴⁵

Grade reports, as much as they may have changed department and academic performance on campus, were very general. Typically, a grade report described the curriculum at North Carolina on the front side and a student’s performance on the reverse. Tod Caldwell’s grade report, for example, read that the faculty “have the pleasure to state that your son, is regarded as an excellent scholar, and of exemplary deportment.”⁴⁶ In addition to sending summary reports to parents, the faculty met at the end of each session to determine a student’s standing with respect to his classmates. The faculty discussed students’ individual academic performances in each class and then voted on who deserved a first, second, or third distinction. (Students called those who were so distinguished “1st, 2nd and 3rd ‘might’ men.”) Kemp Battle, who was graduated from North Carolina in 1849, recalled in his *History of the University of North Carolina*, “Those who obtained "very good" in all, or nearly all, their studies, had the first distinction. Those who averaged "good" obtained the second distinction. The “very respectable" had the third distinction.” The faculty announced the recipients of the three highest distinctions annually at commencement; they were also published in newspapers.⁴⁷ These distinctions were highly coveted, especially among more motivated students.

⁴⁵ Charles L. Pettigrew, 7 November 1835, Pettigrew Family Papers #592, SHC. On other students’ reactions to grading, see James Lawrence Dusenbery, Diary, 03 October 1841, SHC; William S. Grandy, 31 July 1842, Willis G. Briggs Papers #3077, SHC.

⁴⁶ “A grade report for Tod Caldwell to John Caldwell,” Circular, 15 April 1837, Box 1, Folder 8, John Caldwell Papers, SHC.

⁴⁷ Battle, *History*, 553-54.

As was the case in the northeast, this meritocratic system instilled bourgeois values in young southern students, as a class set of essays on the topic demonstrates.⁴⁸ Richmond Pearson explained the importance of systems of merit in an 1840 Junior Oration: “The hope of reward is the prime mover of every action in life. What, we would ask, incites us to practice the virtues of industry, and frugality in the common affairs of life: but the hope of acquiring that competence which is necessary to its enjoyment?” A merit-based system, in other words, inspired other cultural values most commonly associated with middle-class culture of the self-made man: industry, sobriety, and self-discipline.⁴⁹ The establishment of distinctions indicates that these new attitudes about youth had trickled down into the culture at large.⁵⁰

These values did not go uncontested. Some students resisted having to compete for distinctions. In 1840, for example, Charles Phillips, a student and son of the professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, James Phillips, argued, “No where is this trait more strongly developed than in youth, where the blood runs tumultuously through the veins, and the feelings are not restrained by the dictates of reason.”⁵¹ Other students found the antebellum meritocratic system discouraging and emotionally difficult to bear. Edmund Covington was very disappointed when he received a report in 1842 that he did not believe reflected his intellect. “I struggled hard to crown the hopes and wishes of my friends at home and to secure the approbation of the faculty here. But what is my reward?” he wondered. Rather than motivate this “[s]ensitive and generous youth,” the

⁴⁸ Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 94-95.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Richmond Nicholas Pearson, [Junior] Oration [ca. 1840], Senior and Junior Orations, NCC. See also Robert Duncan Dickson, [Junior] Oration [ca. 1840], *ibid.*

⁵¹ Charles Phillips, “[On College Distinctions]” [ca. 1840], Senior and Junior Orations, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, UNC-CH.

faculty's report diminished his "hopes which had been quickened by the prayers of friends" and "blasted" and "checked" his "innocent and laudable ambition." Worse, he feared his grade report besmirched his reputation among friends, who had hitherto "flattered" Covington "to think that I am not without the advantages of some degree of intellect." "I have studied mainly for my improvement," he explained, "But a youth of my age and character sets a high value on a reputation for qualities whether of the head or heart. My fellow students know that I have studied—they know my report and altho' [sic] they may tell me that the faculty are unjust, they will rejoice at that injustice in secret."⁵²

Faculty did not resort to merit alone to inspire students. They also encouraged young men by offering friendly guidance, which had become a common tactic for advising youth after 1820. William Hooper, professor of classical languages, delivered many addresses that the students requested to be published. In an 1830 "Discourse on Education," for example, Hooper reminded students that "the chief business of education is, to develope [sic], to cultivate, and to train towards perfection, all the useful and agreeable powers of man" and to do that, students needed to rally "on the side of virtue." Hooper urged students, whom he addressed as "my young friends," to reform their habits and guard against pernicious conduct common to college life. "How must a son, who has spent a night in drinking, gaming, or debauchery, dread lest his irregularities should reach the knowledge of his parents," he asked, rhetorically. No student could "rise in the morning with a conscience void of offence [sic]" and attain "all the honors that collegiate

⁵² Edmund Covington, Diary, 06 October 1842.

acquirements can confer,” unless he obtained from dissipation.⁵³ Hooper used a familiar antebellum technique of appealing to students as friends. He offered friendly, though grave, advice about conduct in order to guide students in the right course toward distinction in college and in life generally.⁵⁴

Students also read guidance from well-known moralists, whose published lectures and conduct manuals circulated among students. Students also had access to published advice manuals that had come into vogue in the 1830s and 1840s. Inventories of the libraries of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies indicate that students had access to a sizeable and diverse collection of sermons and advice manuals for young men. Between 1834, when society records began, and 1848, more than thirty titles relating to young men’s behavior, manners, and moral circulated in each library. Titles ranged from *Guide to Men and Manners*, to George Thomas’ *Young Man’s Guide*, to *Youth and Manhood* to John Todd’s *Student’s Manual*. John Todd was a Congregational minister who traveled throughout the Northeastern United States in the 1830s, delivering lectures to college students about the dangers of idleness and dissipation. His book gave students advice that included suggestions for proper use of time, reading, and identifying and avoiding vice, especially of a sexual nature.⁵⁵ Ruffin Tomlinson, for example, read and praised Todd’s manual because “it gives excellent advice to every young man.”⁵⁶ These books

⁵³ William Hooper, *The Discipline of the Heart, To Be Connected with the Culture of the Mind; a Discourse on Education, Delivered to the Students of the College, at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, August 22, 1830, and Published by Their Request* (New York: Sleight and Robinson, Printers, 1830), 1, 8, 12-13, 19-20.

⁵⁴ See Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 127.

⁵⁵ On sex and student culture, see Chapter Six.

⁵⁶ John L. Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, the University of North Carolina, 1841-1842,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* XXX (January 1953), 234. John Todd, *The Student’s Manual* (Northampton, Mass.: Bridgman and Childs, 1876).

proved useful to many students who looked to them for advice and encouragement in college.

In sum, college life often proved to be a substantial impediment—socially, emotionally, and morally—to students’ development. Though more independent than ever before in their lives, students still needed (and many desired) advice to bridge the transition from youth to manhood. They found many sources for external encouragement from parents, faculty, and even popular advice manuals. But no source of encouragement was so strong as that which young men received from one another.

Encouragement from Peers

Students played the most important role in bridging the transition between youth and manhood, especially in the student-organized Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies. These societies were the only institutions of student life for most of the antebellum period, and every student joined one or the other, though membership was not compulsory. Following a tradition of student literary associations that had begun in the early eighteenth century, the Di and Phi Societies were intended for and governed by youth; maturation, as a result, was a primary concern in each society.⁵⁷ In weekly

⁵⁷ Battle, *History*, 72-76. James Leloudis, “What Should a University Be? Students, Curriculum, and Campus Life at the University of North Carolina” in *Two Hundred Years of Student Life at Chapel Hill*, 4-5. On the history of literary societies, see Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 25; David Potter, “The Literary Society,” Karl R. Wallace, ed., *History of Speech Education in America* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 238-240. The first known student club in North America was founded in 1716. In 1722, the collegians at Harvard formed the Spy Club, which was the first literary and debating society to appear in North America. By the eve of the American Revolution, students elsewhere had formed literary societies, sometimes with the urging of college presidents, at Yale, William and Mary, Princeton (College of New Jersey), Columbia (King’s College), and Rutgers (Queen’s College). Following the Revolution, the number of American colleges and universities tripled in an effort to see the new republican experiment to fruition, and literary societies likewise grew in number and in significance. See David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 186.

meetings, students disseminated widely held beliefs about the unique importance of youth for development as adults. For example, in 1805, Robert Donnell read before the Dialectic Society a self-authored composition, explaining that youth was the time to lay the foundation for greatness. “Youth is the time to establish those practices which will adhere to us in old age,” he wrote, “and if we sow the seeds of vice, we cannot expect to reap the fruit of virtue. A man of education but destitute of virtue will never become respectable in the world unless among his equals; whereas a virtuous man will never want respectable friends.”⁵⁸ Or as another student explained forty-five years later, youth was “pliant,” a phase of life in which one’s individual nature was in a “state of fluidity and transition.” Youth, therefore needed structure, and the literary society provided that structure. Students needed to cultivate “habits of industry and sobriety and reflection,” which alone “determine whether you are to rank among the ornaments of society, or among the grovelling [sic] tribes of drones and profligates who counter the earth with an existence alike useless and mischievous.”⁵⁹ Thus in the process of guiding one another to manhood, students also transmitted cultural values conventionally associated with the northern middle class, including industry, temperance, and emulation.

Society laws helped students cultivate these values. Each society had a constitution and bylaws that promoted both intellectual work and character formation by regulating student behavior during society meetings. Each society’s rules and regulations were meant to “excite a generous and laudable spirit of emulation” because they were “based on a well known and universal principle of our nature—the love fame.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Robert John Donnell, Composition, 03 August 1805, Dialectic Society Records, 5.

⁵⁹ Julius Alexander Caldwell, Inaugural Address, 06 April 1850, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Jesse Potts Smith, Inaugural Address, 19 July 1844, *ibid.*

Moreover, each constitution provided for a core of officers—a President, Vice President, Secretary, Critics, and a Censor Morum—who enforced rules and exacted punishments (fines) in order to promote a love of fame among members. These officers were supposed to exemplify industry and virtue, especially to younger members.

The presidents of each society played a special role in creating an ambiance fit for cultivating ambition. Presidents customarily delivered addresses to members each term, critiquing the society's progress. Presidential addresses typically emphasized that discipline, order, and regularity led to the success of each student and the society as a whole. Students grounded this in republican ideas about a body politic. In 1813, for example Charles Manly stressed “the necessity of regularity and unanimity in all social compacts, together with a strict adherence to those laws and regulations by which they are conducted.”⁶¹ It was a given, he argued, that their society was like any other civil association—a collection of members bound together by a social contract, comprised of individuals each responsible to the success of their association. He argued, “It behoves you therefore as members of this society, all equally interested in its welfare to render its situation prosperous by your habitual regularity.”⁶² Each student, moreover, had a duty to check the behavior of his classmates. “[S]ince we are so constituted, the society being composed of individual members, that we must all ‘share in the disgrace and participate in the honor of each member’,” another student explained in 1859, “it becomes a duty

⁶¹ Manly, Inaugural Address, 28 August 1813, Dialectic Society Records.

⁶² Ibid. See also William James Cowan, Inaugural Address, 1808, Dialectic Society Records; John Wilder Cameron, Inaugural Address, 03 February 1848, *ibid.* Students in the Old South were not unlike their northern counterparts who, according to James McLachlan found “an extraordinarily intense and unremittent system of education by peers” in their literary societies. See “The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University in Society*, edited by Lawrence Stone (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 474.

which every member not only owes to society but to himself, that he not only act correctly, but also see that the deportment of others is good.”⁶³

Members enforced behavioral standards rigidly. The society had a system of fines whereby students had to pay small amounts of money if they laughed audibly or talked in the hall, picked fights, showed up late, opted out of reading a composition or participating in a debate. It seemed to them “unworthy the dignity of the Dialectic Society, that while in session, if anything laughable occurs, most, if not all its members, more after the manner of schoolboys than of men, as you claim to be, should break out...into loud and uproarious laughter.”⁶⁴ All sorts of measures were put in place to help youth acquire a work ethic. Often students would rather pay a fine than to participate in society exercises, but the Society did not look well upon that behavior. “The Society would rather make men of you, than deprive you of your money,” one student argued, and then recommended that members “come out then and act nobly your part.” The Dialectic Society and its “requirements,” he argued, “if strictly attended to, would be, emphatically, the best High School preparatory to after life.” Students were clear that industry, sobriety, self-discipline were absolutely necessary for the vision of a good society and the cultivation of a virtuous man. This ethic was quintessentially bourgeois and foundational to the culture to which they aspired.⁶⁵

Literary society rules and regulations were also compatible with the southern tradition of honor. Joseph John Jackson used an agricultural metaphor in his inaugural address to the Dialectic Society in 1838, for example, in order to illustrate how the laws

⁶³ Lucius Frierson, “Retributive Dreams,” 05 March 1859, Dialectic Society Records, 1.

⁶⁴ Junius Cullen Battle, Inaugural Address, 16 September 1859, Dialectic Society Records.

⁶⁵ James Hooper Colton, Inaugural Address, 18 August 1854, Dialectic Society Records.

and regulations in the Society as well as the friendships among members, helped in the cultivation of virtue. Like the farmer who rids his garden of weeds that obstruct a plant's growth, "the laws for our regulation...open the path of honor and distinction to our view." And each member is charged to point out anyone who "is destitute of the 'mens conscia sibi recti,'" or "that independent consciousness of integrity which can characterize the gentleman and man of honor by associating with gentlemen in this hall he too is turned from the contemplation of his kindred earth and his views directed to what is truly honorable and worth contending for."⁶⁶

Behavioral problems, nevertheless, disrupted the societies' weekly business throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Each society's minute books present a list of various lapses in behavior ranging from apathy to drunkenness to querulousness to swearing. In 1844, for example, John Wesley Long listed behavioral problems in weekly Dialectic Society meetings, among which were apathy and an "unkind disposition of laughing at new members."⁶⁷ But in general, it was the duty of the Censor Morum—named after the Censor of the Roman Senate, who was in charge of censuring senators' behavior—to "notice every violation of the laws of society that comes under their observation." If they did not do their job, however, they too were "returnable for non-performance of duty." In this way, every member, including officers, was liable to be fined.⁶⁸

Laws, rules, fines, and peer enforcement were important mechanisms that encouraged students to participate actively in literary society duties because they also

⁶⁶ Joseph John Jackson, Inaugural Address, 06 February 1838, Dialectic Society.

⁶⁷ John Wesley Long, Inaugural Address, 18 April 1844, Dialectic Society Records.

⁶⁸ Virginius Henry Ivy, Inaugural Address, 18 October 1844, Dialectic Records.

helped to fuel a healthy spirit of competition between the two rival societies. Students viewed this as healthy emulation. The literary society rivalry, like the grade-based merit system, encouraged students to cultivate ambition, pursue greatness, and cultivate sound intellectual and moral characters. The rivalry gave purpose to the student experiences beyond the allurements of pleasing parents, learning for learning's sake, and succeeding in a merit-based system of evaluation. Intersociety rivalry depended on demonstrable virtues—order, sobriety, wisdom, and academic distinctions—in each society. Students believed none of those virtues could be possible without true and lasting friendships.

Friendships forged through intellectual work in literary societies helped to encourage and inspire many students to cultivate values that would prepare them for manhood.⁶⁹ In literary societies, young men assembled as a “band of brothers.”⁷⁰ When, for example, new members of the Dialectic Society pledged their honor to the Society, they promised to work to “contract a Friendship,” with one another “which shall not be forgotten, when we meet in the serious business of Life.”⁷¹ Members of each society maintained, moreover, that only friendships rooted in mutual attainment of wisdom and virtue were true. “If you are desirous of living agreeable to your Companions and fellows, can you firmly establish either friendship or esteem without paying any regard to mental acquirements?” asked one member of the Dialectic Society in 1841. No friendship, he went on to argue, was ever permanent or meaningful, “whose union &

⁶⁹ Mary Kelley has inspired me to explore the connections between friendship and learning. See *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 16. In the early national and antebellum South, as in the North, men relied on intimate friendships with other men for mutual support throughout life. See Anya Jabour, “Male Friendship and Masculinity in the Early National South: William Wirt and His Friends,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 20 (Spring 2000), 83-87; 106-111.

⁷⁰ John Wilder Cameron, Composition, 1848, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷¹ “Dialectic Society Minutes,” 1798-1804, Volume 3, Dialectic Records, UA. Also see Jeremiah Battle, Address, 1799, Dialectic Society Records.

intimacy” was not “formed with a view to our improvement” and a desire to be wise.⁷² Moreover, students told one another to beware hasty friendships, which were made superficially and defied “sound policy and rational judgment.”⁷³ Though each literary society had members who did not get along, members regulated as much as possible any rivalries, or at least attempted to enforce codes of conduct that might ameliorate soured friendships, in an effort to promote healthy friendships. Those friendships forged in literary societies, in turn, would encourage students to develop qualities expected of elite men, including industry, temperance, mutual aid, and sympathy.⁷⁴

In short, members of literary societies relied on many different rhetorical tactics to encourage one another, particularly the less-motivated members, to work hard. They reminded one another of the value of education, obligation to family and to community, and the need for ambition. Young men relied on students’ age-consciousness to encourage students to take their maturation seriously. These messages that youth shared with one another in the halls of their literary society echoed the language of America’s emerging bourgeois culture—self-discipline, sobriety, industry, friendship, and emulation became tools for inspiration for students as they prepared for adulthood.

Constructing Manly Lives: Emulation

Emulation was an important cultural practice by which the American bourgeoisie articulated values related to self-making and ambition, and students turned to great men

⁷² George Shonnard Bettner, Inaugural Address, September 1822, Dialectic Society Records. See also Samuel Thomas Hauser, Inaugural Address, 01 April 1817; Hector H. McAlister, Address, 1841, Dialectic Society Records; Charles L. Manly, Valedictory Address, 23 June 1814, Dialectic Society Records ; Robert Williams Henry, Inaugural Address, 1835, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷³ John Davis Hawkins, Inaugural Address, 04 September 1800, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷⁴ William Polk Boylan, Inaugural Address, 20 October 1824, Dialectic Society Records; William Martin Crenshaw, Inaugural Address, 23 February 1833, Dialectic Society Records, UA.

as examples of who they could become and what they could accomplish. One of the important functions of emulation, as the intellectual historian Walter Houghton reminds us, was “moral inspiration.” Houghton writes: “To the Victorians a hero might be a messiah or he might be a revelation of God, but he was certain to be a man of the highest moral stature, and therefore of enormous importance.”⁷⁵ Great men achieved distinction, students believed “through continual exertion for the development of physical and mental abilities, from youth to old age.”⁷⁶ Students relied on a pantheon of heroes ranging the history of Western Civilization through the American republic, including Alexander the Great, Peter the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin as moral inspiration. Most importantly, students looked to North Carolina heroes who achieved fame and distinction in public life and, therefore, modeled intellectual manhood.

The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies’ portrait collections provided images for moral inspiration and served as tools to guide young men to adulthood. These societies acquired twenty-six portraits during the antebellum period. The sources do not suggest an immediate reason why students decided to collect portraits, but it seems likely that they knew about a similar enterprise among members of Princeton’s Cliosophic Society.⁷⁷ The Philanthropic Society was the first of the two societies at the University of North Carolina to begin collecting portraits, when they resolved in 1818 to acquire a portrait of Johnston Blakely, an alumnus member of the Philanthropic Society who also

⁷⁵ Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 316.

⁷⁶ Samuel Holms, 04 April 1851, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷⁷ Joseph K. L. Reckford, “The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies Portraits, 1795-1868,” Honors Essay, University of North Carolina, 1981, 1-15. According to Reckford, North Carolina students joined other American collegians in their efforts to acquire portraits. William and Mary had collected two portraits between 1720 and 1732, Harvard had six by 1800, and Bowdoin College created a portrait gallery in 1811 when James Bowdoin III bequeathed his family pictures to the college.

served in the War of 1812. A few months later, they resolved to acquire a portrait of Joseph Caldwell, then President of the College. Then, on April 18, 1821, the Philanthropic Society officially resolved to make portrait collection part of their regular institutional business when a member moved, “that it be requested by Society that such regular members as have attained considerable eminence of which Society will be judge, shall furnish Society with their portraits.” Four years later, in 1826, the Dialectic Society acquired its first portraits, which were of William R. Davie, the University’s founder, and William Hooper, an alumnus who would become a beloved Latin professor in the antebellum period.⁷⁸ The only portrait of an individual who was not associated with the University was that of Benjamin Franklin, which the Philanthropic Society commissioned in 1826. Given their high monetary and cultural value, societies placed their portraits in expensive frames and protected them with green gauze. Students usually tried to keep the portraits clean and protected, but reports of inattention to them appear in each society’s record books.⁷⁹ By virtue of their monetary value alone, these portraits reflected students’ membership to elite society. But their moral value was much greater, for they reminded young men of exemplary men associated with the University, whose successes inspired them or whose own teaching and leadership had inspired their fathers’ or brothers’, or even their grandfathers’ generation of North Carolina students to achieve “intellectual manhood.”

⁷⁸ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 18 April 1821, Philanthropic Society of the University of North Carolina Records #40166, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter Philanthropic Society Records). See also Philanthropic Society Minutes, 03 April 1822, *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Reckford, “The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies Portraits, 1795-1868,” 15-25.

Students ascribed great cultural value to portraits, viewing them as sources for emulation, for education in a great noble spirit of manhood. In 1854, Evander McIver asked his fellow members of the Dialectic Society whether they needed “any stronger encouragement to excel in mental and moral culture” than that provided by model Alumni, whose portraits graced the walls of their society. Quoting memorable verses from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, McIver explained the profound value of emulation:

Lives of all great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime
And in dying leave behind us
Foot prints on the sands of time
Foot-prints that perhaps another sailing on life’s stormy main
Some forlorn + shipwrecked brother
Seeing may take heart again.⁸⁰

Portraits of famous lawyers, clergy, and professors who graduated from the University of North Carolina indeed reminded students that they, too, could rise to greatness. Leroy McAfee explained in 1857, for example: “And why I ask are these portraits suspended upon our walls? Surely they are for some other purpose than simple ornament. In the language of Cicero, they are here not only for our contemplation but also for us to imitate the immortal prototypes, that by placing them constantly before our view we may strive to mould our feelings and thoughts by reflecting on the character of these illustrious men.”⁸¹ Portraits, in other words, placed in view of every literary society member the ideal qualities of intellectual manhood, thereby exciting emulation of its noblest qualities. Several examples from the Dialectic and Philanthropic Society portrait collections show

⁸⁰ Longfellow quoted in Evander J. McIver, Inaugural Address, July 1854, Dialectic Society Records. Strike in original.

⁸¹ Leroy Magnum McAfee, Inaugural Address, 18 September 1857, Dialectic Society Records. On famous alumni as inspiration, see also John Lindsay Morehead, “Presidential Address of John L. Morehead. Blandwood N.C. Dec. 1852,” *ibid.*, 1-2; James Turner Morehead, Jr., Inaugural Address, 16 October 1857, *ibid.*

that portraits conveyed a coherent set of manly ideals that included erudition, sobriety, and dedication to state and national prosperity.

The portrait of William Miller (Fig. 5), North Carolina's Governor between 1814 and 1817, serves as an important example of the role that state leadership played as an inspiration for and inducement to students' developing ambitions. Miller had matriculated at North Carolina in 1802 and joined the Philanthropic Society. He was never graduated from the University, but he served as a trustee from 1814 until 1825. He had been a member of the North Carolina House of Commons and served as Speaker between 1811 and 1814, when he was elected for a one year term as Governor. When his gubernatorial term ended, Miller went on to practice law and eventually served two terms in the State Senate between 1820 and 1822. John Quincy Adams, when he was President, appointed Miller Chargé d'Affaires to Guatemala in 1825. Miller died at sea en route to Guatemala in 1825. The Philanthropic society acquired a portrait of Miller in May 1846 "as a present from Mr. C.B. Root of Raleigh," who made the medals for the Phi Society.⁸²

⁸² Ibid., 113-115.

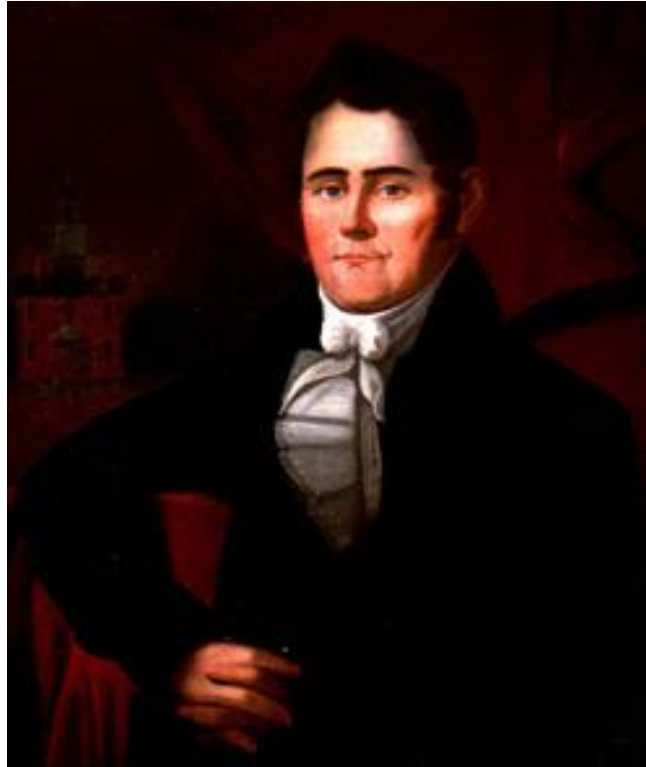


Figure 5 - Portrait of William Miller (1783-1825) by Jacob Marling (1774-1833). Unsigned. Oil on Canvas, 25-1/2"x30" (64 x 76 cm). Philanthropic Society Portrait Collection, Philanthropic Society Hall, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

In the portrait, Miller stands in the foreground as a distinguished man with a high collar and formal scarf around his neck, his hands confidently clasped around a chair draped with luxurious fabric. The background illustrates the state capitol building as it must have looked in the first decade of the nineteenth-century, before it burned around 1830 and was rebuilt. Both background landscape and foreground portrait represented the image of intellectual manhood and the work students hoped to do—service to the state as represented by the capitol through diligent perusal of letters, especially law.

In many cases, portraits in the Di and Phi collections depicted a subject's profession and personality with the use of background objects and landscape. These were typically related to profession. Governor David Lowry Swain's portrait (Fig. 5) depicts a man of letters par excellence. He came to Chapel Hill in 1836, one year after the

University's well-respected president, Joseph Caldwell, died. Many critics among the faculty and trustees believed he was a lax administrator and a feeble scholar. But Swain was widely popular among the students, who admired him and liked his courses in legal and constitutional history, moral philosophy, and political economy. Swain undertook a massive campaign to renew the university and recruit students and he managed to draw in more students than the University had ever accommodated. He also improved the campus and expanded the curriculum. His broad interest in history led him to establish the North Carolina Historical Society for the purpose of archiving documents related to state history.⁸³

In the portrait (Fig. 6), Swain sits in a cushioned chair in front of a simple neoclassical column with a rounded base, standing to the right of a book case of large volumes. A dark curtain drapes over the shelf and column. One volume appears to be withdrawn from the shelf, as Swain holds it comfortably in his left hand. His right arm rests against a wooden side table; paper documents are spread across the table, some of which lay open-faced while others are rolled together neatly. Leaning slightly to the left and looking forward, Swain is wearing a black suit jacket with matching pants, a white shirt, and a dark-colored bowtie. His dark, almost wistful hair and relaxed forehead suggest comfortable belonging in the room; his deep, penetrating eyes and relaxed jaw nevertheless command deference. This setting befits the professor who read law with seniors from Blackstone's *Commentaries*, who taught moral philosophy, and whose presence encouraged many students in attendance at the University in the antebellum period.

⁸³ "David Lowry Swain," *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979-1996), *Documenting the American South*, http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/bios/pn0001638_bio.html (accessed January 27, 2010).

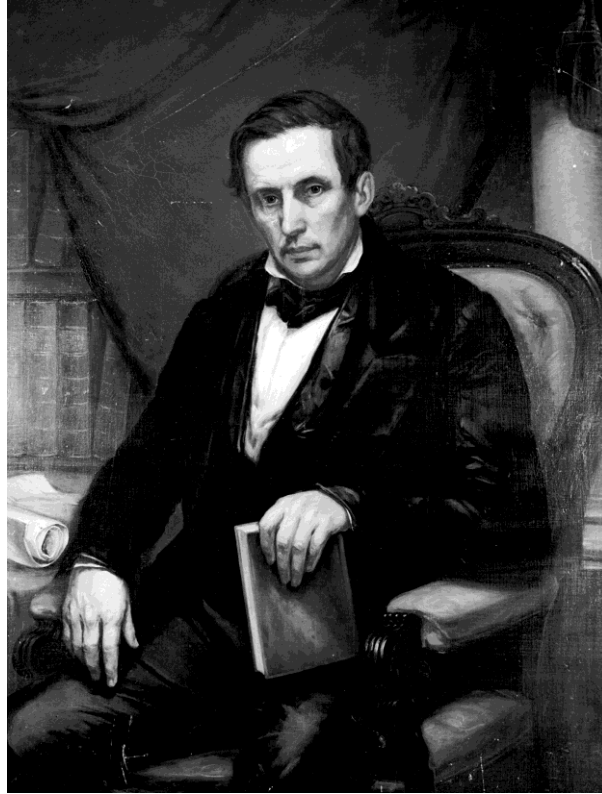


Figure 6 - Portrait of David Lowry Swain (1801-1868) by William Garl Browne (c. 1857). Unsigned. Oil on canvas 46"x35-1/2" (117x90 cm). Image courtesy of the University of North Carolina Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

James K. Polk's portrait (Fig. 7) conveyed another notion of intellectual manhood, one that related to antebellum students' ambitions for national distinction. A thoughtful and serious student at the University of North Carolina, Polk was graduated in 1818 and went on to become a successful lawyer, legislator, governor, and ultimately the eleventh president of the United States in 1845. He was a source of inspiration to many generations of Carolina students, but especially to those who attended during his administration. They saw in Polk an example of how one North Carolinian, through intellectual advancement in college, could go on to bring distinction and honor to the Tar Heel state, whose efforts could progress and expand American civilization. In 1847, moreover, Polk visited the University and attended the May commencement ceremony.

Prior to Polk's visit, the Dialectic Society asked the president for his portrait. Polk replied. "I remember with pleasure my association with 'our common and hallowed fraternity—the Dialectic Society,' and though nearly twenty nine years have elapsed, since I closed my connection with it, I am deeply sensible of the great value of the institution. . . . Fully appreciating the honour which you have done me, I beg you to assure the Society, that it will give me pleasure to comply with the request...and that I can sit for the artist, at any period during the present recess of Congress."⁸⁴ The Society acquired the portrait by the end of the summer in 1847.

The portrait depicts a thoughtful and serious Polk of the sort who attended the University of North Carolina and proved to be a leader there. Formally dressed, Polk sits before a large wooden table, looking into the distance, but not at the viewer. He holds a large canvas in his hands—probably a map, perhaps the Constitution. On the table behind him lay all the accouterment of a man of letters—a book, a quill and ink, a candle. A symbol of progress and expansion to many students, Polk's exemplified the ways in which North Carolina students, through hard work in the same Dialectic Society that produced the eleventh president of the United States, likewise could rise to distinction.

⁸⁴ James K. Polk to a committee of the Dialectic Society, 15 March 1847, Dialectic Society Records.

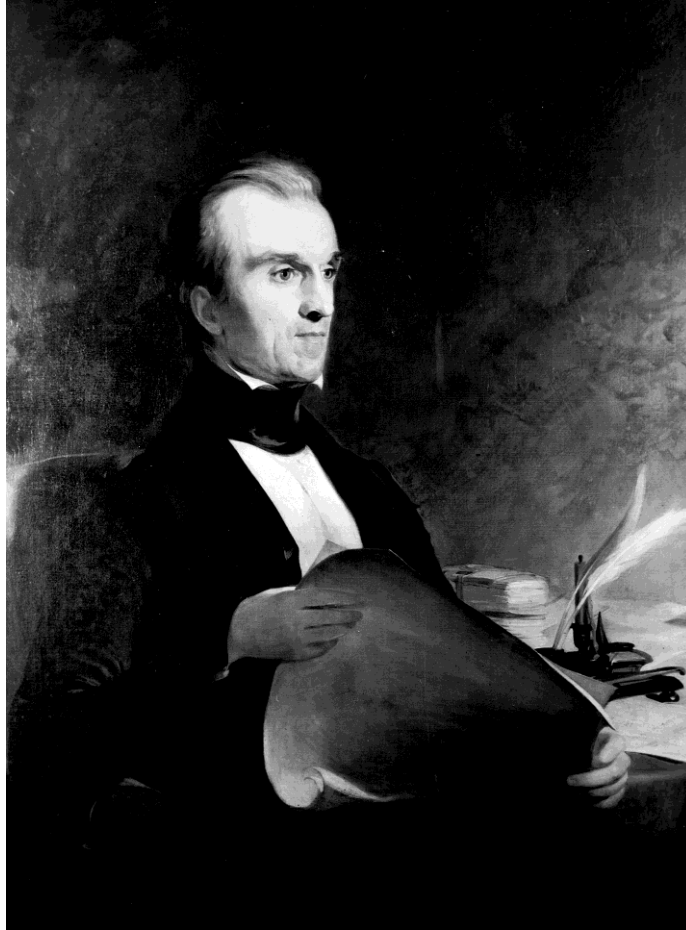


Figure 7 - Portrait of James Knox Polk by Thomas Sully (1783-1872). Unsigned. Oil on canvas. 44"x33-3/4" (112x86 cm). Image courtesy of the University of North Carolina Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Polk's visit and his portrait excited students about the great expansion of the United States following the Mexican War, and they used the idea of an American empire to promote study and diligence in literary society duties. The Mexican cession inspired students to imagine "[a] land teeming with rich mines of gold and silver.... Destined to become the great emporium through which commerce with the Old Worlds can be carried on." William Hill pressed his fellow members to consider how those lands could profit the United States. "Fellow Members," Hill began in 1849, "should we not exert every nerve over which we have any control to grow with the growth and strengthen with the

strength of our beloved country? What a wide field is afforded by this new territory [sic] for either mental or physical gymnastics—Where now is heard only the savage warhoop of the red man will become vocal with the hums of busy life.”⁸⁵ In addresses such as these, students articulated that their ambitions for themselves as leaders of a growing republic were far from provincial. They had ambitions of the sort that compelled many rural New England farmers “beyond the farm” to influence the world and achieve personal fame.⁸⁶

Alumni such as James K. Polk demonstrated to antebellum students that rooting ambition in civic duty was the most important “inducement to mental exertion.” William Bagley, for instance, in an 1842 letter to a friend wrote that he did not wish “to heap encomiums upon my own head, or to gain laurels,” on account of his education. Instead, he only hoped to “flatter myself with the hope that I will yet be a bright luminary in the great republic of North America.”⁸⁷ Students gave encouragement to one another to work hard and strive for the best, and many internalized that message.

Some students found emulation of great men daunting. Students could easily become discouraged in their youth when faced with the example of great men. “Though the avenues to distinction be previously occupied by persons of superior recommendation,” explained Edwin Booth, the president of the Dialectic Society in 1828, “we should consider the circumstance sufficient to arouse our energy and inspire us with courage to surpass our adversaries.” Students ought to look to their superiors, not out of

⁸⁵ William Edward Hill, Inaugural Address, February 1849, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁶ J.M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁸⁷ William Bagley to D. W. Bagley, 01 November 1842, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC.

a vain envy or with feelings of youthful inadequacy, but in a “true republican spirit” of evaluating and emulating one’s qualifications.⁸⁸ When this occurred, students reinforced the civic mission of a nineteenth-century liberal education not only in their portrait collections but also in speeches to one another, advocating self-discipline and diligence in working to achieve eminence. Above all else, students encouraged one another to be ambitious, to set their sights high.

Almost as if ambition were passed down from one generation of North Carolina patriots to the next, students spoke about cultivating ambition as if it were a family obligation. “The Period of our revolution was rendered illustrious by a bright galaxy of distinguished patriots,” explained one student in 1849. “What a luminous disputation have these men produced on the wonders that can be accomplished by untiring exerting both mental and physical,” he mused, and then asked his classmates whether they desired to “pluck one leaf from the laurels that adorned the brows of our revolutionary ancestors?” Students had to act in a way “worthy of the illustrious stock” of Revolutionary heroes from which they “sprung.” The choice, then, was clear: a student could be indolent and listless, and thus “degrade” himself “so low as to dim the luster which they [past heroes] reflected upon our country, or work hard both to uphold the honor of past heroes and to safeguard the freedom from tyranny for which they fought.”⁸⁹ Students used patriotism as a means to encourage one another, but increasingly in the antebellum period, especially after the 1820s, when internal improvements occupied the attention of state legislators, duty to North Carolina became an increasingly important trope in student literary society addresses.

⁸⁸ Edwin Booth, Inaugural Address, 1828, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁹ William Edward Hill, Inaugural Address, February 1849, Dialectic Society Records.

The image of North Carolina as the “Rip Van Winkle” state encouraged students to work hard and to prepare to assume positions of leadership for which they believed they were destined as the state’s “favored sons.” John Lindsay Hargrave told his classmates in 1825, for example, that North Carolina was falling behind the rest of the nation and needed internal improvements. The “present political condition of our state” necessitated that each student make good use of the advantages of a higher education, “in order to prepare yourselves to act well your given parts....” Similarly, in 1825, Ralph Gorrell reminded his classmates that “providence has put into our possession by the patient and persevering use of which we may increase our [North Carolina’s] political importance and render our condition more prosperous and happy,” and he explained how to awaken “Old Rip.” Students needed to exercise “industry and perseverance” in college in order to promote state development. This, Gorrell argued, had been the experiences “of all ages and the history of every country.”⁹⁰

Carolina students were the “favored few” who had the means to distinction through education. This differentiated them from common whites who had no such opportunity to reach eminence. Students relied on this argument about class to encourage one another to work hard, develop an ambition to serve, for it was they alone who could improve North Carolina. Were the state left to the designs of the masses of common whites, then it would not improve. In 1833, William Hayes Owen, a member of the Dialectic Society, explained that North Carolina’s population was approximately 745,000, but only seventy nine of them were students “at her [North Carolina’s] University. “More will be expected and required from you by your country, your parents,

⁹⁰ Lindsay Hargrave, Inaugural Address, 30 April 1832; Ralph Gorrell, Composition, 16 February 1825, Dialectic Society Records. See also Henry Jordan Cannon, Inaugural Address, 20 January 1831 and Joseph John Jackson, Inaugural Address, 06 February 1838, Dialectic Society Records.

and your God,” Owen explained, “than from the uneducated vulgard[.]” So Owen asked his classmates to consider their destinies as leaders:

Am I addressing myself to bosoms that are as emotionless as the sluggish waters of a stagnant pool, or to breasts that feel the stirrings [sic] of a noble ambition? If you feel a laudable emotion, let this be your motto[:] “Aut Caesar, aut nihil” [either Caesar, or nothin]...[Y]ou should aim high, for by so doing you will be more apt to arrive at eminence than if you were to wend your way without any definite goal in view.⁹¹

In setting high standards and pursuing them, youth cultivated the ambition that helped them to improve North Carolina.

Competition with other states in terms of development became an important trope in the late antebellum period. William Hill, in 1849, for instance urged his fellow members of the Dialectic Society to support the cause of literature—schools in particular—in an effort to see that North Carolina not be “eclipsed...by other states, but instead shine brighter than all of them.” Hill explained, “There is no man in whose breast carries a spark of patriotism who does not fervently desire his own native state to be...among the most wealthy refined and literary states in the Union.” He therefore charged his fellow Dis not to “fold our arms in security and permit our own Carolina to be eclipsed...by other states, but instead shine brighter than all of them.” Students at North Carolina “in a great measure control the destiny of our state,” and they would do well to acquire the intellectual and literary skills in college that would help the state compete for power and prestige nationally.⁹²

⁹¹ William Hayes Owen, Inaugural Address, 17 April 1833, Dialectic Society Records, 5-6. Emphasis in original.

⁹² William Edward Hill, Inaugural Address, February 1849, Dialectic Society Records.

Conclusion

Young men coming of age in the rural South in the 1820s saw higher education as a means to social and political distinction. This, too, was the spirit of the early republic, where a more democratic political culture (among white men) and a rapidly growing market economy created seemingly countless options for young men to achieve social distinction “beyond the farm,” as one historian has put it.⁹³ To achieve their dreams, students relied on ambition—the “spring of human action” and “desire of superiority” that rendered any obstacle easy.⁹⁴ In all, young men recognized that ambition, as the historian Stephen Berry has explained, was the “constituent element of the antebellum male life.”⁹⁵ College, many young men believed, was the surest place to kneel at fame’s temple and “rise to distinguished eminence.”⁹⁶

Yet the space between boyhood and adulthood that nineteenth-century Americans called youth brought hope as well as frustration and anxiety. Youth seemed naturally to be inclined toward impulses that could derail their “hopeful ambitions” to be great men. Irrationality, intemperance, rowdiness, and dissipation were among many “vices and follies” of youth that made college an exceptionally dangerous place, and they seemed to be at odds with young men’s aspirations and dreams of greatness. In order to bridge the gap between youth and manhood, the University developed an important mechanism to

⁹³ J.M. Opal, *Beyond the Farm: National Ambitions in Rural New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁹⁴ Mark M. Henderson, Inaugural Address, 20 February 1816, Dialectic Society of the University of North Carolina Records #40152, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter Dialectic Society Records), 2-3; James Martin, Inaugural Address, 07 February 1820, *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

⁹⁶ Sockley Donaldson Mitchell, Inaugural Address, 1815, Dialectic Society Records.

encourage students in their pursuit of mental and moral improvement: a merit-based system of evaluation that awarded distinctions to the best students in order to promote good deportment and studious habits.

Although meritocracy and emulation helped youth become men, peers provided the most crucial encouragement through friendships that existed at the crux of male development and education. In the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies, students competed with one another for college honors, the best libraries, the most orderly and beautiful halls, and the most famous alumni. They viewed this as a healthy emulation with their classmates that would create an ambition for greatness among members. Portrait collections in each society served to honor the University's most distinguished men (as well as one national hero, Benjamin Franklin), which inspired students in their quest for intellectual manhood. Students emphasized their symbolic importance as icons of heroism for them to emulate.

In a class essay on college distinctions, Samuel Walkup explained that young men were voyagers, ready to set sail on a journey toward fame. As was the case for Thomas Cole's youthful hero, so it was for students: "The love of distinction is the gentle gale which first sets in motion the mental ship & then wafts it continually onwards to glory & renown. Such incentives causes the student to exert himself, his mind is enlarged & strengthened, he gradually with his 'blushing honours thick upon him,' & may exclaim with justice 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius,'" or "I have built a monument more enduring than iron."⁹⁷ How students honed their ambitions—how they attempted to

⁹⁷ Samuel H. Walkup, "[On College Distinctions]," [Junior] Oration, 30 April 1840, Senior and Junior Orations, NCC. Horace *Odes* III, 30: 1.

enlarge and strengthen their minds through learning how to think, speak, and read like a man—is the subject of the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 2

Educating Young Men: The Formal Curriculum

On Monday, October 4, 1841 Ruffin Tomlinson, a junior at the University of North Carolina, recorded in his diary that he had read “Milton upon education” and praised it as “one of the best pieces in the english language.” He copied Milton’s definition of “a complete and generous education” into his diary: “that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices both private and public, of peace and war.” Tomlinson thought about this definition for some time and then turned to the community of scholars and students around him for their answers to the question “What is the object of an education.” First, he asked David Swain, the university president, who replied, “The object of an education is to write and to speak.” Then he asked the professor of chemistry and geology, Dr. Mitchell, who replied, “To fit a man for after life” (i.e., life after graduation). Afterward, he asked his friend, William C. Hunt, who replied: “To put a man in the possession of the power to think for himself.” Finally, Tomlinson concluded that the object of education was “[t]o enable a man to discharge the duties of life to the best advantage to himself and his fellow beings.”

These definitions of education underscore the chief objects of antebellum higher education: to store the minds of young men with useful knowledge and to develop their intellectual and moral faculties, fitting them for civic participation in a republic. As one student put it, young men went to college “in order to acquire that knowledge which is to

prepare us to perform our duties as members of society and citizens of a great republic.”¹ Young men’s specific civic duties were to make, interpret, and uphold just laws and to model virtuous citizenship. These duties required students to learn how to think, write, and speak forcefully and persuasively. Moreover, because students were expected to lead society and to model citizenship, moral development was also a focus of every subject studied under the formal curriculum. Complementing these civic ambitions were class ambitions. Students learned to cultivate refinement, taste, and judgment, which comprised a man’s honor and indicated his breadth of character. In all, higher education facilitated the advancement of elites by acquiring knowledge, reasoning, speaking, and writing skills, and a sense of private virtue and public duty.

The form that this education took in the antebellum period was the classical liberal arts curriculum, which relied on a literary and scientific canon developed over hundreds of years. The curriculum at antebellum North Carolina emphasized ancient languages and literature, science and mathematics, rhetoric and logic, and moral philosophy. This curriculum was derived from two medieval and renaissance curricula: the “trivium,” which included grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the “quadrivium,” which included astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and music. Standard at Oxford and Cambridge, this curriculum became the foundation of classical learning in American colleges in the colonial period and remained central to U.S. collegiate education from the

¹ David Alexander Barnes, 12 February 1840, “David Alexander Barnes Diary,” Folder 16, David Alexander Barnes Papers #3484, SHC. Similarly, William Bagley wrote that education was a way for him to become “a bright luminary in the great republic of North America.” See his letter to D. W. Bagley, 01 November 1842, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC, 53. UNC students confirm what Lawrence Cremin has argued about nationalism and education in his *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 5.

early national period through the Civil War.² Holding these subjects together—indeed, what made them useful for becoming men—was the nineteenth century’s core educational philosophy: mental discipline. Mental discipline viewed the mind as a muscle—most serviceable when exercised. Subjects of a liberal arts curriculum were selected in order to “discipline and furnish the mind.”³ This philosophy emphasized the importance of self-restraint, discipline, and authority, which students applied to traditional southern notions of mastery and honor. In addition to improving the mind, the curriculum focused on improving students’ morals.⁴ The University’s strict rules for conduct and compulsory prayer and church services discussed in the previous chapter were part of this moral education, but the formal curriculum also emphasized moral development in every subject.

The classical curriculum was a coherent system comprised of several discrete branches of learning that worked in tandem toward the goal of mental and moral improvement.⁵ Ancient languages were foundational to students’ overall mental and

² Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 14. Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 30.

³ Yale Report quoted in Michael S. Pak, “The Yale Report of 1828: A New Reading and New Implications,” *History of Education Quarterly* 48 (Feb., 2008): 50. Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 65-75. For a North Carolina reference, see William Bingham Lynch, Debate [ca.1855-59], Dialectic Society Records, 1-10.

⁴ William Hooper, *The Discipline of the Heart, To Be Connected with the Culture of the Mind; a Discourse on Education, Delivered to the Students of the College, at Chapel Hill, North Carolina, August 22, 1830, and Published by Their Request* (New York: Sleight and Robinson, Printers, 1830), 8-9. See also Evelyn D. Causey, “The Character of a Gentleman: Department, Piety, and Morality in Southern Colleges and Universities, 1820-1860,” Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2006, chap. 3.

⁵ The literature on classicism is vast. An important work on American education and the classics is Carl Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994). The best work on the subject concerning education and American culture is Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). On the South, see Wayne K. Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words: Classical Teaching and Social Change at South Carolina College, 1804-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* (August 1999): 469-498; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern*

moral development because they required students to exercise attention in reading and encouraged precision in writing and elocution. The ancient texts that students read, moreover, exposed students to style, argumentation and, most importantly, to models of virtuous manhood that they could emulate. Though students spent most of their time studying Latin and Greek language and literature, the “classics” were never supposed to be isolated from science (including mathematics), rhetoric and logic, or moral philosophy. All of these subjects, in concert with ancient languages, trained young men to develop habits of attention and to cultivate the reasoning faculties.⁶ Mathematics especially provided a necessary foundation for instruction in the physical sciences (natural philosophy and astronomy, especially). Finally, the course in moral philosophy brought all of these subjects together by introducing the exercised and refined mind to moral laws governing society and directing the development of the conscience. In all, Latin and Greek, math, science, and moral philosophy, conveyed a unified understanding of the mind and its masculine qualities. Moreover, these subjects underscored for students the duties of educated men to self and to society, the importance of an educated elite, and the centrality of virtue to America’s republican government and civil society.

Slaveholders’ Worldview (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 249-204; Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 73; Aliana Gimbert, “The Purpose and Effects of Classical Education in the Antebellum South,” honors thesis, Department of History, University of North Carolina, 1996.

⁶ Historians nevertheless have emphasized classics in isolation from the entire curriculum. See Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words,” 469-498. On scientific education as classical education, see Stanley M. Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-Bellum American College* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1975), 159 and Theodore Hornberger, *Scientific Thought in the American College, 1638-1800* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1945), 48. See also William Earle Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1860* (New York: Carlton Press, 1964), 165-172; Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 61-65. One example of discourse on the overall place of science in antebellum southern curricula see, Wilbur Fisk Foster, “Speech of W.F. Foster of Ala[bama], Junior Debate for 1858,” *Dialectic Society Records*.

There were always many critics of the so-called “classical curriculum,” who believed that ancient languages and theoretical science did little to achieve any of the objects of higher education that Ruffin Tomlinson, his professors, and classmates said they should achieve. As the development of a market economy mandated rapid new infrastructure development in the United States and North Carolina, many educational reformers advocated more practical college curricula that trained young men for business, trade, building railroads, canals, and roads, and agricultural improvements, instead of just learned professions and public life. Yet the classical curriculum retained its hold on higher education throughout the early republic until well after the Civil War.⁷ Throughout the country, educators maintained that mental discipline through classical learning sufficiently prepared young men for a rapidly growing modern world. The improvement and advancement of American civilization required great men—professionals or otherwise—who had the wisdom and virtue to improve upon past civilizations and lead the modern world. Mental discipline of the traditional liberal arts curriculum therefore remained the mainstay of higher education because, as all of Tomlinson’s definitions suggested, it provided the best possible structure to fit a young man for intellectual manhood and its most important arena—public life.

So, between 1820 and 1861, the curriculum at the University of North Carolina consistently emphasized learning the laws governing words, nature, and society because history had proven that this knowledge made great and virtuous men. In this way, the formal curriculum at North Carolina conveyed important core values of antebellum southern manhood, especially self-control, mastery, and honor, which could be achieved

⁷ Rudolph, *Curriculum*, chap. 4.

by careful study, accumulating wisdom, and controlling one's mind and passions. At the same time, the curriculum and pedagogy emphasized values often ascribed to the northern middle class and characterized as mainstream national values: discipline, industry, competition, and patriotism. The liberal arts curriculum at the antebellum University of North Carolina drew from a canon of literature that was national and transatlantic in scope and, therefore, promoted a style of manhood—intellectual manhood—that prepared students for more than mastery in a slave society, but also for leadership in a growing republic of letters and American civilization.

A Collegiate Course: Structures and Experiences

The university's institutional and educational culture guided young men in the task of mental and moral improvement. The progression of a young man's studies and the nature of classroom learning gave direction to that improvement, providing a formal foundation for intellectual manhood. The process required gradual development that enlarged a young man's capacity for knowledge and virtue on which honor and intellectual manhood depended. Recitation and lecture conveyed core masculine values that resonated with both southern and national notions of ideal manhood, and study, rather than simply a means to avoid dishonor, was a means to cultivate intellectual manhood and arrive at distinction.

The liberal arts curriculum was a four-year program of studies that carried youth through a gradual process of mental and moral improvement. Entering students were required to demonstrate competency in fundamental ancient language skills, arithmetic “to the square root,” and geography. Just before a new school year began, incoming

students were examined and placed into a class.⁸ Students were not placed by age, but by academic ability; consequently each class ranged widely in age.⁹ Some students passed exams in all but one or two subjects, and they were admitted as irregular students, permitted to enter the freshman class after additional study.¹⁰ Other students could place into the sophomore or junior classes if they also took and passed freshman and sophomore year exams. A list of students examined for entry into the freshman class in 1836, for example, shows that ten students “were examined upon the studies of the Freshman year in addition to those of the Preparatory Department; their examination being approved by the Faculty they were admitted as regular members of the Sophomore class.”¹¹ Some students prepared for the entrance exams rigorously in order to skip a year of college. In 1843, William Bagley “read every Latin book this side of College,” the “Greek reader,” “Cicero’s orations,” and arithmetic “hard down” in order to begin college as soon as possible and in the sophomore year. “How long do you think it would take me to enter the junior class supposing I go next June + join as an irregular? Could I not do it twelve months?” he asked his friend, Ed, a student at North Carolina. “If I could

⁸ Faculty Meeting Minutes, 1821-41, vol. 1:13, General Faculty and Faculty Council of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records, 1799-2006 #40106, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereinafter Faculty Meeting Minutes, Faculty Records). Early childhood and pre-collegiate education in the Old South is understudied. Robert Curtis, “The Bingham School and Classical Education in North Carolina, 1793-1873,” *North Carolina Historical Review* (1996), 348. Male students received regular instruction in Latin, Greek, English, Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Composition, and Declamation. Girls studied science more than boys. Kim Tolley, *The Science Education of American Girls: A Historical Perspective* (New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 35-53, 65, 79.

⁹ Placement by ability applied to girls and boys as well as northerners and southerners. See Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, 70; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 96.

¹⁰ For one example, see Thomas L. Spragins to Melchizedek Spragins, 06 June 1808, Melchizedek Spragins Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (hereinafter Duke).

¹¹ Faculty Meeting Minutes, 23 July 1824, Vol. 1:3, 1821-41, 45, Faculty Records .

I would save one year which would be of use to me.”¹² Bagley took the entrance exam in June 1843, “passed on everything he tried for,” and was admitted to the sophomore class.¹³

As Bagley’s experience demonstrates, entrance examinations emphasized classics. Indeed, students’ first two years were almost entirely devoted to the studies of Greek and Latin, though they also studied mathematics (primarily geometry and algebra).¹⁴ In the junior and senior years, students continued their Greek and Latin studies, but also studied additional, more advanced mathematics and science courses such as natural philosophy, astronomy, trigonometry, fluxions (or calculus), and rhetoric and logic. Seniors also studied moral philosophy, political economy, and constitutional history in addition to Latin, Greek, mathematics, and science. Thus, many students found the junior and senior years far more interesting than their first two years. For example, during his first two years of college, Walter Lenoir complained of being too bored with Latin and Greek lessons that he claimed repeated his academy training.¹⁵ But he found his Junior year more exciting: “[O]ur studies for this session will be very easy and interesting,” he wrote. “Natural Philosophy and Rhetoric, in particular are delightful studies.”¹⁶

This progression of studies moved students from easier branches of learning to more difficult, manly ones and suited students overall development from boyhood to

¹² William Bagley to Edward C. Yellowby, 28 February 1843, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, 66, SHC.

¹³ William Bagley to D. W. Bagley, 02 June 1843, *ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴ Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1860*, 156-57.

¹⁵ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 26 January 1842, Box 6, Folder 84, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

¹⁶ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 24 July 1841, Box 6, Folder 82, *ibid.*

manhood. In 1818, Iveson Brookes, then a senior, explained the curriculum's structure in terms of age and maturation. Just as a child needed to learn how to crawl before learning how to walk, college students gradually reached for "the higher refinements of scientific knowledge" in each year of study. "[I]n our collegiate course the study of the dead languages, Geography, & Arithmetic conducts us to the study of the Mathematics and that introduces us to the study of Philosophy and Rhetoric which completes the course by including English Grammar."¹⁷ In other words, each subject was designed to strengthen the mind for "more difficult branches of learning."¹⁸ Similarly, when Richard Henry Lewis, a junior, wrote to his sister Emma, a student at Farmwell Female Academy in Halifax County, North Carolina about his classes in 1825. "My studies are much more laborious than what they were last session," Lewis wrote. "They are...Geometry, Logarithms, Plane Trigonometry, Cicero de Senectute, and Blairs Lectures. In addition to these we study Paley's Theology on Sunday." Though overwhelming, Lewis believed the pursuit of six subjects at once was worthwhile, "for they serve to exercise and improve the mind the more; and this is what we all aim at, viz. the improvement of the mind."¹⁹

The school day's rhythm promoted mental improvement, largely by keeping students busy. Students awoke at six o'clock each morning to the sound of the college bell, perhaps earlier if they wished to read or study.²⁰ They dressed—usually very plainly and often in homemade clothes that included a pair of trousers, a long sleeved cotton shirt, shoes, and sometimes a simple jacket—and left their rooms to attend compulsory

¹⁷ Iveson L. Brookes, Inaugural Address, September 1818, Dialectic Society Records, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Richard H. Lewis to Emma Lewis, August 20, 1825, John F. Speight Papers #3914, SHC. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ William Sidney Mullins, 20 January 1841, William Sidney Mullins Diary #531-z, SHC.

sunrise prayers in Person Hall. The school day's first recitation began at seven o'clock in South Hall, the University's main academic building.²¹ After the bell signaled the end of the first recitation, students ate breakfast either at Steward's Hall on campus or at one of the local boarding houses. Two or three hours of study time followed breakfast, though crowds of students commonly gathered "in front of one of the College buildings," to watch dogs fight in the street or discuss politics.²² Again, the bell rang and students rushed to a second recitation at eleven, followed by dinner (the largest meal of the day) at noon, and a third recitation. Students were typically free after two in the afternoon, and the bell rang at eight o'clock in the evening, summoning them to their rooms for study and sleep, though playing games of whist, novel reading, and cigar smoking was quite common as well.²³

As the typical school day suggests, recitation was the core pedagogy of the nineteenth century, and it was designed primarily to facilitate mental discipline. In recitation rooms, students sat (alphabetically by last name) on wooden benches—not at desks—facing the professor's table at the front of the room; a blackboard hung behind the table. As many as thirty or forty students occupied a given recitation in the antebellum period. When the professor called upon a student to recite his lesson, he rose and

²¹ William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 62. Zebulon Vance, Governor of North Carolina, wrote about wearing homemade shoes and clothes while he was a student at UNC. Some students also got their clothes from tailors.

²² Thomas W. Mason, "The Journal of a Day," 1856, Sally Long Jarman Papers #4005, SHC.

²³ Acts of the General Assembly and Ordinances of the Trustees, for the Organization and Government of the University of North-Carolina (Raleigh: Printed at the Office of the Raleigh Register, 1838), 11-12. Erika Lindemann, "The School Day and the School Year," *True and Candid Compositions, Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp03-02/chp03-02.html> (accessed online 17 September 2009); Mason, "Journal of a Day."

approached the professor's desk, and answered a series of questions for several minutes.²⁴ Sometimes professors spent a great deal of time with a student, but not always, as Henry Francis Jones recalled in his diary in 1857: "Mr. Fetter [Professor of Greek] took me up this morning, no more though than I expected. He didn't keep a fellow up more than two minutes."²⁵ Students usually knew when they might be called upon to recite, for professors followed the alphabetical order of the seating arrangement when questioning students. But professors were not always so predictable. George Thompson was surprised, for example, when he "was taken up" six times in his Geometry class in one week. "I call that getting tolerable high up in the pictures," he remarked in his diary.²⁶ More typically, students anticipated waiting for several recitations to lapse before being called on to recite a second or third time in a given session.²⁷

In recitation, professors expected students to recall information from assigned texts and paraphrase it in their own words. Students relied largely on textbooks—not lectures—for the facts, theories, and demonstrations required for a successful recitation.²⁸ Many early-nineteenth-century texts included marginal questions to guide students' preparation for recitation. For example, John Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1835) explains, "Now in hearing a

²⁴ Lindemann, "The School Day and the School Year."

²⁵ Henry Francis Jones, 06 October 1857, Diary, Folder 1, Henry Francis Jones Diary #3019-z, SHC.

²⁶ George N. Thompson, 17 January, Diary, George N. Thompson Diary #2367-z, SHC, 31-32.

²⁷ Archibald McLauchlin to Sarah McLauchlin, 17 August 1853, Folder 1, Archibald McLauchlin Correspondence #5384-z, SHC.

²⁸ Students had the option of buying their textbooks. According to the University of North Carolina's 1841 *Catalogue*, "The whole series of books, for the four years, may be purchased for \$60 or \$70. It is desirable that every Student shall retain his Text Books, and take them with him when he leaves College; but as in most instances they are parted with to the succeeding classes, at a reduced price, this item of expense is thereby rendered less burthensome to many." See University of North Carolina *Catalogue* (1841), 18.

recitation...the teacher will ordinarily be guided by, but not confined to them [marginal questions].... The pupil, too, will use his own language, which will vary very considerably from that of the author.” The following dialog from Abercrombie’s text exemplifies this process:

Teacher. The first topic is attention.

First Pupil. The author says that it consists in keeping the object distinctly before the mind, for a certain time, so that it may make a strong impression. It assists very much in enabling us to remember it afterwards.

Teacher. The best means of confining the attention to any object?

Second Pupil. There are several modes; one is by repeating the thing several times to other persons; another is, by writing an account of it, especially if it is done systematically; a third, endeavoring to *explain* it to others.

Teacher. How is it these methods produce the effect....²⁹

In this case, an ideal recitation required students to make abstractions more palpable by expressing them in their own language. Students were not asked to engage the texts critically, but to demonstrate the logic of an argument contained in an approved and authoritative text. This pedagogy disciplined students’ minds by exercising attention and memory, and it provided them with useful knowledge that could help them command the powers of their mind better and become more confident and assertive men.

Recitation also forced young men to perform intellectual manhood, as Thomas W. Mason shows in “The Journal of a Day,” a nine-page class composition on “the real occurrences of a single day at college” that he wrote for John Thomas Wheat’s rhetoric and logic course. Mason depicts a “scene in Prof H[arrisse]’s recitation room” in which the French professor, Henry Harrisse, a native of France, sat “on a high rostrum, assuming all the dignity of his lofty station” in front of thirty or forty “young men of all sorts of characters and dispositions.” Some students were “grave and sober,” others “all

²⁹ John Abercrombie, *Inquiries concerning the intellectual powers, and the investigation of truth. By John Abercrombie ... With additions and explanations to adapt the work to the use of schools and academies, by Jacob Abbott.* (Boston: John Allen & Co., 1835), 23.

fume and fuss,” or “delighting in his wit,” or “trifling beyond all tolerance.” Once HARRISSE began recitation, he called upon a student “to translate some English sentences into French,” which the student did “admirably well no less to his own satisfaction than to that of Prof.” Not all students performed so well. The next student on whom HARRISSE called made “some awful mistakes in pronunciation, much to the amusement of Prof. and his own discomforture [sic].” After several other students rose to translate English to French, or vice versa, HARRISSE at last called on “the celebrated wit of the class” and “ask[ed] him to translate the sentence, Have you the bad butter, into French.” The student replied, “Avez-vous le vieux beurre,” but to no avail. HARRISSE “inform[ed] the gentleman that vieux means old,” but the student did not miss a beat and “startle[d] him [HARRISSE] with the brilliancy of his wit by informing him in return that, old butter is generally bad.” At this witty remark, the class ended, and everyone left the room laughing at the humor of the day’s French recitation.³⁰

As Mason’s story demonstrates, recitation rooms conveyed core values of intellectual manhood—discipline, industry. Moreover, students earned honor through confident demonstration of knowledge, virtue, and even wit. Historians have often emphasized the rigidity of the recitation room and its potential to un-man a student. Indeed, the classroom’s hierarchical spatial arrangement provided a context in which students, by submitting to a professor’s authority, could become embarrassed. Humiliation was often an emotional reaction to a stressful and rigorous academic environment. In September 1857, Henry Francis Jones wrote in his diary, “I have a tremendous hard lesson to get to night. I dread it too. It is a greek lesson.” He feared that

³⁰ Mason, “Journal of a Day,” 5-6.

his professor, “Old Fett,” as he and his classmates called him, will humiliate him if he’s wrong.³¹ Jones had reason to worry, for he remembered one recitation, when “one of the boys had a translation to the Greek he had to read, and Mr. Fetter caught him with it,” Henry Francis Jones noted in his diary. “He [Fetter] told him that it showed the very lowest grade of scholarship.”³² Many students grappled with concerns about embarrassment, but these concerns did not render the prevailing pedagogy ineffective. In fact, recitation could just as easily empower a student as it could emasculate him.

Recitation required students to be authority figures. By ascending to the professor’s rostrum to explain an abstraction, recall a fact, or translate a passage a student demonstrated how much he did or did not prepare. In other words, his perseverance, diligence, and authority were on display; his honor was called to question, but this was necessary for developing intellectual mastery. The recitation also enacted a competitive world in which students would one day inhabit. Finally, the recitation mimicked the spoken nature of civic engagement in the antebellum period. Men were expected to be able to speak with elegance, concision, and clarity on any topic or in pursuit of the solution to any problem. Recitation modeled how men ought to commission the mind and tongue in civic life.³³ A young man’s honor depended on whether he could demonstrate virtue and knowledge and the recitation modeled how that could be done.

³¹ Henry Francis Jones, 14 September 1857, Diary, Folder 1, Henry Francis Jones Diary #3019-z, SHC.

³² Jones, 27 October 1857, *ibid.*

³³ Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 88. Baker argues that mid-nineteenth-century classrooms in the North conveyed a democratic political culture in the same way that didactic, biographical, and historical literature aimed at youth did. Baker’s analysis of recitation culture is more convincing than that found in Pace, *Halls of Honor*, which argues that recitation pedagogy was ineffective because southern students worried that being publicly corrected by a professor would dishonor them in a public setting. I maintain, however, that students had opportunities to be dishonored *and* honored in recitation.

Some students preferred recitations to lecture. Science instruction, for example, was conducted chiefly through the lecture method. Students were not always enthusiastic about the pedagogy. William Mullins wrote in his diary in 1841, that Dr. Phillips' calculus lecture was "the driest [sic] kind of lecture," lasting an entire hour. Later that year he offered a similar critique of Elisha Mitchell's "opening lecture on the Science of Chemistry," which lasted almost an hour and a half, from 8:30 AM until about 10 AM, and Mullins had a difficult time paying attention. Worse, the lecture was only a fraction of his chemistry work for the day, for Mitchell gave the class "a lesson to prepare for Recitation at eleven," an hour later. Thus, Mitchell "manages to make the Senior [class] recite three times a day notwithstanding their exemption from ante-breakfast recitation. Indeed when we recite to him twice on the same day...[we] spend an hour more there than any other class in College devotes to the Recitation room." Frustration aside, he concluded, "This circumstance is however by no means displeasing to classes generally."³⁴

Lectures were supplements to, and extensions of, the material presented in the assigned textbook. Professor Phillips explained, for instance, "The object of these lectures is not to exhibit in a popular dress the various subjects noticed in your text books." Instead, he hoped to extend the study beyond the text, by noticing other examples of natural philosophy, "which have been passed over entirely & barely gleaned at, & to endeavor to impress them all on your minds by many interestg. & beautiful experiments...."³⁵ Lectures were never participatory and students did not engage in

³⁴ Mullins, 20 January 1841, 21 July 1841, Diary, SHC.

³⁵ James Phillips, "Natural Philosophy Lecture 2d. History completed, Its importance Shewn," undated, Volume 47, Folder 203, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 20.

experiments actively. Instead, professors described scientific experimentation and discussed the logic of their methods, sometimes demonstrating them before the class. But students never performed scientific experiments. Most students took notes during lecture and then copied their notes later into readable prose.

Joseph Hubbard Saunders kept a detailed notebook of Denison Olmstead's chemistry course at North Carolina in 1820 that provides insight into how antebellum students may have engaged with lecture material. Rote memorization of ideas and examples were central to lectures, and Saunders' notes emphasize keywords and phrases often underlined. Occasionally, Saunders' notes demonstrate more active engagement with ideas. In a lecture on heat and temperature, for example, Saunders notes that Olmstead argued, "Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, dark, or, black, clothing is [more] suitable for a student in a hot day, than light colored." Supporting this point, Olmstead explained, "That Negroes are more able to bear heat, than white persons, is not to be ascribed entirely to habit, for the same holds true when negroes are brought up in cold climates; but it is to ascribe to their black skins; for they are gainers by their radiating surfaces." Saunders took issue with this point and wrote parenthetically, "[T]his cause of Prof. Olmstead does not appear very satisfactory to me for, when negroes are exposed to the direct influence of the sun, as in a cornfield, it appears that as their black skin is a very great absorbing surface...." Saunders, however, may have misunderstood Olmstead, whose outlines for the course explain, "In Summer light coloured clothing best in the sun—dark coloured in the shade—why negroes bear the heat better than white people."³⁶ Saunders' notes nevertheless suggest that lectures, like

³⁶ Joseph Hubbard Saunders, Notebook, Box 1, Folder 4, Miscellaneous Students' Notebooks #3286, SHC, 66-69. Denison Olmstead, *Outlines of the Lectures on Chemistry, Mineralogy, & Geology*

recitations, conveyed latent values and assumptions of intellectual manhood. They modeled oratory and proper listening and prepared students for participation as speakers and listeners in an aural culture. The lectures also conveyed deference to authority, though students seemed to assume some intellectual freedom when they took possession of the material in private study.

Students' study habits varied, as they do today, due to the subject, an individual's attention span, and environmental distractions such as noise. Study was usually a solitary activity, but some students relied on one another for help with difficult studies such as mathematics, as Henry Francis Jones explained in his diary: "I had mathematics this morning, and I made Jim help me last night for the first time."³⁷ Some students studied their lessons each night, while others gleaned over their readings quickly in the morning before breakfast or between recitations. James Hilliard Polk reflected on the best times for study in his diary: "[A]t the still hours of night I can fix my whole mind on my lessons, but in the hustle of day, there are too many objects to engage the attention." So he decided that "night, dark night, when all nature has sunk beneath the hour of sleep, then is the fit time for the student to store his head with the hidden treasures of ancient lore."³⁸

Because students had an idea as to when professors would call on them to recite, many of them only studied when they expected to have to recite. In a fictional memoir, Edwin Fuller wrote about the different approaches that he and his best friend (both self-

Delivered at the University of North-Carolina, for the Use of the Students (Raleigh, N.C.: J. Gales, 1819), 8. Saunders may have used these outlines as a study aide because his notes are very organized and even included a table of contents at the beginning.

³⁷ Jones, Diary, 30 October 1857, Folder 1, Henry Francis Jones Diary #3019-z, SHC.

³⁸ James Hilliard Polk, 22 July 1859, Diary, Folder 1, James Hilliard Polk Diary #5259-z, SHC, 9.

proclaimed good students) took to study. “Ned studied to learn all his lesson—to know every part of it; while I often picked over those points on which I thought I should most likely be examined. He studied to master the subject—to become acquainted with a language or to understand a problem; I studied to make a good recitation. He stored up for the future; I looked no farther ahead than the next morning’s lecture.” Fuller remembered studying Homer. “Ned would worry a whole morning over an idiom; and passages that I found no difficulty at all in rendering would afford him an hour’s work with lexicon and grammar,” he wrote. But Fuller used an annotated edition, “a great friend of the student” and used “its voluminous references” to “cram all that it was probable the professor would touch upon.” But when he recited on Homer the next day, “all the portions I had prepared so carefully were given to others to render or construe, while I would be taken up on some part I had thought too simple for my attention, and would be found woefully ignorant.” As a result of his studying, he made a “brilliant recitation” about twice a month, but “the balance of the time,” he concluded, were “failures.” Fuller concluded that his friend’s methods were far better.³⁹

The antebellum culture of study, more so than recitation and lecture, conveyed values most necessary for intellectual manhood: discipline, perseverance, industry, and mastery of mind and matter. And students knew it. In 1822, for example, Dialectic Society president, James Dickson recommended to his classmates “[u]nremitted application and persevering assiduity in the prosecution of the studies of your respective classes.” Moreover, he cautioned them to beware false assumptions that young men achieved distinction without study. “Let no one pride himself upon the preposition of

³⁹ Edwin W. Fuller, *Sea-Gift: A Novel* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, Publishers, 1873), 168-69.

brilliant talents or eminent abilities, let him not harbour the pleasing but delusive idea that he can make himself master of any branch of literature or science without diligence & industry,” he argued.⁴⁰ Students consistently drew on these themes in literary society addresses in the antebellum period, urging their classmates to study hard to bring honor to themselves and to their societies.⁴¹ There were nevertheless obstacles for students who preferred anything to study, but students cautioned against idleness, dissipation, socializing, and even extracurricular reading (see Chapter 5). In fact, when Thomas Miles Garrett, an avid reader of fiction and history, began to fall behind in his studies because he spent too much time reading Hume’s *History of England*, he thought that he should perhaps stop reading altogether. Study promised to make him a man, but extracurricular reading did not. “I am firmly resolved to change my course of studies for the remainder of my college life,” Garrett wrote in his diary in December 1849. He felt that he did not spend his time profitably by “acquiring knowledge by reading [history and fiction] instead of training [the] mind.” He concluded, “[I]f a man studies as his inclination leads him without any settled purpose or object, that resolution which is necessary to have to be master of his own powers will be gradually further removed and more difficult to recal[.]” Study, for those who stuck with it, promised to turn youth into men.⁴² In particular, the study of ancient languages and literature was considered the proper foundation for this process of becoming men.

⁴⁰ James Henderson Dickson, Inaugural Address, 23 August 1822, Dialectic Society Records, 3-4.

⁴¹ On social life and study, see George Shonnard Bettner, Inaugural Address, September 1822, Dialectic Society Records. Sometimes students discussed the importance of study in letters to younger siblings. See, for example, Kenelm H. Lewis to Emma Lewis, 8 September 1834, Box 1, Folder 6, John Francis Speight Papers #3914, SHC

⁴² Thomas Miles Garrett, 20 December 1849, Thomas Miles Garrett Diary, 1849-1850, Typed Transcript, SHC, 252.

“At the foundation of all advancement”: Ancient Languages and Virtues

Classical languages were at the core of the formal liberal arts curriculum and were especially important for the cultivation of intellectual manhood. In particular, American elites viewed Latin language study as an important gendered rite of passage aimed at “toughening” male youth for a competitive world.⁴³ For example, when Kenelm H. Lewis received word that his younger brother was beginning to study Latin, he explained, “this may be considered as a new era in your life.”⁴⁴ The study of Latin in boyhood marked the beginning of a long process of mental development aimed at becoming a man who could think and write for himself. This independence of thought and action was a crucial component of intellectual manhood in the early American republic, when men demonstrated their manliness through classical erudition.

Language study and young men’s maturation went hand-in-hand. Because language was an “instrument of thought,” William Bingham Lynch explained to his classmates in the 1850s, students must study language carefully. He explained, “All the important knowledge that we receive here [at college] & throughout life is communicated to us through the medium of language, of words rightly put together.” he explained. “An accurate knowledge of the rules, principles, powers of written & vocal speech lies at the foundation of all advancement, intellectual & moral; it is indispensable.” No other study

⁴³ “Toughening” is Walter Ong’s phrase in “Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite,” *Studies in Philology* 56 (April 1959): 121, 123. Since the sixteenth century, Latin language acquisition had been considered an important “puberty rite” among the English gentry, who believed that Latin study toughened young men for a competitive world.

⁴⁴ Kenelm H. Lewis to William F. Lewis, 16 May 1835, K.H. Lewis Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C. See also Walter W. Lenoir to Rufus T. Lenoir, 05 February 1842, Box 6, Folder 84, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

than language “brings so actively into exercise all the faculties of the mind.”⁴⁵ Learning ancient languages was an important part of the process for making men out of boys because it facilitated mental improvement and taught students to think, write, speak, and feel as men did.

Ancient authors were especially valuable for instilling proper literary taste in young men who had not yet learned to judge literature for its style and content. Discerning taste was the mark of gentlemen of letters who hoped to distinguish themselves as a lawyers or statesmen. “It is upon models like these [ancient historians and biographers] in which there are delicate tints, impassionate touches, chasteness of expression, and accuracy of thought, that we wish to see the taste of the youth of the present day formed,” Rufus Rosebrough explained to his classmates in 1832.⁴⁶ Classical literature provided an array of examples of a pure literary style for students to use in their own writing and speaking. As men were expected to do in public forums, students often quoted Roman and Greek texts in their original compositions for class and in their addresses to one another in literary societies. This technique distinguished young men in public addresses and private conversations.

Ancient authors also provided examples of intellectual and civic manhood for students to emulate. According to Thomas Hooper, “Many generous youths have caught from the perusal of the classic pages that ardor which carried them to the summit of fame.”⁴⁷ Another student, Thomas Slade, believed that the classics provided “the purest

⁴⁵ William Bingham Lynch, Debate [ca. 1855 and 1859], Dialectic Society Records, 1-10.

⁴⁶ Rufus Milton Rosebrough, Address, February 1832, *ibid.*, 4-5.

⁴⁷ Thomas Clark Hooper, Address, 1812, Dialectic Society Records.

principles of uninspired morality.”⁴⁸ In 1823, for instance, George Franklin Davidson explained to his Dialectic Society classmates that the classics helped students cultivate virtue. He cited Horace, the early Roman Empire’s most famous lyric poet and satirist, as meriting special attention for his maxims that taught youth about “morality and rectitude of conduct.”⁴⁹ Students, in fact, studied a variety of Roman authors other than Horace, especially prose authors such as Quintus Curtius, Tacitus, and Cicero for their moral lessons. Cicero (106-43 BC) was especially important to students’ development as men because his works exemplified elegant compositional and rhetorical prose styles and, at the same time, emphasized the importance of private and public morality to republican societies.

Cicero had been foundational to eighteenth-century collegiate curricula in the American colonies, and many of the founders extolled his writings for their republican sentiments. John Adams, for example, wrote in his famous *Defence of the American Constitution*, “all the ages of the world have not produced a greater statesman and philosopher united in the same character [than Cicero], his authority should have great weight.”⁵⁰ Cicero’s writings formed the basic rubric of American republicanism because they emphasized the importance of moral government (particularly through the authority of the Senate) to the health of a republic and the liberty of its people. Cicero’s writings also examined the role of individuals to develop virtue in order to prevent corruption,

⁴⁸ Thomas Bog Slade, Address, 10 September 1819, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ George Franklin Davidson, Inaugural Address, 26 February 1823, *ibid.*, 1. Roman literature had been used to cultivate virtue among the ruling classes in England since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See James Bowen, “Education, ideology and the ruling class: Hellenism and English public schools in the nineteenth century,” in *Rediscovering Hellenism: The Hellenic Inheritance and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 161-186.

⁵⁰ Adams quoted in M. N. S. Sellers, *American Republicanism: Roman Ideology in the United States Constitution* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 90.

luxury, ambition, and avarice—that is, the vices that increased individual ambition and lead to demagoguery and ultimately tyranny.⁵¹ Cicero’s appeal to republicanism and, ultimately, patriotism did not wane during the early republic. Speaking before the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies in 1857, former North Carolina governor and alumnus of the University of North Carolina, Henry W. Miller, explained that Cicero exemplified the type of leadership that would prevent political factions and personal ambition from breaking apart the Union. He wrote, “The patriotic appeals and prophetic warnings of the immortal Tully, ‘with all the State-wielding magic of his tongue,’ could not arouse his countrymen to the fact, that corruption, treason and ambition were undermining the foundations of Roman liberty and paving the way to a gigantic despotism!”⁵² The classic text for learning about men’s public duties was Cicero’s *De Officiis* (*On Duty*), which students read in the antebellum period. North Carolina students, like their counterparts throughout the republic, including those Wayne Durrill has studied in South Carolina, regarded this text as an important guide for public life.⁵³ But students’ reading of Cicero did not end with *De Officiis*, for his philosophical works were regarded as highly instructive on account of their resonance with youth and maturation. Antebellum students also read classical texts that conveyed important themes relating to private morality and intellectual manhood in nineteenth-century America.

Two of Cicero’s later works, *Cato Maior De Senectute* (*Cato on Old Age*) and *Laelius De Amicitia* (*Laelius on Friendship*), figured prominently in students’ character

⁵¹ Ibid., 92-94.

⁵² Henry W. Miller, “Address Delivered before the Philanthropic and Dialectic Societies of the University of North-Carolina, June 2, 1857 by Henry W. Miller, Esq.” (Raleigh: Holden & Wilson, “Standard Office, 1857), 14.

⁵³ Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words,” 492-95.

development at college. Cicero wrote *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia* as companion pieces, and they each taught important moral lessons about age, virtue, and friendship. Each of these works was written in the last years of Cicero's life (45-44 BC) after the Roman Republic had collapsed under Julius Caesar's dictatorship. Cicero had little hope that Roman republicanism would ever be restored. In addition to the sense of political loss in the transition from republic to empire, Cicero also suffered profound personal loss after his daughter died. While both philosophical works convey a latent sense of loss, they also demonstrate how individuals who have led virtuous lives come to terms with diversity.⁵⁴

De Senectute, set in 150 BC, is a dialogue between three famous Romans—Cato, Scipio, and Laelius—and it emphasized to students the importance of cultivating virtue in youth. Cato, eighty-four years old in the dialogue, was a distinguished Roman soldier and held the prestigious position of censor in the Roman Senate, in which capacity he censured senators with poor morals. Most of the text consists of lectures that he gives to the two younger characters, Scipio and Laelius “on what principles we may most easily support the weight of increasing years.”⁵⁵ He examines four reasons why many men fear old age: “it withdraws us from active pursuits”; “it makes the body weaker”; “it deprives us of almost all physical pleasures”; and, finally, “it is not far removed from death.”⁵⁶ The best defense of old age, Cato told his friends, “are the principles and practice of the virtues, which, if cultivated in every period of life, bring forth wonderful fruits at the close of a long and busy career, not only because they never fail you event at the very end

⁵⁴ J.G.F Powell, ed., introduction to *Cicero: Cato Maior De Senectute* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-3.

⁵⁵ Cicero *Cato De Senectute* 2.6.

⁵⁶ Cicero *Cato De Senectute* 5.15.

of life...but also because it is most delightful to have the consciousness of a life well spent and the memory of many deeds worthily performed.” Cato’s philosophy echoes the reason so many youth at North Carolina urged one another to heed the message that youth was the time to cultivate the virtues on which all future happiness rested. Indeed, Cicero’s message in *De Senectute* was compatible with nineteenth-century notions of age and maturity. “Life’s race-course is fixed,” he wrote, “Nature has only a single path and that path is run but once.”⁵⁷ Cicero’s stoicism is the antidote to unhappiness in old age, too, for he recommends moderation in eating and drinking, tempering the passions, including sex. In all, *De Senectute* reinforced core values among middle- and upper class families, especially the cultivation of virtue in youth, temperance, deference to age, and friendship.

Similarly, *De Senectute*’s companion piece, *De Amicitia* reinforced notions of deep and intimate friendship between men that students viewed as important to their private development and associated with nineteenth-century learned culture and civil society. In this dialog Cicero writes, “Friendship cannot exist except among good men.” He defines friendship and discusses the “innumerable” advantages of friendship.⁵⁸ He exhorts his readers “to esteem virtue (without which friendship cannot exist), that, excepting virtue, you will think nothing more excellent than friendship.”⁵⁹ Students emphasized the importance of friendship to manhood in their private writings and in public addresses in one another’s company. Echoing *De Amicitia* in an address to his classmates in the Dialectic Society, for example, Robert Henry proclaimed, “It has been

⁵⁷ Cicero *Cato De Senectute* 10.33.

⁵⁸ Cicero *Laelius De Amicitia* 5.18

⁵⁹ Cicero *Laelius De Amicitia* 27.104.

remarked by a great man [Cicero] that they who would take friendship from the world commits the same deed as they who would take the sun from the world. ‘Solem a mundo, tottem vindentur qui amicitiam a vita tollunt.’”⁶⁰ Students, moreover, argued that intellectual manhood was strongest when forged through intellectual and moral association through mutual learning. Thus, students’ reading of Cicero in the classroom reinforced a larger nineteenth-century cultural context that privileged sentimental friendship among men and marked it as an ideal and foundational relationship for sociability in republican civil society. By appropriating the Ciceronian perspective on friendship into their public addresses, students used classroom texts to inform their attitudes about friendship (see Chapter 1). In these texts, moreover, they identified particular values—purity, sincerity, and sympathy—that reflected attachment to broader, middle-class values regarding friendship studied by historians of the northern middle class and applied them to their own lives and experiences.⁶¹

Students engaged these lessons in private as well. On August 21, 1849, Thomas Miles Garrett recorded how “delightful” he thought his day’s Latin lessons were. “We read Cicero’s Cato and Laelius or de senectute, a little disquisition which has always attracted admiration.” The text “contain[ed] many useful lessons of morality from which both the young and old may profit,” including lessons concerning “temperance, and self-

⁶⁰ Robert Williams Henry, Inaugural Address, 1835, Dialectic Society Records. Henry’s Latin is slightly off. The passage from *De Amicitia*, XIII, 47 reads: “Solem enim e mundo tollere videntur ei qui amicitiam e vita tollunt...” [Why, they seem to take the sun out of the universe when they deprive life of friendship.] See Cicero *Laelius De Amicitia* 13.47. Other students referred to the friendship between Scipio and Laelius (from *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia*) as a model. See, for instance, William Norwood, Valedictory Address, 21 June 1826, Dialectic Society Records. On the classical links of sentimental friendships and their importance to republican civil society, see Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 36. For a literary interpretation, see Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), esp. 1-15.

⁶¹ See E. Anthony Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (Fall, 1989): 8.

rule, restraint of passion and subjection of the will, resignation for our ills and gratitude for our blessings, and to contentment.” In all, he believed that Cicero’s professes a “purity of morals” that “belongs more properly to the Christian age” than to antiquity. “So high, his philosophy!” he concluded his entry. “So sublime his precepts!”⁶² Garrett’s enthusiasm for Cicero had not waned a month later, when his class had commenced reading “the beautiful treatise of Cicero on Friendship.” He had been “extremely delighted with it and am sorrow[ful] that there will be taken from me after this the chief source of my comfort in study.”⁶³ Much of Garrett’s enthusiasm for these works came from his advanced language skills. Garrett acknowledged that he read *de Senectute* and *de Amicitia* with more facility than his classmates. While his classmates struggled with the prose, he was able to spend more time reading for pleasure. But when the class began Cicero’s *Philippics* at the end of October, he admitted feeling “something in discomfiture” in not being able to read as quickly as he might like.

Cicero’s delivered his *Philippicae*, orations condemning Mark Antony for threatening to usurp the republic after Caesar’s assassination on the Ides of March, 44 B.C. The address was similar to his oration against Catiline, *In Catilinam*, which schoolboys studied from ancient times through the nineteenth century. Cicero argued that Antony had no respect for the Senate’s moral or legal authority and, therefore, undermined Roman liberty. Tyrants deserved death, he proclaimed in the oration, and those who killed Caesar were justifiable in their crime because they saved the republic from a tyrant. The Senate, he argued, needed to save the Republic once more by getting rid of Mark Antony. According to one historian, this oration, like the Catlinarian

⁶² Garrett, 21 August 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 98.

⁶³ Garrett, 25 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 142.

orations, “provide[d] the essential outline and vocabulary of his [Cicero’s] republican outlook.”⁶⁴ Students reading *Philippicae* learned that the Senate and all individuals in a republic needed to cultivate virtue in order to prevent the spread of corruption, luxury, ambition, and greed on which the ambition of would-be-tyrants such as Mark Antony relied.⁶⁵ Cicero’s *Philippicae* reinforced proscriptions against too much ambition, which characterized much moral advice to nineteenth-century youth. Because these nineteenth-century students paid careful attention to the evils of personal ambition, these themes may have been particularly appealing. Thomas Miles Garrett, after “reading a little” in the *Philippics*, found the work “far from being dry,” but “highly interesting and contain[ing] some as valuable historical information as any book which I could read.”⁶⁶ Though not all students shared Garrett’s love for Cicero, his response demonstrates the intended effect of studying Cicero: reinforcing nineteenth-century values concerning age, friendship, and ambition.

Greek authors also played an important role in young men’s moral development. In the early and antebellum republic, freshmen read one of three works by the ancient Greek historian, Xenophon (430-354 BCE): *Anabasis (Persian Expedition)*, *Cyropaedia (Education of Cyrus)*, or *Memorabilia*. Xenophon was one of the most common ancient historians read in the early republic because of his contribution to classical republican philosophy.⁶⁷ His collected works comprise a major source for Greek history during the

⁶⁴ Sellers, *American Republicanism*, 92-94.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Garrett, 23 October, 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 179.

⁶⁷ The others were Thucydides and Homer, whom students also read. See Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, vol. 2 (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 593. On Xenophon and classical republicanism, Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 1993), 37.

period 410-362 BC. They examine the philosophy, history, military affairs and technical strategies, biography, commentaries on Spartan life, including education and politics in a republic, treatises on government, economics, and even hunting.⁶⁸ Roman statesmen studied Xenophon, and the English humanists advocated the study of Xenophon as a result, especially because he offered practical and useful knowledge for “men of practical affairs.”⁶⁹ Eighteenth-century educators valued Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* particularly for its moral instruction.⁷⁰ Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* was assigned regularly at North Carolina between 1795 and 1861.⁷¹

Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* was ideal for educating male youth because it required diligent and careful study to master the language. This was especially difficult for many freshmen, as Clifton Berrie explained to a younger friend planning to attend North Carolina the following year. “The first session you & he comes up here you will read a Latin book called Quintus Curtius, and Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, which is a great deal harder than his *Anabasis* which you are reading now, for there is no Interlinear [translation] to that,” he explained. Berrie advised his friend to ask his teacher for help

⁶⁸ M.D. Macleod, *Xenophon: Apology and Memorabilia I* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 5-6.

⁶⁹ Pangle and Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty*, 52.

⁷⁰ Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 150, 26; James McLachlan, “The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University in Society*, edited by Lawrence Stone (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974): 451. On the reception of Xenophon among educated southerners, see Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words”; O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 260, 324, 503, 593; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118, 288n75, 289-90, 343, 366, 669, 745-6. On Xenophon’s value in a broader, American context, see Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 13, 35; Pangle and Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty*, 37, 39-41, 44-46, 52, 67, 178-79, 204. Winterer and Durrill note that students at South Carolina College read Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (Education of Cyrus) in their Freshmen year.

⁷¹ Charles Lee Smith, *The History of Education in North Carolina* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1888), 29.

“read[ing] those very books next session, and then you will find it a great deal easier.”⁷²

Berrie was not the only student who found Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* challenging. In 1846, a group of students created an unauthorized study aid—“The Freshman’s Friend”—for Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, for example, to help students pass end-of-term examinations based on the Greek text because no translation was available to them. “The Freshman’s Friend” was a collaborative project, a literal translation to prepare students for recitation.⁷³

Like Cicero’s philosophical texts, Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* introduced young men to the importance of morality in public and private life. Xenophon used the life and teaching of Socrates, who was Xenophon’s personal acquaintance, to explain larger issues facing educated men in a republic. Socrates had been prosecuted in 399 BC for undermining Athenian laws and corrupting youth, and *Memorabilia* refutes these charges and vindicates Socrates’ character based on the argument his teachings were useful.⁷⁴ According to one scholar, Xenophon “was less interested in Socrates the philosopher than in Socrates the teacher, who taught how to lead a virtuous, self-sufficient and happy life, not just by his words but by the example he set.”⁷⁵ In so doing, Xenophon presented a moral and intellectual biography of Socrates that resonated with core nineteenth-century masculine values such as self-restraint, virtue, and obligations within families and friendship.⁷⁶

⁷² L. Berrie Clifton to E.L. Jeffreys, 15 September 1860, Randolph Webb Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

⁷³ “The Freshman’s Friend,” 1846, Box 3, Folder 17, UNC Personal Papers, Misc. #3129, SHC.

⁷⁴ M.D. Macleod, *Xenophon: Apology and Memorabilia I* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008), 58-62.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

Xenophon emphasizes Socrates' teachings about the role of virtue in creating what he called, "perfect men," or those "fit to rule."⁷⁷ In the first book of *Memorabilia*, Xenophon discusses Socrates' disciples-turned-persecutors were motivated to follow Socrates by political ambition. When they received the wisdom they thought they needed—and the political connections and clout they thought they deserved—they abandoned Socrates and turned against him. Ambition was their hubris, and Xenophon used their examples to engage larger issues of personal ambition and self-interest over the needs of the state.⁷⁸ Xenophon's text demonstrates the dangers of political ambition in a way that did not implicate contemporary politicians; ancient politics were safe to scrutinize, but contemporary politics were not (at least in the formal curriculum). Indeed, one of the reasons why students were required to read ancient authors such as Xenophon was because they were divorced from modern political bias—party spirit—and they offered insightful, retrospective glances into the problems of politics in a republic, when men may be swayed more by personal ambition than service to the polis.

No story made the case for civic virtue better than the famous fable about the choice of Hercules as he matured from boyhood to youth, which Socrates told to his student, Prodicus.⁷⁹ "When Heracles was passing from boyhood to youth's estate, wherein the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will approach life by the path of virtue or the path of vice, he went out into a quiet place" to contemplate which path to choose. Two women appeared before Hercules. Virtue

⁷⁷ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.7, ed. E.C. Marchant (Harvard University, 1923), *Perseus Digital Library*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0208> (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁷⁸ Macleod, *Xenophon*, 77.

⁷⁹ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21-34.

appeared first. She was “fair to see...adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty” and wore a white robe. Vice appeared next, “plump, and soft, with high feeding,” and wearing revealing garments. She hoped to win over Hercules by promising him the “pleasantest and easiest road...all the sweets of life,” and no hardship whatsoever. “My friends call me Happiness,” she said “but among those that hate me I am nicknamed Vice.” In the meantime, Virtue approached Hercules and said, “I know your parents and I have taken note of your character during the time of your education. Therefore I hope that, if you take the road that leads to me, you will turn out a right good doer of high and noble deeds, and I shall be yet more highly honored and more illustrious for the blessings I bestow.” She urged him to worship the gods, cultivate friendships, and do good. While Vice tried to seduce Hercules by saying that virtue’s path was too long, tedious, and laborious, Virtue ultimately convinced him that her path was most honorable in the long run.⁸⁰ Hercules’ choice was a model for students who needed to learn that a good life required self-sacrifice.

The “choice of Hercules,” as it came to be known, influenced other ancient writers whose works nineteenth-century students read, including Cicero, who praised the story in his treatise on public morality, *De Officiis*.⁸¹ Cicero wrote, “It is more in accord with nature to emulate the great Hercules and undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of aiding or saving the world, if possible, than to live in seclusion, not only free from all care, but reveling in pleasures and abounding in wealth, while excelling others also in beauty and strength.” As McLachlan has pointed out, the “Choice of Hercules”

⁸⁰ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21-34, ed. E.C. Marchant, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, *Perseus Digital Library*.

⁸¹ On the uses of the story over time, see McLachlan, “The *Choice of Hercules*.”

was easily adapted to nineteenth-century evangelical morality because of its focus on virtue over vice. Through Herculean self-sacrifice, students could fulfill their obligations to society earn an esteemed position not just in the favor of society, but in God's favor too.⁸² Students learned from Hercules about the value of tempering youthful impulse and developing manly virtue in its place.⁸³

Students appropriated Xenophon in addresses to one another in an effort to instill in one another other middle-class values such as industry and temperance. Many antebellum North Carolina students cited other individuals from Xenophon's writing as examples of good and manly character. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (*Education of Cyrus*), for example, was very popular among students.⁸⁴ One student noted the lessons to be drawn from Xenophon's portrayal of "the character & conduct of the Persian Cyrus":

Temperance was his [Cyrus'] cardinal virtue, as it was of all his countrymen at the time. It was temperate & hardy Macedonians who achieved the conquest of the degenerate & effeminate Persians. but in turn, they too, with their master, fell a prey to the luxuries & vices of the people whom the conquered such has been the usual order of events...The same order still prevails and prevails universally. Youthful intemperance generally prevents the attainment of any excellence.⁸⁵

As this passage demonstrates, students found that ancient texts conveyed mainstream nineteenth-century American values, including middle-class values concerning temperance, which they wished to incorporate into their cultivation of intellectual manhood. Classical texts, therefore, promoted moral improvement because they offered many examples of virtue, especially that which self-restraint helped to cultivate.

⁸² Cicero *De Officiis* 3.5.25 quoted in McLachlan, "The *Choice of Hercules*," 449.

⁸³ Elam Alexander, Address, February 1825, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁴ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 324.

⁸⁵ Elam Alexander, Address, February 1825, Dialectic Society Records.

Despite the obvious relevance of many classical texts to mainstream nineteenth-century culture, especially middle-class evangelical morality, some students challenged the moral relevance of ancient texts. What good were pagan authors to young men working to cultivate Christian virtue for the benefit of what they saw as an entirely Christian republic? “The ancient Greek & Romans were heathens. they were unconscious of the existence of a God and knew nothing of the Bible,” Wilbur Foster explained in a speech to his classmates. Seeing ancient writers as “superstitious and selfish,” “licentious,” and even “barbarous and cruel,” Foster wondered why “the student is taught to see in them the very personification of intellectual and moral excellence.”⁸⁶ And how did the study of ancient letters qualify them for anything more than genteel society? Richard Hamlin explained to his classmates in 1858, “This age of improvement loudly demands a new system of education. It calls for practical knowledge that prepares us for the stormy sea of life.” For students who wished to enter a profession or planned to become farmers or small planters, what use could they make of Cicero or Xenophon? These questions resonated in American culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, though were never truly addressed until after the Civil War. Americans, including students and educators, remained committed to the ancients. But they also learned to adapt the ancients to a growing, more complex and modern society.⁸⁷

In sum, many classical texts’ emphasis on public and private virtue conformed to core values of intellectual manhood: refinement, self-restraint, temperance, and virtue. Classical They offered more than teaching students about “wielding power in a highly

⁸⁶ Wilbur Fisk Foster, “Speech of W.F. Foster of Ala[bama], Junior Debate for 1858,” *Dialectic Society Records*, 9.

⁸⁷ Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words,” 497-498.

stratified society,” as Wayne Durrill has argued. Classical texts on government, oratory, and aesthetics certainly equipped young men with cultural capital as gentlemen and social leaders, but they also dealt with the important, yet fragile, notion of republican virtue more so than southern notions of caste and class.⁸⁸ Granted, ancient authors such as Xenophon and Cicero were slaveholders and aristocrats. Their republican virtue was only available to them because of their elite status. Some North Carolina students and professors certainly must have applied this truth about ancient slaveholding directly to the South’s slave society, as Durrill has argued they did in South Carolina. But others democratized Greek republicanism, citing it as an example of both the hazards and potentials of republican governments. Ancient authors—themselves observers of republican life and leadership—demonstrated above all the importance of cultivating character (balanced by reason and virtue) and demonstrating that virtue as examples of good citizenship from common folks.⁸⁹ This was an important component of intellectual manhood according to the address with which this dissertation began: the “common people” look up to educated men, whose duty was to model good citizenship. Ancient language and literature was the foundation for a young man’s intellectual and moral advancement by teaching about the laws and power of language to communicate virtue. Scientific education built upon that foundation and taught young men how develop confidence, authority by learning the laws of nature.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 473.

⁸⁹ Pangle and Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty*, 36-37.

Science Education: The Languages and Laws of Nature

Scientific education, which included mathematics, complemented the study of language and literature by disciplining the mind and storing it with useful information about the laws of nature. First, mathematics taught students to use facts and to demonstrate truths precisely and confidently. Students learned the basic elements, language, and format of logical scientific proof. Second, the physical sciences, especially natural philosophy and astronomy, introduced students to the history of and theories behind basic laws of nature. Students learned that men needed to understand these principles, if for no other reason than “to be sure in all we undertake, to have, at least the law on our side, so as not to struggle in vain against some insuperable difficulty opposed to us by natural causes.” Third, in understanding the laws of nature, students also learned what was realistic and possible to accomplish and therefore would avoid making mistakes that uneducated men might make. Finally, science taught students to employ the “easiest, shortest, most economical & most effectual” means to an end. In all, the study of the natural world expanded the horizons of inquiry for students. With an understanding of the principles of nature, students could “accomplish, objects...we sh[oul]d never have tho[ugh]t of undertak[ing].”⁹⁰ All of these goals were possible because science disciplined the mind and directed the morals of youth.⁹¹

Like the study of Latin and Greek language, mathematics was studied in the first two years of a collegiate course because it provided mental discipline, honed a young

⁹⁰ Phillips, “Natural Philosophy Lecture 2d.,” 13.

⁹¹ Like the other subjects presented to students in the antebellum curriculum, science education was valued for process as much as, if not more than, content. Faculty psychology and mental discipline therefore underpinned scientific education as it did the other branches of learning. See James Phillips, “Astronomy. Lecture 9th. The “Cui bono”? question noticed; the Milky way; figments of the ancients respecting it; its real constitution explained; distance of some of its stars; its superior magnificence in southern latitudes....,” undated, Volume 28, Folder 183, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 3-4.

man's attention, provided a foundation in truth, and provided a student with a greater sense of "moral and demonstrative reasoning," as one historian has put it.⁹² According to one student, "[T]he great utility of the mathematics consists in its tendency to give that equilibrium to the powers of the mind which enables us to reason truly, judge accurately, and decide correctly upon such subjects as fall under our investigation."⁹³ Students began their course with algebra, continued with geometry and trigonometry, and finished with calculus. Freshmen devoted eighteen weeks to algebra and nineteen weeks to geometry.

Students studied the major works on algebra used in the early republic: Simpson's *Treatise of Algebra* (1809) for the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and Young's *Elementary Treatise on Algebra* (1832) in the decades that followed. Simpson's text was simpler than Young's and the switch to the latter suggests an increased interest in advanced mathematics by the late antebellum period.⁹⁴ Joseph Caldwell's synthesis of Euclidian geometry was likewise important throughout the antebellum period. As Professor of Mathematics in the early nineteenth century, Caldwell wrote "A New System of Geometry," which circulated among students as aides to his lectures. Caldwell published this manuscript in 1822 as *A Compendious System of Elementary Geometry*. By the 1840s, students read Charles Davies' *Elements of Geometry and Trigonometry*, which offered a more sophisticated course in geometry as

⁹² Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1860*, 171.

⁹³ Brookes, Inaugural Address, September 1818, Dialectic Society Records.

⁹⁴ Drake, *Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1860*, 171-72. Thomas Simpson, *A Treatise of Algebra: wherein the principles are demonstrated and applied in many useful and interesting inquiries, and in the resolution of a great variety of problems of different kinds: to which is added, the geometrical construction of a great number of linear and plane problems with the method of resolving the same numerically* (Philadelphia : Printed for Mathew Carey, 1809). John Radford Young, *An Elementary Treatise on Algebra, Theoretical and Practical; with attempts to simplify some of the more difficult parts of the science ... Intended for the use of students* (Philadelphia, Carey & Lea, 1832).

preparation for more advanced (and applied) mathematical and scientific instruction.⁹⁵

Antebellum geometry complemented language instruction by disciplining the mind and teaching young men to be strong and independent thinkers.

Like the classics, geometry was at the foundation of further intellectual advancement because it required concise and accurate use of language and logical reasoning, two essential elements of intellectual manhood. In *A New System of Geometry*, Joseph Caldwell explained that the principles of geometry “have a singular power to sway the understanding in its deductions concerning the rules of human conduct.”⁹⁶ Students spent most of their time learning the language of mathematics—definitions, axioms, and theorems—and how to use them in well-reasoned demonstrations. Joseph Caldwell’s course, for example, began with basic definitions (i.e., solids, surfaces, lines, points, planes, and so on), continued with a discussion of postulates and axioms, and then guided students through geometric proofs.

Geometry provided a foundation in logic and introduced students to confident and succinct styles of argumentation and demonstration that were necessary for persuasive speech in the public arena. Caldwell’s geometry book provided examples of logical proofs that students were supposed to study and explain in class. One lesson, for example, required students to demonstrate how algebraic ratios applied to geometry. First, they had to demonstrate that they understood the algebra:

⁹⁵ Charles Davies, *Elements of Geometry and Trigonometry from the works of A.M. Legendre: revised and adapted to the course of mathematical instruction in the United States*. Walter Lenoir studied “Davies’ Legendre.” See Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 20 January 1840, Folder 78, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

⁹⁶ Joseph Caldwell, “A New System of Geometry by the Reverend Joseph Caldwell, Professor of Mathematics and President of the University of North Carolina,” Chapel Hill, 1806, Volume 2, Folder 4, Joseph Caldwell Papers #127-z, SHC, 14-15.

PROP. IV. THEOR. The products of the corresponding terms of two or more proportions, are also proportional.

Let there be the two proportions
 $a : b :: c : d$, and
 $e : f :: g : h$;
then shall ae be to bf , as cg to dh .

For because the ratio of a to b is a/b , and the ratio of c to d is c/d ; by the former of the given propositions, $a/b = d/d$: and so also, by the latter, $e/f = g/h$. But if equals be multiplied by equals, the products are equal; therefore $a/b \times e/f = c/d \times g/h$, or $ae/bf = cg/dh$. Hence $ae : bf :: cg : dh$. And in like manner it may be shown, that if the corresponding terms of three, or of any number of proportions be multiplied together, the products are proportional.

COR. If four quantities be proportional, their squares, cubes, and in general, their like powers, are proportional.

REMARK. The preceding theorem may be otherwise expressed by saying, ratios which are compounded of equal ratios, are equal to one another.⁹⁷

Students studied proofs like these prior to recitation. In class, the professor called on individual students to demonstrate proofs by drawing diagrams on the blackboard and talking through the proof with clear and precise language. This mathematical pedagogy required young men to demonstrate their well-trained and attentive minds—and their mastery of the subject—with confidence and authority.

This mastery did not come easy to many students, who often complained that mathematics classes were difficult, boring, and impractical. Though Iveson Brookes believed that “[t]he study of Mathematics is designed to invigorate & discipline the mind; to inform the judgment strengthen the memory and bring all the faculties of the mind to a proper balance by giving each faculty its regular an proportional share of exercise,” he still complained, “Yet it is to me a dry study more particularly when so increased as to prevent my attention to other sources of mental improvement & especially when it

⁹⁷ Joseph A. Caldwell, *A Compendious System of Elementary Geometry, in Seven Books: To Which an Eighth is Annexed, Containing Such Other Propositions As Are Elementary, Among Which Are a Few That Are Necessary, Beyond Those of the System, To the More Advanced Parts of the Mathematics* (Philadelphia: Printed by William Fry, 1822), 291.

encroaches on my enjoyment of religious privileges.”⁹⁸ Despite their boredom with the subject, students learned that mathematics was useful for training them for important duties of intellectual manhood—thinking, reasoning, and speaking.

Although students focused on the language and principles of science (i.e., mathematics) in the first two years of college, they delved more deeply into the laws of nature in the last two years. They studied mathematical subjects—trigonometry and calculus—necessary for the study of Natural Philosophy (physics), Astronomy, Chemistry, and Geology.⁹⁹ Some students anticipated the new challenges that accompanied the study of advanced mathematics. During the summer before he took “Fluxions,” or Calculus, with Professor Phillips, Thomas Miles Garrett, for instance, received a recommendation to read “Simpson on Fluxions...as a lucid explanation of some difficult propositions in the study of Calculus.” After reading a few pages, Garrett concluded, “it will not be an invaluable exercise to study this in connexion [sic] with Calculus next session.”¹⁰⁰

Calculus was far more applied than other mathematics subjects. James Phillips’ calculus students, for example, solved basic astronomical questions about the movement of objects in the sky: “...Find the position of Venus when brightest. It’s dist from the earth.”¹⁰¹ Sometimes the problems were more elaborate: “On the 15th of July, 1816, in lat. 53° 45’ N. at 36 ½ past 9 o’clock in the morning, I observed a small cloud exactly in

⁹⁸ Iveson L. Brookes to Jonathan Brookes, 13 February 1818, Box 1, Folder 2, Iveson Lewis Brookes Papers #3249, SHC.

⁹⁹ Board of Trustees Minutes, December 19, 1818, *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/un/unc04-07/unc04-07.html> (accessed 18 May 2009).

¹⁰⁰ Garrett, Diary, Typed Transcript, 261-62.

¹⁰¹ James Phillips, “Mathematical Questions,” undated, Volume 17, Folder 174, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 25-26.

the east, the shadow of which fell upon the Earth at the distance of 1270 yards and in the direction E NE from the plane where I stood. Required the perpendicular height of the cloud?” A successful student relied on concise language and drew from his knowledge of mathematical facts to convince the professor and his classmates that his method was an accurate means to the mathematical end.¹⁰²

Calculus, though challenging, appealed to some students. Thomas Miles Garrett loved the subject, particularly the study of “infinitesimals,” which he believed was “a most curious piece of reasoning.” After reading an assignment for class—“a dissertation” on infinitesimals—Garrett remarked in his diary that he probably did not gain “much of the sense that was intended, but it [the subject] must be most sublime.” He wrote, “When we have any immense object before us which requires the utmost extension of the human faculties to grasp securely ever does the mind attempt to raise itself to a contemplation of it without feeling an awful [sic] elevating sensation.” When he put down his book and “quietly contemplated infinity for a moment,” he “felt a slight creeping on of that sublime sensation” and adoration of “the wonders which God has made.”¹⁰³ Even in the abstract, mathematics refined and elevated his feelings. Garrett’s reaction was the ideal, for mathematics was supposed to stretch the capacity of the faculties to such extent that the wonders of creation were more palpable. In so doing, a student’s mind could better ponder the world around him in the manner God ordained—humbly and purely with reverence to creation.

Science education, including mathematics, complemented religion in meaningful ways. Students viewed science as proof of God’s existence and omnipotence and,

¹⁰² Ibid., 15.

¹⁰³ Garrett, 10 October 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 159.

therefore, as a moral enterprise. Wilbur Foster, a junior, explained in 1858 that the natural sciences had certain “moral effects,” including “enlarged ideas and more elevated conceptions of the greatness and goodness of God.” He explained further, “We are taught to see in these works of a kind and beneficent hand and we are involuntarily to reverence and adore it. Our hearts are purified, our moral nature refined, and our minds exalted. Such are the benefits flowing from the study of the natural sciences.”¹⁰⁴ This thinking was common in a pre-Darwinian world. In a study of fifteen American colleges between 1815 and 1860, one historian notes, “Science professors...found a religiously inspired morality imperative for the study of science and agreeable to their own thoughts and interests.”¹⁰⁵ All professors at North Carolina were affiliated with one Protestant denomination or another, and some were ordained clergy, as was the case with Joseph Caldwell and Elisha Mitchell, two professors of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy in the early nineteenth century. Nor did religious-minded laymen such as James Phillips shy away from a religious apology for the study of science. Science education, professors and students believed, fostered moral improvement by revealing God’s mysterious omnipotence.

James Phillips’ natural philosophy class exemplifies the extent to which antebellum science facilitated both the moral and intellectual development of youth. For seventeen weeks, juniors at the University of North Carolina attended lectures on Natural Philosophy. Phillips taught his science classes with a conviction that “[t]he contemplation of the works of creation excites the mind to the admiration of whatever is great and noble, accomplishing the object of all study, which is to inspire the love of

¹⁰⁴ Foster, “Speech of W.F. Foster of Ala[bama], Junior Debate for 1858,” 9.

¹⁰⁵ Guralnick, *Science and the Ante-Bellum American College*, 154.

truth, of wisdom, of beauty, especially of goodness, the highest beauty, and of that supreme and eternal mind which contains all truth and wisdom, all beauty and goodness.”¹⁰⁶ The course began with an overview of the development, methods, and theories of Newtonian physical sciences, followed by lectures on the properties of matter, Newton’s laws of motion, gravity, the theories and measurement of time, “experiments on the mechanic powers,” and the nature of bodies, fluids, and liquids, as well as their properties and relationships. The course ended with lectures about air pressure, theories of winds, hurricanes, waterspouts, and the media and transmission of sound. Many students looked forward to studying these topics, as Walter Lenoir explained to his father in 1841: “As far as I can judge from the recitations of one week, our studies for this session will be very easy and interesting. Natural Philosophy and Rhetoric, in particular are delightful studies.”¹⁰⁷

Natural Philosophy, like all sciences in nineteenth-century college curricula, was purely theoretical. Justifying his approach to natural philosophy, Phillips explained, “The objects of inquiry in natural philosophy are principles not phenomena; laws, not insulated independent facts, & [therefore] as truth is simple & consistent with itself, it may be as completely & plainly elucidated by the most familiar & simple facts as by the most imposg. & uncommon phenomena.” As an example of how he demonstrated these principals and truths, Phillips explained, “The colors of a soap bubble, for instance, result from a principle, the most important from the variety of phenomena it explains, & the most beautiful from its simplicity & compendious neatness, to be found in all optics.” He

¹⁰⁶ James Phillips, “Astronomy. Lecture 1st. Its attractions, its uses, history, cultivators &c.,” undated, Volume 19, Folder 175, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 24 July 1841, Box 6, Folder 82, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

concluded, “No natural object is unimportant & uninterestg. to a natural philosopher....”¹⁰⁸

Lectures were the chief mode of science instruction and students were examined (orally) at the end of term. In lectures, professors presented the history of scientific thought, explained the laws of nature, and the methods by which scientists understood them over time. Sometimes professors demonstrated scientific principles during lecture, which students seemed to anticipate and enjoy. In 1841, James Dusenbery recalled that “Dr. Mitchell...received a very fine selection of Galvanic & Electro-Magnetic instruments” and “showed the class some striking experiments.”¹⁰⁹ A year later, Ruffin Tomlinson seemed disappointed that “there were but few experiments” in a Chemistry lecture he attended, though “the Dr shewed us several minerals.”¹¹⁰ Students, however, did not participate in experiments. Many more curious and ambitious students still desired active participation, beyond the mere memorization and recitation of solutions to abstract scientific principles. Thomas Garrett and his friends obtained a key to “Prof. Phillips’ philosophic chamber” one evening in 1849. They were “excited at the idea of pilaging [sic] about among the [scientific] instruments. Garrett bragged, “It would have probably excited the admiration and astonishment of the great Aristotle or of Newton if he could have peeped through a hole at us.” They explored all the instruments in the room—prisms, concave mirrors, and telescopes—going about “from one thing to another

¹⁰⁸ James Phillips, “Natural Philosophy Lecture 2d. History completed, Its importance Shewn,” undated, Volume 47, Folder 203, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 12.

¹⁰⁹ James Lawrence Dusenbery, 10 October 1841, Diary, James Lawrence Dusenberry Diary and Clipping #2561-z, SHC.

¹¹⁰ John L. Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, the University of North Carolina, 1841-1842,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* XXX (January 1953): 241.

untill none one single branch of the whole science remained, a part of which we did not explore.”¹¹¹

Though lecture was the principal pedagogy of science instruction, professors assigned, or at the very least recommended, textbooks to supplement the course.¹¹² Sometimes textbooks complicated, rather than clarified, lectures. Reading about optics for his natural philosophy course in 1849, Thomas Garrett complained, “This day has been entirely taken up with the science of Optics in Philosophy, a subject quite interesting indeed; but I would willingly escape from the duty of studying it in the language of the author,” he wrote. In addition to the text’s “obscure” and “unintelligible” language, Garrett complained that the author, he continued, “had not a distinct idea of what he was writing about.” In the end he confessed to have had more difficulty comprehending the author’s language than he did the science of optics.¹¹³

Sometimes students questioned the usefulness of science instruction. In 1849, Thomas Miles Garrett heard a lecture on the law of gravity and “descriptions of instruments used in finding it,” and remarked in his journal that the whole enterprise seemed to him a “matter of mere curiosity, and not of any practical value to put ourselves to the trouble of so accurately measuring the specific gravity.” Yet he found utility for such a law, strangely, in the context of commerce. “A law that all articles of commerce shall be taxed according to its specific gravity,” he wrote in his journal, “has rendered it quite necessary that rules should be discovered and instruments invented in order to

¹¹¹ Garrett, 19 June 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 18.

¹¹² Phillips, “Natural Philosophy Lecture 2d.,” 20.

¹¹³ Garrett, 13 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 127.

obtain with accuracy [sic] the specific gravity.”¹¹⁴ Despite its questionable usefulness, Garrett concluded that the “observations” of natural philosophy, as far as he has learned them, “nevertheless prove highly interesting and instructive.” Garrett found, after some thinking, a way to adapt theoretical science to his notion that intellectual manhood demanded useful erudition.

The course in astronomy provides another example of how theoretical science was supposed to help youth cultivate intellectual manhood by relating exemplary manhood with exemplary thinking. Students studied Astronomy, a branch of Natural Philosophy, in their senior year under James Phillips. The course covered the history of major astronomical and physical discoveries and observations since Newton, the history of ideas about the earth and its properties (including the poles, ocean, land, and tides), planets’ observable properties and their satellites, and various other “heavenly bodies,” including comets. Astronomy was supposed to teach students how to imagine the intangible and to reason from observation. James Phillips explained to his classes, “Our business is not to make astronomers but correct thinkers and sound thinkers, for the theoretical part of the science is all that you can acquire.” Instead, the course familiarized students with astronomy’s “technical terms” and its history and provided explanations of how scientists have studied the “heavens.” “It is a great mistake, as well as a great and useless waste of time, to commit solutions or even to follow...the steps laid down in your text books,” Phillips told his Astronomy class. Instead, he instructed them,

Exercise your imagination much more than your memor[y]. i.e. read little and think a good deal, see demonstrations or solutions for yourselves, at least try your own power as often as possible; in this way you will find you progress to be both rapid and easy. you will acquire a mathematical spirit, a relish for researches and

¹¹⁴ Garrett, 8 August 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 84.

a facility for discovering and inventing. Try to develop, without assistance of any kind, what you may have read, to deduce corollaries, to make applications and only seek in your text books for a confirmation of the results which you have reached alone. “Sic itur ad astra.”¹¹⁵

James Phillips was clear in all of his scientific courses that the method of deduction presented in lectures was what students ought to pursue. Antebellum students had opportunities to observe “the heavens” at the University’s observatory, completed in the 1830s, but lectures were the primary mode of instruction.

Astronomy lectures filled students’ imaginations with wonder by emphasizing the sublime qualities of a subject that explored God’s infinite greatness. The ability to contemplate the sublime was a mark of a truly educated and enlightened man.¹¹⁶

Educators stressed this point in their lectures. “We can enjoy the beauty & fragrance of the flower without undervalu[ing] its medicinal virtues,” Phillips explained, and “[w]e may...be pardoned if we continue to pursue our path into the depths of space, to contemplate & admire those worlds which are sprinkled in such profusion above us, & which are but the shadows of His power who formed, sustains & governs them.”¹¹⁷

Professors used an elevated and refined style to emphasize the sublimity of the natural world. James Phillips, for instance, began his seventh lecture, “On the Sun, & zodiacal light,” with a “hymn to the sun,” by Thompson:

Having now taken a cursory view of the planets, we shall proceed to a brief description of the sun, that magnificent luminary on which they all depend, from

¹¹⁵ James Phillips, “Astronomy. Lecture 2nd. Discoveries of Halley, Bradley, Herschel...,” undated, Volume 20, Folder 176, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 11-13.

¹¹⁶ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), 275-80.

¹¹⁷ James Phillips, “Astronomy. Lecture 9th. The “Cui bono”? question noticed; the Milky way; figments of the ancients respecting it; its real constitution explained; distance of some of its stars; its superior magnificence in southern latitudes....,” undated, Volume 28, Folder 183, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 3-4.

which they derive light & heat & vivifying influence, & by whose attractive energy they are directed in their motions & retained in their orbits--.

“O Sun
Soul of surrounding worlds! in whom best seen
Shines out thy Maker! may I talk of thee....”¹¹⁸

Other times Phillips relied on an assumed understanding of ancient authors’ depiction of “the heavens” in poetry, citing, for example, Virgil or Homer to describe astronomical phenomenon. In many scientific lectures such as these, professors engaged students in what the great intellectual historian Perry Miller has called, “science as a form of contemplation,” making subjects like astronomy suitable for both intellectual and moral improvement.

Astronomy was not all about wonder; like language and mathematics, astronomy was also about developing intellectual authority and the mastery of knowledge. Students were largely responsible for being able to explain astronomical phenomenon and how to study them. The questions at the end of James Phillips’ lectures demonstrate how the course worked and some of the themes it examined. Questions in his notes on his fifth lecture, for example, include: “Methods of study? Astronomy? Plan of the university? Earth’s position in the System? Different aspects of the planets as seen from the earth? What do they prove? Are the extent & duration of their areas of retrogradation equal? When have we the best telescopic views of Mars...? At what intervals of time?” Students also had to memorize distances. For example, questions in the margins of Phillips lectures ask students to give the distance of Mars from the sun and explain the “Variation in [Mars’] apparent size? Time of revolution, etc....” Likewise, students were asked the following questions of Jupiter: “Intensity of light? Any atmosphere? “Ratio

¹¹⁸ James Phillips, “On the Sun, & zodiacal light,” James Phillips Volumes, Vol. 25, Series 8.2, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC.

of equatorial to polar diam.? Weight, etc.” In lecture six, solely on Saturn, questions are similar, “What is said of Saturn?, etc.”¹¹⁹

As with natural philosophy, students studied the assigned textbook to answer questions in recitations and exams on science. Ruffin Tomlinson, who took Phillip’s Astronomy course in 1841, noted how he prepared for recitation by studying the assigned text, William A. Norton’s *An Elementary Treatise on Astronomy* (1839).¹²⁰ “After prays [sic] I returned to my room to prepare the ninth Chapter in Norton’s Astr[onomy] for recitation in the evening between five and six. I devoted myself exclusively to Norton until breakfast. Immediately after breakfasting I returned to my room to studying of Norton until eleven o clock when I went to the Senior recitation room.” He continued with Norton after dinner at one in the afternoon until his five o’clock recitation in Astronomy. Despite his nearly six hours of studying the chapter, Phillips never called on Tomlinson to recite.¹²¹

Mathematics, natural philosophy, and astronomy demonstrate that the antebellum science curriculum consistently emphasized the story of human progress and the role of rigorous thinking to its promotion. Whether the course was Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus, Natural Philosophy, or Astronomy, the first lectures faithfully charted the progress of science from ancient Greece to modern Europe. In fact, science and math classes were largely courses in the history of mathematical and scientific ideas and

¹¹⁹ James Phillips, James Phillips Volumes, vol. 24, folder 180, Series 8.2, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC.

¹²⁰ William A. Norton, *An Elementary Treatise on Astronomy, in Four Parts, Containing a Systematic and Comprehensive Exposition of the Theory, and the More Important Practical Problems: with Solar, Lunar, and other Astronomical Tables, Designed for Use as a Text-book in Colleges and Academies* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1839).

¹²¹ Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson,” 95.

methods, with a dash of practical demonstration and problem solving on students' parts. James Phillips began his course in Fluxions, for example, not with the definitions, postulates, axioms, etc. of fluxions, but with its ancient history. He emphasized Greece in particular: "One of the most memorable periods in the history of the Mathematics is the foundation of the Platonic school, where Geometry was assiduously cultivated, and where it received some of the most valuable accession which now enrich and adorn it..."¹²²

Part of the enterprise was to show superiority of the ancient world, but also how modern thinkers have allowed the purity of the ancient's thought to grow and expand. Phillips put it still more plainly in his "Introductory Lecture to Natural Philosophy." The study of mathematics and the physical sciences, he explained to his students, afforded "contemplation of the more quiet progress of civilization." Math and science, Phillips argued, were "intimately...connected with the advance of the arts, & above all, with the intellectual improvement of our species..."¹²³ Science promoted human civilization, the argument went, and American youth were obliged to pursue science for the benefit of their republic. For example, in 1859, Cicero Croom, explained that science, or the study of "nature and nature's laws," as with history and commerce, was an important element of civilization building.¹²⁴ Antebellum science instruction taught students that men with disciplined minds, stored with knowledge of the principles on which the natural world operated, could promote American civilization. Armed with these abilities, students

¹²² James Phillips, "Introductory Lecture to Natural Philosophy," undated, Volume 46, Folder 202, Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC, 2.

¹²³ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁴ Cicero Stephens Croom, "Motion Universal," 15 March 1859, Dialectic Society Records. Croom's grandson had the same views. See Hardy Bryan Croom, Address, 05 March 1817, *ibid.*

required the conviction of an educated conscience to understand educated men's moral duties to others and to God.

Mental and Moral Philosophy: The Laws of God and Man

By exercising and disciplining the mind, courses in ancient languages and literature, mathematics, and science provided a foundation on which young men could lead responsible lives and advance American civilization and republican government. But where did knowledge and virtue reside? And from what sources did men derive power to reason, to judge, and to discern right and wrong? In other words, how could individuals make the choice of Hercules and choose virtue over vice? The course in moral philosophy—a senior-year capstone course taught by the college president—taught young men to look within themselves for knowledge and virtue, that is to develop self-identities as free moral agents. The course addressed a range of discrete subjects, including (in order of presentation to students in the senior year) intellectual, or mental, philosophy (how the mind operated); moral philosophy (theoretical and practical ethics); political economy (ethics applied to nation states, commerce, etc.); and U.S. constitutional theory and history (a case study of moral philosophy in practice). These subjects provided a coherent ethical system that addressed all possible theoretical and practical questions regarding men's moral obligations to self and to society. Moral Philosophy, in short, brought together a variety of subjects, each aimed at teaching students how to lead virtuous private and public lives.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 40, 90. These were the driving questions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century moral philosophy. See William H. Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 56. In general, the history of moral philosophy in American higher education has gone largely unstudied and only two historians have dealt substantively with the philosophers and texts studied: Donald H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The*

Assigned readings for the course reflected the curriculum's emphasis on virtuous republican leadership and its broad application to society. Between 1795 and 1835, students studied two major works for the course, which were tied very closely to eighteenth-century European thought: William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) and Montesquieu's *On the Spirit of Laws* (1748). After 1835, under President David Swain's instruction, students read the Bible, John Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830), and three texts by Brown University President, Francis Wayland, including his *Elements of Moral Science* (1835), *Elements of Political Economy* (1837), and *Elements of Intellectual Philosophy* (1854). In addition, they read the first volume of James Kent's *Commentaries on American Law* (1826) and Joseph Story's *Familiar Exposition of the Constitution* (1833). In tandem with these works, Swain delivered lectures on the history of constitutional law.¹²⁶ Overall, the readings assigned for the course offered a

Shaping of the American National Ethic (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) and Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). The following discussion of moral philosophy engages the methods and interpretations of Myer and Howe. Like their works, for example, this section relies largely on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century moral philosophy texts more than on manuscript sources because, oddly, primary sources for this part of the educational experience at North Carolina are rare. For example, I have been unable to locate David L. Swain's lectures on the subject or any detailed engagement with readings in student writing. Uncovering marginalia in texts was also difficult for this subject because the texts that students would have read for class continue to circulate in the University of North Carolina's main library, removing any reliability for marginalia analysis. The primary means by which students seemed to have engaged with the lessons of moral philosophy, however, are not unclear. As I will argue in Chapter 4, students regularly took up the ethical concerns of Moral Philosophy in their weekly literary society debates. Their debate questions reflected the major ethical concerns of Paley, Wayland, and others. Moreover, the questions closely resembled the questions that Yale College president, Timothy Dwight, Jr., asked his moral philosophy students in the early nineteenth century, suggesting a certain correlation between moral and ethical thought in and outside of the classroom. See *President Dwight's Decisions of Questions Discussed by the Senior Class in Yale College in 1813 and 1814* (New York: Leavitt, 1833).

¹²⁶ *Catalogue of the Trustees, Faculty, and Students, of the University of N. Carolina. 1846-47* (Raleigh: W. R. Gales, Printer, Register Office, 1846). The catalog states that these works were used "with constant reference" to Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy* (Philadelphia : J. Grigg ;Charleston, S.C. : W.P. Bason, 1824) and Thomas C. Upham, *Elements of Mental Philosophy, Embracing the Two Departments of the Intellect and Sensibilities* (New York : Harper & Brothers, 1840).

conservative view of man and his world—one in which elites, as society’s natural leaders, ordered, controlled, and disseminated knowledge and shaped civil society through the exercise of moral leadership.¹²⁷ This public ethic was essentially Christian (emphasizing benevolence, veracity, justice, and the golden rule) and republican (emphasizing individual liberty and elevating the common good over self-interest). While the course did not teach men’s duties differently or more effectively than Christianity, by virtue of its foundations in science and reason rather than doctrine, professors teaching the course could evade charges of sectarianism.

The course and assigned texts were intended specifically for young men and provided practical, rather than esoteric, guidelines for moral life that conformed to expectations that elite young men practice self-control of mind and emotions. For example, in an 1835 composition, “On Moral & Intellectual Philosophy,” Julian Leach explained that moral philosophy provided useful lessons for performing educated men’s moral duties. “For what is more important to the young who are just entering on the great theatre of life, and proposing to themselves either happiness or greatness, than to have an instructor which will teach them their duty, on what to found their hopes and their great destiny?” he asked. “Are not these the very subjects on which they [young men] are most solicitous of information?” Mental and Moral Philosophy, he argued, taught young men how to regulate their conduct, their hopes, and perform their moral duties. The overarching idea behind the course, he concluded, was to teach a young man “Gnothi Seauton,” to know thyself, or to recognize that one’s own soul is “the spring of all action

¹²⁷ Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 90. As Frederick Rudolph has explained, “Moral Philosophy encouraged the choice of Hercules; it lacked democratic pretensions; it located virtue and wisdom not in the people but in an educated few [men] fit to be their leaders. And it carried the reassuring message that knowledge could be ordered, unified, and contained.”

and Governor of volition.”¹²⁸ Arriving at this level of self-knowledge took hard work and careful attention to each branch of moral education, beginning with the study of the human mind in mental philosophy.

Mental philosophy taught students how the mind worked and how best to control it. This was the root of all moral education, students learned, for knowledge of one’s own mind allowed an individual to know the minds of others. Or as David Swain explained to his students, quoting Alexander Pope’s famous *Essay on Man* (ca. 1732), “The proper study of mankind, is man.”¹²⁹ The study was premised on Scottish common sense realism, a school of thought founded by Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and Dugald Stewart and popularized in the American colonies by John Witherspoon, president of Princeton. According to one historian, these Scottish thinkers “focused their studies first upon observations of how the human mind worked.... Their objective was to seek out the natural laws of thought and morality and then apply them to human behavior in the perfect social and political world system, which could reflect only the wishes or workings of God himself.”¹³⁰ Scottish realism was not an esoteric or metaphysical philosophy, but a concrete and orderly approach to understanding man and his world. At its root was the idea that mind and matter were separate and distinct, and thus could be understood inductively by reasoning men. Thomas Reid, in particular, argued that there were certain common principles that all men could understand and that the mind was the

¹²⁸ Julian E Leach, “On Moral & Intellectual Philosophy,” 25 May 1835, Dialectic Society Records.

¹²⁹ Dusenbery, 12 October 1841, Diary. Dusenbery’s diary report also suggests that Swain may have used John Witherspoon’s famous Princeton lectures on moral philosophy. Witherspoon said at Princeton at the study of morals began with the study of man. He explained, “It seems a point agreed upon that the principles of duty and obligation must be drawn from the nature of man. That is to say, if we can discover how his Maker formed him, or for what he intended him, that certainly is what he ought to be.” Witherspoon quoted in Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 35.

¹³⁰ Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution*, 58.

active agent of all understanding, perceiving, and judging of those principles.¹³¹ All the perceptions that comprised knowledge, Reid argued, were “a part of the furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding. . . . They are part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called *the common sense of mankind*.” Behind this process was the theory of faculty psychology, which viewed the human mind as compartmentalized into three discrete powers, or faculties—the rational, emotional, and volitional (that is, reason, passions, and will). Each part of the mind had to be balanced with the other; character was the “controlling” center, or at least reflected “the proper development of ‘the whole man.’”¹³² The study of mental philosophy taught students that humans, by nature, were thinking and moral beings, capable of discovering moral truths and performing them in private and social capacities.¹³³

Mental philosophy texts led students through the psychological arguments of Scottish philosophers, modeling their inductive approach to knowledge and applying them to a set of gendered and class ideals about men and moral leadership. The primary text used in the antebellum period was John Abercrombie’s *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830), a synthesis of Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart’s theories about the human mind. A doctor and fellow at the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, Scotland, John Abercrombie (1780-1844) distinguished himself as one of Britain’s preeminent medical scholars, served as the

¹³¹ This was at once a substantial revision of John Locke’s theory that men were born without innate ideas and a response to Berkeley’s idealism and Hume’s skepticism. See Goetzmann, *Beyond the Revolution*, 56-58.

¹³² Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 24-25, 54-55, 66.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

King's First Physician in Scotland, and published widely in medical journals. He wrote two works for the instruction of medical students—*Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830) and a sequel, *The Philosophy of Moral Feelings* (1833)—which were used widely in academies, colleges, and universities in Britain and the United States. The texts were intended to help young men develop what Abercrombie called “personal identity.” *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth*, for example, is concerned first explaining the structure of the human mind—its faculties and their relation to one another—and the uses of reason to investigate truth and correct impressions of the mind. Equipped with an understanding of how the mind worked, young readers of Abercrombie's text then explored the importance of cultivating habits of attention and industry, which comprised a “well regulated mind.”¹³⁴

Abercrombie's text presented a rubric for intellectual manhood—stoic, confident and competent. He celebrated the man who cultivated an “active, inquiring, and reflecting habit of mind” and “directs his attention intensely and eagerly to the great truths which belong to his moral condition.”¹³⁵ The ideal man of Abercrombie's text exercised complete control over his mind and passions. Abercrombie's ideal man was the great-man archetype to which young men aspired:

Does a subject occur to him, either in conversation or reflection, in which he feels that his knowledge is deficient, he commences, without delay, an eager pursuit of the necessary information. In prosecuting any inquiry, whether be reading or observation, his attention is acutely alive to the authenticity of facts, the validity of arguments, the accuracy of processes of investigation, principles which are illustrated by the facts and conclusions deduced from them, the character of observers, they style of writers; and thus, all the circumstances which come before

¹³⁴ Ibid., 267.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 279-80.

him are made acutely and individually the objects of attention and reflection. Such a man acquires a confidence in his own powers and resources to which those are strangers who have not cultivated this kind of mental discipline. The intellectual condition arising out of it is applicable alike to every situation in which a man can be placed, whether the affairs of ordinary life, the pursuits of science, or those higher inquiries and relations which concern him as a moral being.¹³⁶

Great men differed fundamentally from men with “listless” and “torpid” characters on account of their mental strength. Julian Leach echoed these sentiments in his 1835 essay, arguing that young men who learned to regulate their minds and morals possessed an “internal secret power,” which alone “elevates those who cultivate it.” The ideal man stood in stark contrast to boys, he argued, who were “naturally prone to excess of every kind.” The attentive student of mental philosophy could readily achieve this ideal through strenuous mental exercise.¹³⁷

Great men were great by virtue of their mental powers but also by their moral powers. The study of moral philosophy, which followed mental philosophy, raised students’ consciousness of men’s relations to God and to one another by learning how to think, judge, and perceive relationships, rules, and so forth, and then taught students how, “by the use of the powers of our intellect” to carry their “moral affections” into action. During the first third of the nineteenth century, William Paley’s *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785) was the standard moral philosophy textbook used in American colleges and universities, including the University of North Carolina, largely because it was the most comprehensive work dealing with theoretical and practical ethics available.¹³⁸ William Paley (1743-1805) was educated at Christ’s Church, Cambridge,

¹³⁶ Ibid., 277.

¹³⁷ Leach, “On Moral & Intellectual Philosophy.”

¹³⁸ D.L. Le Mahieu, Forward to William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), xii-xiv.

and shortly after finishing his studies, returned as a lecturer in moral philosophy. His *Principles* are an elaboration of his Cambridge lectures. Most of Paley's lectures complemented late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century views that wisdom, virtue, and leadership belonged only to educated elite. Paley's views of civil society were conservative. He believed that representatives should be landed and that private property was "expedient" for society. He also opposed the French Revolution, rejected electoral reform in Britain, and, in general, feared mob rule.¹³⁹ These social and political views were compatible with elite, republican manhood in the early national and republic periods, but his views on morality were more controversial. He emphasized, for instance, that men formed moral judgments based on the consequences of one's actions. That is, moral law was not necessarily absolute. American college presidents, lacking a better synthetic text, overlooked this argument and explained to their students in supplemental lectures that moral law was absolute and innate in humanity, emanating from an omniscient God. Ultimately, many American colleges began to drop Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* for other, more modern, American works in the 1820s and 1830s. North Carolina did too, and adopted Francis Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* in the 1830s.

Francis Wayland (1796-1865) was a Baptist minister, served as a professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Union College, and then as President of Brown University. He was a staunch advocate of educational reform in the United States because he did not believe that classical learning prepared young men for modern professions. He championed both intellectual and moral improvement, especially the

¹³⁹ Paley, xix-xxii.

balance of reason and religion.¹⁴⁰ Wayland articulated this position clearly in his philosophical writing, especially his treatise on moral philosophy. When he became president of Brown University in 1827, Paley's textbook remained the main text for the course. But Wayland rejected most of Paley's ideas, particularly the idea that men base their moral judgments on the potentially positive or negative consequence of their actions. So he began to present his own ideas to his students, which were based on those of Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752), who explained that conscience directed men in adhering to moral law. Wayland's lectures refuting Paley ultimately culminated in his *Elements of Moral Science*. First published in 1835 by Cooke and Company of New York, Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* went through four editions by the time of his death in 1865. By century's end, about 100,000 copies of the text had been sold in America, and other editions were published in foreign languages. This was the "first American textbook in moral philosophy," and it became the standard moral philosophy text in American colleges and universities in the antebellum period.¹⁴¹

Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* is divided into two main parts, one dealing with theoretical ethics and another with practical ethics. In his system of theoretical ethics, he emphasizes the divine origins of all moral laws. He echoes Scottish common sense realism by arguing that humans have the power—the moral sense, or conscience—to discern these moral laws and to judge actions and their consequences based on this innate moral sense. He wrote, for example, "I believe the idea of a moral quality in the actions to be ultimate, to arise under such circumstances as have been appointed by our

¹⁴⁰ Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, ed. Joseph L. Blau (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), xlii.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xli-xlii.

Creator, and that we can assign for it no other reason than that such is his will concerning us.”¹⁴² In particular, the moral sense teaches men that promoting individual happiness also promotes the happiness of society. The basis of social happiness, in other words, was what Julian Leach referred to in his 1835 essay, as the “philosophic government” of one’s own passions.¹⁴³ An innate sense of right or wrong, however, did not in itself educate the conscience entirely. In order to act morally, men had to refer to what is revealed in religion about moral law. Conscience, in other words, needed to be assisted by divine revelation, or revealed religion, and Wayland’s *Elements of Moral Science* provided a system of practical ethics to assist the conscience.

The second part of Wayland’s text dealt with practical ethics, or men’s obligations to God and to man. Wayland’s text conveyed essential values in nineteenth-century society and its expectations for intellectual manhood. Men’s most basic duties were twofold: to God and to man, and in that order. “[T]he moral obligations of men are of two kinds,” Wayland wrote, “first, LOVE TO GOD, OR PIETY; second, LOVE TO MAN, OR MORALITY.”¹⁴⁴ He explains that men’s general obligation to love God, or piety, is required of every individual and can be achieved in three ways: by cultivating a “spirit of devotion”; praying; and keeping the Sabbath. Students learned from Wayland that ideal manhood required “a devotional spirit” that consisted in “making the moral use which is intended, of all the objects of intellection that come within our experience or observation.” In other words, everything knowable emanated from—and contained lessons about—God.

¹⁴² Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, 36.

¹⁴³ Leach, “On Moral & Intellectual Philosophy.”

¹⁴⁴ Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, 137, 150.

Wayland stated clearly his belief that the main avenue to morality, to observing the obligation to mankind, is through “reciprocity and benevolence,” rooted in the golden rule, that is Christ’s call to love one’s neighbor as oneself. Therefore the most important Christian maxim, treat others as you want to be treated, was an inviolable moral obligation. Wayland puts it this way:

Every human being is, by his constitution, a separate and distinct and complete system, adapted to all the purposes of self-government and responsible, separately, to God for the manner in which his powers are employed. Thus every individual possesses a body, by which he is connected with the physical universe, and by which that universe is modified for the supply of his wants; an understanding, by which truth is discovered, and by which means are adapted to their appropriate ends; passions and desires, by which he is excited to action, and in the gratification of which his happiness consists; conscience, to point out the limit within which these desires may be rightfully gratified; and a will, which determines him to action.

Every man had “an entire right” to his body, his mind, his will, and his conscience, and Wayland refers to this as “equality of right.” There was no such thing, he explains, of “inequality of right,” but only “inequality of condition.”¹⁴⁵ Wayland offered a radically democratic perspective on the human condition that conformed to Christianity, but flew in the face of southern slaveholding.

Wayland criticized American slavery as a violation of personal liberty given to all individuals from God. He argued that slavery violated man’s duty to man and man’s duty to God and was, therefore, immoral. “The most common violation of personal liberty,” he argues, “is that which exists in the case of *Domestic Slavery*,” Wayland writes. “Slavery,” he argues, “violates the personal liberty of man as a *physical, intellectual, and moral being*.” The premise of domestic slavery is that a “master has a right to control the actions, physical and intellectual, of the slave for his own, that is, the

¹⁴⁵ Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science*, 182-183.

master's, individual benefit; and of course that the happiness of the master, when it comes in competition with the happiness of the slave, extinguishes in the latter the right to pursue it. It supposes, at best, that the relation between master and slave is not that which exists between man and man, but is a modification, at least, of that which exists between man and brutes."¹⁴⁶ Slavery corrupted, moreover, the character of both master and slave. Among masters, slavery "tends to cultivate...pride, anger, cruelty, selfishness and licentiousness," and among slaves, it "fosters...lying, deceit, hypocrisy, dishonesty, and a willingness to yield himself up to minister to the appetites of his master." Beyond individual evils, slavery harmed national wealth, removes a "natural stimulus" to labor among laborers, and undermined frugality.

Wayland also refuted proslavery claims that the Bible sanctions slavery. Here he argued in the realm of revealed religion, by looking at the golden rule, first, and then examining evidence from the Gospel. First, he argues, "The moral precepts of the Bible are diametrically opposed to slavery. They are, Thou shalt love thy *neighbor* as *thyself*, and *all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.*"¹⁴⁷ This stance on slavery made him a persona non grata in most of the South. Rather than follow a growing national trend to adopt the text for the moral philosophy course, many southern college presidents wrote their own textbooks.¹⁴⁸ Alone in the South, the University of North Carolina continued to assign the book into the late antebellum period, demonstrating the varied and unpredictable attitudes about slavery among elite whites in the upper South that the historians William Freehling and Lacy

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 191.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., xliii-xlix

Ford have explained in recent works.¹⁴⁹ No evidence exists about how President Swain taught this part of Wayland at North Carolina, but he did not omit it from the course. According to one historian, “[i]t was provided that no portion of the [moral philosophy] text-books should be omitted, ‘but the whole carefully recited, subsequently reviewed, and each member of the class separately and rigidly be examined on the entire system.’”¹⁵⁰ Swain may have chosen not to require recitation of the anti-slavery sections of Wayland’s *Elements of Moral Science*, but there is no evidence for this decision.

Perhaps because Wayland never proposed an immediate end to slavery, North Carolina continued use of the book in its Moral Philosophy course. “[I]mmediate abolition would be the greatest possible injury to the slaves themselves,” he argues. “They are not competent to self-government.”¹⁵¹ So, in the meantime, slaves had to obey their masters, and masters had to treat their slaves well. “What is the duty of masters and slaves under a condition of society in which slavery now exists?” He asks his readers. Since the system of slavery is wrong, masters are morally obligated to manumit their slaves. Slaves, too, are morally bound to honor the wishes of their masters.

Wayland’s emphasis on men’s reciprocal obligations to one another was foundational for his system of applied ethics. In addition to respecting individuals’ personal liberty, including the physical, intellectual, and religious, respecting the right of property is an essential duty to man examined in Wayland’s practical ethics. He

¹⁴⁹ The University of North Carolina was the *only* southern college to assign Wayland’s book, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese have explained in their comprehensive *The Mind of the Master Class*. Higher schools, including girls’ academies, however, did assign the book. See Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*, 86. On southerners’ diverse and unpredictable attitudes about slavery, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. chaps. 12-14.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *The History of Education in North Carolina*, 79-80.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

examined at great length the foundations for the rights of property and how they could be violated. The discussion of personal liberty fit perfectly the complementary course to moral philosophy—constitutional history and theory, in which young men studied how real law put into practice the ethics discussed in the abstract in moral philosophy. Moral philosophy also extended to character and reputation, which were important components of intellectual manhood. Wayland covered topics such as obligations, oaths, slander, and ridicule, on one hand, and individuals' responsibilities to uphold public justice and protect innocent citizens. In all, he imbued his reader with a host of mainstream Protestant values and ascribed to them civic importance.

Private virtue was also central to Wayland's discussion of applied ethics, especially the "duties which arise from the constitution of the sexes," or the duties of husbands and wives, and parents and children. He emphasized men and women's duty to live chaste lives in particular. This education in sex and gender conformed neatly to middle-class expectations for restrained manhood and resonated with the sexual values that elite southern youth learned in families and, especially, through religion. Wayland taught that "sexual appetite" was a natural "part of our constitution," the indulgence of which God limits; moral philosophy was supposed to ascertain the limits to sexual indulgence. Adultery, polygamy, concubinage, and fornication are forbidden and therefore Wayland's text explains the definition of each violation and then explains why each is a violation based on revealed religion. He notes, in particular, that "unchaste desire is strongly excited by the imagination," and "the law of chastity forbids all impure thoughts and actions; all unchaste conversation, looks, or gestures; the reading of obscene or lascivious books, and everything which would naturally produce in us a disposition of mind to

violate this precept.”¹⁵² In addition, Wayland warns young men of the severe punishments that “God has affixed” on those who breach the laws governing sex: “Let the seducer and the profligate remember that each must stand, with his victim and his partner in guilt, before the Judge of quick and dead, where a recompense will be rendered to every man according to his deeds.”¹⁵³ Appealing to a common understanding of Christian crime and punishment, the Christian conscience, Wayland provided a clear rubric for young men as they develop self-consciousness as sexual beings.¹⁵⁴

Students learned, moreover, that sex roles emanated from these natural laws and duties of chastity. For example, he reminds his readers about the moral and social role that men and women were supposed to play in society. “Let it be remembered that a female is a moral and accountable being...that she is made to be the center of all that is delightful in the domestic relations; that by her very nature she looks up to man as her protector, and loves to confide in his hands her happiness for life,” he wrote. He asked his readers to consider, ultimately, whether there was a greater crime than the violation of a woman’s moral nature. In all, students learned that they had to actively guard against vice—lust, desire, “impure or lascivious imaginations”—in daily life in order to respect to protect their own souls, but also the souls of women. These lessons in monogamy, chastity, and vigilance against lust were absolutely necessary for young men to learn to become virtuous husbands and fathers, as well as members of civil society at large.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, 271. On the ways in which Wayland reinforced nineteenth-century patriarchy and separate spheres ideology through moral philosophy, see David Randall Gabrielse, “Making Men, Colleges and the Midwest: The Building and Writing of Indiana Colleges, 1802-1860,” Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2002, 134-51.

¹⁵³ Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, 275.

¹⁵⁴ Chapter Six examines how students did (and did not) abide by these moral duties and laws in their social and private lives at college.

¹⁵⁵ Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, 277-305.

Extant records do not indicate how the professor engaged students in practical ethics questions, including the issue of slavery, but we do know that at other schools, the professor engaged students with important social questions. Yale President Timothy Dwight required seniors to participate in debates about practical ethics. They entertained questions such as “Ought Capital Punishment ever to be inflicted?” and “Is a lie ever justifiable?” and “Does Temptation diminish the turpitude of a crime?”¹⁵⁶ There are no records of this style of pedagogy at North Carolina, but students’ literary society records suggest that many issues relating to practical ethics in moral philosophy may have been raised in moral philosophy classes and later addressed in debates in student societies’ weekly debates, which often resembled those entertained in Dwight’s moral philosophy course and discussed in Wayland’s *Elements of Moral Science* (See Chapter Four).

As students turned their attention outward from individual to society, they addressed practical ethical issues relating especially to the operation of government and civil society. At the end of the course, President Swain delivered lectures on the history of Constitutional Law. According to an 1846 course catalog—the first course catalog to provide a detailed course description—the president presented “an analytical review, in chronological order, of the MAGNA CHARTA of King John: The Petition of Right; the Charters of Carolina; the Fundamental Constitution (by John Locke); the Habeas Corpus Act; the Bill of Right; the Declaration of Independence; the Articles of Confederation; the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain, and the Constitution of the United States.”

Through the use of these documents, students were able to trace the history of republican

¹⁵⁶ Timothy Dwight, Jr., *President Dwight’s Decisions of Questions Discussed by the Senior Class in Yale College in 1813 and 1814* (New York: Leavitt, 1833).

government in the modern era and analyze them in the context of men's moral obligations. Students learned to view morality, not as historically contingent, but absolute, running through the progress of history.

In all, antebellum moral philosophy addressed the most important ethical questions that students would encounter in public life. The course contributed substantially to the broader project of moral education that characterized maturation at college in the antebellum period. In an 1830 address on education, for example, William Hooper, professor of Latin, explained to North Carolina students, "In proportion, therefore, as the intellect is exalted, and the taste refined, there is need that our moral nature should be confirmed in rectitude, and all our affections enlisted on the side of virtue."¹⁵⁷ In other words, Hooper reminded students about the importance of character education, which was crucial to a classical liberal arts curriculum. According to one historian, "[c]haracter was considered the controlling center" of a disciplined and well-furnished mind. It was also the *sine qua non* of intellectual manhood.

Significantly, this was an entirely evangelical character education. Character education permeated life at the University through strict rules governing student conduct, compulsory daily prayers, church services, and Bible recitations. This form of character education viewed young men primarily as boys, in need of external guidance.¹⁵⁸ Yet, as youth, students also had to learn to govern their own actions, for men were expected to be able to control themselves above all else. Thus, the senior-year moral philosophy course

¹⁵⁷ Hooper, *The Discipline of the Heart*, 8-9. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 63.

¹⁵⁸ Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience*, 66. Historians have demonstrated the development of this *in loco parentis* character education in great detail. As young boys, students relied on their parents and clergy for character education, but in college young men relied on college faculty, especially the president, for continued moral training. On the difficulties of *in loco parentis* at college, see Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 94-95.

located the center of moral guidance in the individual himself and aimed to teach him to control his mind and to make the Choice of Hercules of virtue over vice that ancient texts repeated modeled. In all, a thorough character education required moral philosophy because the subject explained systematically what comprised an individual's moral nature and provided a rubric by which he could responsibly perform his moral obligations to God and to his fellow man.

Conclusion

A classical education trained young men to think, to reason, and to judge. It improved the mind and fixed the attention so that students could become competent and confident thinkers in any situation that faced them as adults. Likewise, this education aimed to balance an improved mind with a virtuous conscience. The course in moral philosophy brought all branches of learning together in a capstone-course that “assisted” the conscience to act for the good of society. Together, this improved mind and assisted conscience balanced a young man's character making him virtuous, and therefore ready to model citizenship and lead the republic. Students learned that the pursuit of knowledge and virtue was one way to honor and to greatness.¹⁵⁹ The texts students read, the lectures they heard, and the recitations in which they participated conveyed these values that resonated with both southern and mainstream American masculine values.¹⁶⁰ They elevated a style of manliness that was industrious, restrained, mindful, and virtuous.

¹⁵⁹ Honor through wisdom and virtue, through learning, confirms and elaborates points in Berry, *All That Makes a Man* and Carmichael, *The Last Generation*. This view complicates the traditional view of southern male youth and honor culture presented in works on higher education such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor*, and Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons*.

¹⁶⁰ Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers*, 138-156.

But while the main focus of mental and moral improvement was youth themselves, no one would have denied that this training was for the benefit of others. Educated men, students believed “form the taste of their age, and give a decided cast to the religious and political opinions of those among whom they lived.” Indeed, they believed that future generations “cry out from the future to the educated of this age, ‘Men of learning you are shaping our destiny for us; to you we look for protection.’”¹⁶¹ Civilization depended on educated men, students learned. In this way, intellect and honor were inextricably connected, for intellect was a badge of honor. For educated men to be able to do their duty to American civilization, they needed to learn how to make their education serviceable to the republic, especially to their peers. Therefore, another essential piece of formal training and higher learning outside of the classroom was applying that knowledge publicly in spoken demonstrations of mental superiority. Education in speech and debate, the subjects of the following two chapters, required the formal mental discipline accrued in a structured system of higher education. When youth learned how to speak like men—in both private and public life—they not only demonstrated their wisdom and virtue, but their merit as leaders able to solve society’s great public questions.

¹⁶¹ “The Rewards of Educated Men, and Their Indebtedness to the World, *The North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (September, 1852): 276. See also Alfred Gowan Merritt, “The Man of Superior Intellect alone gains admiration,” Composition, 06 October 1852, Dialectic Society Records.

CHAPTER THREE

“Not merely thinking, but speaking beings”: Speech Education

On May 20, 1818, twenty-seven years before he became the eleventh President of the United States, twenty-three year old James Knox Polk, stood before his fellow members of the Dialectic Society at the University of North Carolina and delivered a commanding address on eloquence. According to Polk, the power of eloquence had been “felt and acknowledge[d] in all ages and in all nations”: in the republics of Greece and Rome, among the “unlettered savages” of North America, and most especially in the early American republic. Speech was the means by which men became great. Polk therefore commanded his classmates to “Reflect upon the high ground which you occupy with respect to the world,” and upon “the necessity of cultivating your oratorical powers”:

You not only live in a country which possesses advantages over every other in the superior excellence of its political institutions and in the freedom of parliamentary debate, but you are the chosen few of your own community who have the advantage of a liberal education.... Seize then with avidity the opportunity of improvement as they pass, for... you may be called upon to succeed those who now stand up [as] the representatives of the people, to wield by the thunder of your eloquence the council of a great nation and to retain by your prudent measures that liberty for which our fathers bled.¹

Polk’s attitudes about the power of eloquence were characteristic of the early republic and antebellum periods. Born in 1795 into a well-off slaveholding family in

¹ James Knox Polk, “James K. Polk’s Inaugural Address Delivered in the Dialectic Hall May 20th 1818,” Dialectic Society Records, 4.

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Polk learned at an early age that those in his social circle viewed eloquence and social status as inextricable. Moreover, he had a keen sense of the oratory of his father's generation, whose eloquence, as he remembered it, inspired and sustained the Revolutionary struggle. It was up to succeeding generations of educated men to learn to maintain the republic through their ability to inspire their fellow citizens, with speech, to be wise, virtuous, and active participants in civil society.²

Students such as James K. Polk who attended the University of North Carolina between 1795 and 1861 believed that speech was one path to political distinction, eminence, manhood, and, in turn, honor. Oratory was the most important, and certainly the most idealized, form of speech among students because of its close connection to government and the endurance of the American republic. According to Kenneth Greenberg, oratory was “a central component of Southern political life.”³ North Carolina students in each generation believed that learning to become a good orator was important—that their future lives indeed depended on it—because they hoped to participate in government and politics as adults.

Southern men had to be able to speak in various other capacities too. They were expected to demonstrate their manhood—their honor, virtue, and erudition—in conversations among peers in literary societies and library clubs, in parlors and ballrooms, at church picnics, and in their professional lives as clergy, businessmen, or educators. In conversations as much as oratory, speech “placed on view ‘the whole man’

² *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 5, 107-109.

³ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 12.

for all to see.”⁴ Speech distinguished men from women, adults from children and youth, and masters from slaves. In a society in which words were deeds and symbolized power, the spoken word determined a man’s reputation and honor.

Given how much we know about the value adult Americans ascribed to both formal and informal modes of speech and self-presentation, it is surprising how little we know about how youth learned to talk like men. Their speech has often been described as (and often was) crude and rebellious. But the process of learning to talk like a man was important to youth nonetheless. Private and public writings from male college students show that speech education for youth was a long, gradual, and rigorous process that began in early boyhood and ended when a young man took up his profession (though, arguably, it went on much longer than that). Students actively engaged in this process because they believed youth was the only time to form habits that would help them succeed. They strove to cultivate formal eloquence, as Polk recommended to his classmates, and to regulate their informal speech according to class prescriptions for elite men. In these moments when students learned to speak like men, moreover, they defined, articulated, and reified their visions for the society they hoped to inherit and the masculine roles they hoped to play once they did. They learned to balance the rowdy, unrestrained characteristics of youth culture and expectations for restrained masculinity commonly associated with elite and middle-class society.⁵

Speech education was central to young men’s development as men, and it occurred simultaneously in the formal curriculum as well as in everyday life at the

⁴ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 12-13.

⁵ Mark Garrett Longaker, *Rhetoric and the Republic: Politics, Civic Discourse, and Education in Early America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), xvii.

University of North Carolina. First, the curriculum delineated for students an explicitly masculine oratorical ideal rooted at once in classical texts and pedagogies, national and transhistorical republican traditions, and nineteenth-century political culture. The process of speech education began for freshmen and sophomores with the study of Greek and Latin texts through a pedagogy that emphasized recitation—oral performances of knowledge in classrooms. For juniors and seniors, the curriculum added courses in rhetoric. Second, as Polk’s address demonstrates, students engaged these oratorical ideals in their literary societies in weekly exercises in declamation. Third, literary society debates provided students with opportunities to apply what they knew about speech to important questions about contemporary society and politics, among other topics. Finally, because students knew that an orator, or anyone who spoke in public, ought to be virtuous, many students looked to informal conversations with one another as opportunities to form correct habits of everyday speech. Becoming a good orator was not possible unless a young man learned to speak like a man in everyday life. In each of these educational experiences, students attempted to create identities for themselves as “speaking beings” that conformed both to class and gendered expectation for elite men.

Manhood and the Nineteenth-Century Oratorical Ideal

James K. Polk and his classmates came of age during the “golden age of American oratory.”⁶ Any student attending college between the Revolution and the Civil War would have understood the importance of the American orator to the experiment with American democracy. Oratory gained increasing importance in the 1820s, during

⁶ David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 167.

the emergence of the second party system of Democrats and Whigs. By the election of 1840, when party organization and modern-day campaigning had emerged as a defining characteristic of American popular democracy, oratory had become entrenched in political culture.

The appeal of oratory was not limited to political culture, and it was felt in religion and popular culture throughout the early republic. The spread of evangelical Christianity in the South in the first few decades of the nineteenth century brought passion and emotion into southern oratory. Emotion-infused speech converted much of the South, including youth, women, and slaves, to such a great extent that it inverted the social fabric of the region and democratized Christianity.⁷ In the 1820s and 1830s, moreover, oratorical performance became a mainstay of popular culture, especially among the urban middle class in the North and the South, who flocked to lyceums and theaters to hear speakers lecture on a number of topics.⁸

The American orator served as a model of virtue, devotion to the public good, and masculinity during this period. The orator was inscribed in popular and political culture as quintessentially masculine. “O the orator’s joys!” Walt Whitman wrote,

To inflate the chest, to roll the thunder of the voice out from the
ribs and throat,
To make people rage, weep, hate, desire, with yourself,
To lead America—to quell America with a great tongue.⁹

⁷ The literature on evangelicalism is vast. I have relied principally on Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), esp. chaps. 1-2; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁸ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 90-93; Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 421.

⁹ Walt Whitman, “Song of Joys,” quoted in *Walt Whitman’s America*, 174.

Only great men could possess the ability to “quell America” with his speech. In fact, so great was the orator that many Americans considered him a “superior order of being” because he alone possessed eloquence.¹⁰ Eloquence was fundamental to a republic. “In a republic, popular eloquence is a powerful engine by which the political aspirant works his way to office and distinction,” one writer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* wrote in 1842.¹¹

In the nineteenth century, eloquence did not mean everyday speech. Anyone could talk, many could speak, but few could be orators. Eloquence was the highest form of language. Synonymous with oratory, eloquence differentiated ordinary speech from extraordinary speech and, as such, it provided the “power of persuasion” to any orator who possessed eloquence.¹² Samuel Johnson defined eloquence as “speaking with fluency and elegance.”¹³

There were certain prerequisites for a strong orator. First, his delivery required “energy and elegance” and “force, earnestness and simplicity.” Second, eloquence required passion. “A man can never be an orator who has not strong passions, and intense feelings,” one writer argued in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1854. “If he is possessed of fluency of language and good sense he may become an elegant and powerful speaker. But eloquence is something higher. It springs from the fountain of the hearts.”

¹⁰ A. M. Judson, “Eloquence,” *Southern Literary Messenger* (hereinafter *SLM*), Vol. 20, No. 9 (Sept., 1854): 536.

¹¹ “Ancient and Modern Eloquence,” *SLM*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Mar., 1842), 169.

¹² Erwin House, “What is Eloquence?” *Ladies Repository*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Apr., 1852), 139; W. G. Howard, “Ancient Eloquence,” *SLM*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan., 1841): 703.

¹³ *Johnson’s Dictionary, Improved by Todd, Abridged For the Use of Schools; with the Addition of Walker’s Pronunciation; an Abstract of His Principles of English Pronunciation, with Questions; a Vocabulary of Greek, Latin, and Scripture Proper Names; and an Appendix of Americanisms* (Boston: Charles J. Hendee, 1836), 116.

Third, an orator had to demonstrate his virtue. He required “resolute ambition and a high moral purpose,” and a drive for eminence in every action he took and every word he spoke. A good orator was “never contented with mediocrity in any thing,” but instead “seeks to soar or perish in the attempt.” Finally, the exemplary orator was supposed to grapple “with every kind of knowledge,” his imagination expands, and his powers of reason are strong. He must speak universally and appeal to the good of all humanity. His ultimate object was “[t]o combat error and falsehood.”¹⁴ These characteristics of the ideal orator conveyed ideal masculine values, which as we have seen, students learned to identify in the formal curriculum and pursued in their literary societies.

One distinction of eloquence—of oratory over ordinary talking and speech—was its ability to rouse the passions and excite the mind. “The qualities, however, which constitute the elements of oratorical excellence, although they cannot be *dissected*, may nevertheless be *felt*.”¹⁵ An orator “does with an audience as he pleases,” a writer for the *Ladies Repository* wrote in 1852. He “lulls, excites, calms, irritates, enrages” his audience.¹⁶ Thus, oratory was valued as the art of statesmen, clergy, and educators, whose profession required them to inspire people to think, feel, and do good and virtuous deeds. Though nineteenth-century educators believed everyone was born with “oratorical genius,” few could cultivate it to perfection. The few who did reached political distinction. In James K. Polk’s address with which we began, for example, the future President reminded his fellow classmates, many of whom were discouraged by the prospect of cultivating eloquence, “poeta nascitur Orator fit.” That is, the poet is born,

¹⁴ Judson, “Eloquence,” *SLM*, 536-37.

¹⁵ Howard, “Ancient Eloquence,” *SLM*, 703.

¹⁶ House, “What is Eloquence,” *SLM*, 138.

but the orator is made. Formal speech education, therefore, was an important aspect of young men's higher education.

Formal Speech Education: Classrooms and Curriculum

American males prepared for oratory their entire lives. In the early nineteenth-century United States, speech education began in elite and middle-class families with reading aloud. Fathers and mothers began a child's speech education early in life, in parlors in which they read aloud newspapers, poetry, and novels. Fathers sometimes read political speeches aloud. Children sometimes would read aloud, too, and their fathers and mothers would critique the ways in which they read. Indeed, as one historian of southern oratory has explained, speech education was "a natural part of family life."¹⁷ When a child was old enough to go to a private tutor, boarding school, or private academy, speech education became more formal and more gendered.

The standard pedagogy of speech education emphasized oral recitation, speech, and the performance. Teachers instructed boys to recite texts aloud, first in English and then in Latin and Greek, which they were supposed to have memorized in advance for class. Young boys were also called on at an early age to declaim famous speeches and receive criticism from a teacher.¹⁸ Schoolbooks, according to Carolyn Eastman, emphasized that "polished and confident speech would make them [students] better

¹⁷ Merrill G. Christophersen, "The Anti-Nullifiers," in Waldo W. Braden, *Oratory in the Old South, 1828-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 74-76.

¹⁸ Robert Curtis, "The Bingham School and Classical Education in North Carolina, 1793-1873," *North Carolina Historical Review* (1996): 328-77. For an amusing scene of boys declaiming in a private North Carolina academy, see Edwin W. Fuller, *Sea-Gift: A Novel* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, Publishers, 1873), 51-53.

adults and engaged members of society.”¹⁹ In college, young men truly learned to associate oratory with civic duty and public authority. As was true of early childhood education, the standard pedagogy of the early-nineteenth-century college was oral recitation. For freshmen and sophomores, speech education largely consisted of reciting memorized Greek and Latin prose and poetry, and mathematical theorems was the common mode of oral performance in the classroom.²⁰ Speech education was central to the “classical learning” that characterized American higher education between the Revolution and the Civil War.²¹ This educational tradition can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who viewed rhetorical training as essential for learning how to become active participants in civil society.²² Humanists of the English Renaissance placed speech at the center of their intellectual communities, and they emphasized, in particular, Ciceronian rhetoric in their conceptualization of leading citizens. This tradition of using speech education to cultivate citizenship continued in English colleges and universities and then was imported to North America during the colonial era, where the first generations of colonial men were trained.²³ During the first half of the nineteenth century, American colleges and universities drew from this rich tradition of

¹⁹ Carolyn Eastman, “The Female Cicero: Young Women’s Oratory and Gendered Public Participation in the Early American Republic,” *Gender & History* 19 (August 2007): 260-261.

²⁰ Christopherson, “The Anti Nullifiers,” 74-75.

²¹ Bruce A. Kimball, *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977).

²² Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), chap. 1. Longaker, *Rhetoric and the Republic*, 36, 42.

²³ Fritz Caspari, *Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), 15; Sandra M. Gustafson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 13; David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 60-70.

higher education through rhetorical training and made paramount classical texts that highlighted the importance of speech to citizenship in ancient republics, including the works of Cicero, Quintilian, Homer, and Demosthenes, which made explicit connections between oratory, morality, and civic culture.²⁴ Following the tradition of their eighteenth-century models, nineteenth-century educators stressed that a “good republican citizen [was] a rhetorically active member of the public sphere.”²⁵ Thus classical learning presented a canon of works that depicted eloquence as a universal and timeless masculine value.²⁶

The study of Grecian oratory was intended to captivate students’ imaginations about oratory and its potential to arouse patriotism. Homer’s *Iliad*, which students read in their sophomore year, taught important lessons about eloquence and manliness. As one writer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* put it in 1841, Homer invested his heroes “with all the charm of eloquence.” The correlation between heroism, oratory, and manliness, the writer argued, made “ancient eloquence” worthy of students’ attention. In the third book of the *Iliad*, for example, Homer compared Ulysses’ and Menelaus’ oratory. “When Atreus’ son harangued the listening train,” he wrote,

Just wax his sense, and his expression plain;
His words succinct yet full, without a fault,
He spoke no more than just the thing he ought
But, when Ulysses rose, in thought profound,
His modest eyes be fixed upon the ground;
As one unskilled or dumb, he seemed to stand,
Nor raised his head, nor stretched his sceptered hand.
But, when he speaks, what elocution flows!
Soft as the fleeces of descending snows,

²⁴ Winterer, *Culture of Classicism*, esp.11-12, 25-26.

²⁵ Longaker, *Rhetoric and the Republic*, 186.

²⁶ Wayne K. Durrill, “The Power of Ancient Words: Classical Teaching and Social Change at South Carolina College, 1804-1860,” *Journal of Southern History* (August 1999), 497-49.

The copious accents fall, with easy art,
Melting they fall and sink into the heart.
Wondering we hear; and fixed in deep surprise,
Our ears refute the censure of our eyes.²⁷

The writer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* used this passage to demonstrate that Homer's poems—both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—were important to study because they emphasized the “fervid eloquence” of heroes such as Ulysses. The “direct tendency” of Grecian oratory, then, “was to awaken in the bosom emotions of the purest patriotism, and thus to prepare the individual for the most brilliant and effective displays of oratory.”²⁸ Because of the correlation between oratory and a “republican spirit,” heroes such as Menelaus and Ulysses could serve as timeless models of orator heroes for students in every generation.

The study of Roman oratory likewise suited young men for leadership in a republic. Roman models of orator heroes were equally represented in the antebellum curriculum, particularly Cicero's oratorical works. In *De Officiis*, for example, Cicero explicitly linked virility and the spoken words. According to Maud Gleason, Cicero regarded “the orator as a paradigm of masculine deportment.” In a way very compatible with nineteenth-century ideas about manhood, Cicero did not offer an antithetical effeminate orator to the masculine oratory hero, but a boyish, unrefined model instead.

²⁷ Twickenham's *Iliad* quoted in W.G. Howard, “Ancient Eloquence,” 705. Robert Fagles' modern translation is more accurate. Its comparison to Twickenham's translation highlights the importance of eloquence in the nineteenth century: “Now, when they mingled with our Trojans in assembly,/ standing side-by-side, Menelaus' shoulders/ mounted over his friend's in height and spread,/ when both were seated Odysseus looked more lordly./ But when they spun their appeals before us all,/ Menelaus spoke out quickly—his words racing,/ few but clear as a bell, nothing long-winded/ or off the mark, though in fact the man was younger./ But when Odysseus sprang up, the framed tactician/ would just stand there, staring down, hard,/ his eyes fixed on the ground,/ never shifting his scepter back and forth, / clutching it stiff and like a mindless man./ You'd think him a sullen fellow or just plain fool./ But when *he* let loose that great voice from his chest/ and the words came piling on like a driving winter blizzard--/ we no longer gazed in wonder at his looks.” *The Iliad* III: 252-68, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 135-36.

²⁸ W.G. Howard, “Ancient Eloquence,” *SLM*, 705.

He cautioned his readers against “boorish” deportment and delivery, but not delicacy or effeminacy.²⁹ Cicero embodied this own oratorical ideal in his famous orations against Catiline, *In Catilinam*, demonstrated that eloquence was the patriot’s sword, his defense against tyranny. Catiline was a terrorist, of sorts, who threatened to overthrow the Roman Republic around 63 BC, and Cicero’s case against him was studied for its rhetoric as well as its republican themes. “Who can conceive of any thing more thrilling and overwhelming than his [Cicero’s] orations against Cataline [sic]?” One author wrote in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1834. Cicero’s manly patriotism vividly portrayed

...the patriot orator, sternly bold, from the magnitude of his cause—for the lives of millions depended upon his success—hatred and abhorrence depicted in his face; indignation flashing from his eye—for love of country was his impelling motive; energy and passion in his every action, and the living lava bursting from his lips;—and the victim, shrinking awe-stricken away—his baseness exposed—his treacherous schemes unfolded to public gaze; he flies a blasted and withering thing—a reckless and degraded outlaw.³⁰

The author went on to liken Cicero’s oratory to that of the founding fathers, who were also patriot orators. Eloquence, “the inseparable companion of liberty,” will guarantee the success of the American republic if it is used by patriot orators in the timeless ways that reach back to the early days of Athens, Rome, and the American founding.³¹

Students’ classroom exposure to eloquence and oratory was not limited to reading *about* orators in ancient texts. Formal rhetoric was taught to juniors and seniors in order to develop students’ compositional and rhetorical skills. The course emphasized

²⁹ Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 107.

³⁰ H.M., “Eloquence,” *SLM*, 165-66.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 166. Cf. treatment of Cicero in William H. Stiles, *An Address Delivered Before the Phi Kappa and Demosthenian Societies of Franklin College, (University of Georgia,) at The Annual Commencement, August 4th, 1852* (Augusta, GA: F H. Singer, Georgia Home Gazette Office, 1852), 17-19.

the history of rhetoric from ancient to modern times as well as the rules of rhetoric. Students read and recited from Rev. Hugh T. Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), which was the standard text at colleges and universities nation-wide well into the mid-nineteenth century.³² Following Lord Kames in many respects, Blair believed that language and literature promoted the progress of civilization. His *Lectures* connected the classical and humanist traditions of rhetorical training and promoted an eighteenth-century model of speaking that students applied to their nineteenth-century world.³³ Thomas Miles Garrett especially enjoyed the course on rhetoric. "I am very interested in this study which I deem, probably of as much importance as any in the course of instruction," he wrote in his diary in 1849. He believed that Blair's text was "excellent," and he borrowed "Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric" from the Philanthropic Society library to "study in conjunction with Blair." If he continued to enjoy the rhetoric, he wrote, "I shall read the great text author Quintilian, on this subject, a book probably abounding with soundness of principle, useful and curious knowledge."³⁴

By a student's junior and senior years application of rhetorical theory to original compositions and orations became the primary focus. Seniors had to deliver two orations during the academic year—one in the fall and one in the spring during the annual "senior

³² Winterer, *Culture of Classicism*, 26. See also Jean Ferguson Carr, Stephen L. Carr, and Lucille M. Schultz, *Archives of Instruction: Nineteenth-Century Rhetorics, Readers, and Composition Books in the United States* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 33-43. On the South specifically, see O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 683-684. Also used were Thomas Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution* (1762) and Charles Rollins, *Traite des etudes (The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres*, 1758). See Connor 1: 451-55; Lindemann on "True and Candid Compositions," *Documenting the American South*.

³³ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 689.

³⁴ Garrett, 04 August 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 81-82. George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric. By George Campbell ... In two volumes* (London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).

speaking,” which occurred just hours before the commencement ceremony began. Every senior had to deliver a speech on a topic of his choosing. These topics ranged widely from serious orations on the progress of American poetry to light-hearted pieces of poetry about college life and women.³⁵

Speech was central to commencement, the most anticipated event of every academic year. Students’ family and friends, as well as townsfolk, professors, and their families assembled to watch students, who entered college as boys, come out to their communities as men and as leaders.³⁶ The seniors’ speeches were widely anticipated, for they were public presentations of the state’s newly educated citizens. Robert F. Pace has written, “The speeches given at commencement were designed to demonstrate the academic achievements of the honorable graduates,” and to introduce them to the community as future leaders. The highest-ranking student in the senior class had to deliver a salutatory address in Latin. The second-ranking senior—the one who received the second honor (often called the second “mite” man) had to deliver the valedictory address. Between 1795 and 1836 students who ranked among the top three seniors delivered orations on topics they selected, but requiring approval from the professor of rhetoric and logic. But after 1836, the debating societies were responsible for electing three speakers for commencement. These were usually highly coveted speaking positions. Finally, at commencement, students who graduated with distinction, or honors,

³⁵ Pace, *Halls of Honor*, 28-33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

engaged in a public debate on a pre-determined and –prepared topic. Every graduating senior spoke in one way or another at commencement.³⁷

Education through Criticism

Students had many opportunities to hear and to evaluate speech both in and outside of the classroom. Church provided an opportunity for students to hear and critique different styles of oratory (each denomination seemed to have its own style). In October 1840, William Sidney Mullins heard a visiting Presbyterian minister deliver a sermon about humility during university chapel service. What struck Mullins was the plainness of the delivery: “The Rev. Mr. Ely preached this morning in the chapel,” Mullins wrote in his diary. “He is a Presbyterian clergyman from the North and has come to the university as an applicant for the vacant professorship of Modern Languages. His sermon was very plain but contained much useful matter and suggested several points, well worthy an attentive consideration.”³⁸ Mullins preferred emotionally stimulating sermons. For example, when Professor William Mercer Green delivered a sermon in 1840 on the topic, “whoso loveth the world, is not a friend to God,” Mullins praised the sermon for its logic and careful rhetoric: “In deviding [sic] his sermon, he [Green] showed first, how the spirit of the world is at direct variance with the commands of God, and secondly the superiority of the Heavenly temper.” But he also praised Green’s eloquence, particularly its noteworthy ability to rouse his emotions and sympathy. “I was much affected with some of the sermon and felt sensations almost

³⁷ Lindemann, “The School Day and the School Year,” *True and Candid Compositions, Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp03-02/chp03-02.html> (accessed 24 July 2008).

³⁸ William Sidney Mullins, Diary, 25 October 1840, William Sidney Mullins Diary #531-z, SHC.

strangers to my breast, since I have been a member of college,” Mullins concluded.³⁹ The ideal orator’s ability to rouse the passions was part of students’ consciousness of the spoken word and, as we shall see, would play an important role in shaping students’ own efforts to become eloquent speakers.

Responses to sermons in diaries represent the few written responses to religion in papers from students attending North Carolina before 1861. Significantly, spoken delivery usually trumped content in students’ evaluations of sermons. Students who cared about the sermons and wished to write about them in their diaries noted their emotional responses, making connections between speech, feeling, and manhood. Now this is not surprising, given the purpose of an evangelical sermon was to arouse emotions and excite a need for self-reflection and conversion. These were important models for students to observe and to note critically because they demonstrated a range of speech that they could choose to appropriate (or not) in their own developing skills.

Itinerant speakers occasionally visited Chapel Hill, providing students with different styles of oratory. When a temperance speaker visited Chapel Hill in 1851, the faculty suggested that students listen to his speech. George N. Thompson described his reaction to the lecture in telling detail:

As the Faculty had given us a snap during the evening in order that we might hear mr White [sic], the great temperance lecturer speak.... Mr White spoke a speech two hours long and it proved quite interesting, his power of riveting the attention of the audience. I have never seen equaled. He is very pathetic humorous, and affecting so much so that at one time you will be following him in his lofty flights in regions of heavenly bliss at another time holding your sides with laughter, and your heels together--and again be so affected at some of his stories that you would weep in spite of your exertions to the opposite...⁴⁰

³⁹ Mullins, Diary, 01 November 1840. Also see his entry for 11 November 1840 and, on a similar topic, George N. Thompson, Diary, 12 January 1851, George N. Thompson Diary #2367-z, SHC, 23.

⁴⁰ Thompson, Diary, 07 February 1851, 72-73.

Thompson's reaction evokes the popular appeal of speech. It was a form of entertainment, and a good lecture riveted an audience's attention and appealed to every sort of emotion.

The faculty often wanted students to have exposure to formal speech that met with the approval of learned society. Professor Swain occasionally read sermons, or addresses, to his moral philosophy class. Hugh Brown noted in 1857, "Gov Swain read, to our class this evening at recitation, that celebrated sermon of Dr Hopper [sic] on the "force of habit[.]" I think it one of the best I ever heard, and will endeavour from this time forth to improve by its teachings."⁴¹ Swain also recommended other North Carolinians' speeches to students for emulation. He was known, for instance to recommend Judge William Gaston's 1832 address to the Di and Phi Societies. "In talking to the class to day," Hugh Brown wrote in 1857, "Gov. Swain gave us an account of Judge Gastons [sic] description of Fisher Ames speech in the house of Representatives on the British treaty to indemnify the Scotch Merchants, who had been driven away by the Revolution, which he says the Judge spoke of as being one of the greatest efforts of Eloquence he had ever heard."⁴²

Whether reading speeches, hearing them described, or listening to them as members of audiences, students learned the power of eloquence in everyday college life. These external sources of speech education helped students to identify eloquence as a primary criterion for intellectual manhood, but they provided little in the way of active participation in speech and preparation for oratory as adults. Students, therefore, made

⁴¹ Hugh T. Brown, "Journal, kept by H. T. Brown, of his Thoughts and reflections from Sept. the 11th 1857," 21 September 1857, Box 6, Folder 110, Volume 23, Hamilton Brown Papers #1090, SHC, 10

⁴² Brown, "Journal," 22.

speech education central to their weekly literary society duties. The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies reinforced the connection between eloquence and manhood that formal college education proposed and provided opportunities for students to cultivate the skills that would make them men.

Speech Education in Literary Societies

In the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies, students taught one another how to speak like men by requiring active participation in composition, declamation, and debate. This form of speech education was as connected to the formal curriculum, students believed, as the body was connected to the soul.⁴³ “It is needless to enumerate the advantages of our literary duties,” Robert Williams Henry explained to his fellow members in the Dialectic Society in 1835. “[W]ithout practice in speaking extemporaneously it is scarcely possible for any of us to acquire that ‘copia verborum’ which rhetoricians deem of primary importance to all who propose to address either legis[la]tive judicial or popular assemblies.”⁴⁴ In 1847, another student argued, in fact, that the “largest portion of the advantages to be acquired by a collegiate course are to be derived from debate, composition and declamation.”⁴⁵ These exercises played a crucial role in maturation as they prepared students for public life.⁴⁶ For example, William Bonner, Jr., explained to incoming members of the Dialectic Society in 1858, “You are now entering upon those duties, that will lay the deep and broad foundation for a man, if

⁴³ Robert Williams Henry, “Address,” 1835, Dialectic Society Records.

⁴⁴ Henry, “Address,” Dialectic Society Records

⁴⁵ Oliver Pendleton Meares, “Address by O.P. Meares,” November 1847, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ James Martin, Inaugural Address, 07 February 1820 and Angus McNeil, Inaugural Address, 20 September 1838, *ibid.*

properly attended to. It is here you form those qualities that will render you useful.”⁴⁷

These qualities included the ability to convey through words and gestures emotion, sympathy, and passion in the public sphere; in other words, literary society duties provided an education in eloquence.⁴⁸

Declamation allowed students to practice eloquence (and manhood) through imitation of various famous orators from the past. As one student explained in 1826, in declamation

we adopt as it were their [orators’] sentiments & feelings. We imagine ourselves in their situation influenced by the same circumstances, advocating or opposing the same cause, striving for the same end, animated by the same principles. If such be our course we cannot fail to success.⁴⁹

By imitating exemplary oratory, students could also develop virtues necessary for success, especially sympathy, passion, and sincerity. Students encouraged one another to deliver speeches by ancient orators such as Cicero and Demosthenes; English orators such as Burke, Sheridan, and Pitt; and Americans such as Patrick Henry. “Let us emulate their powers & endeavour to imitate their perfections,” Henry Elliot declared in his 1826 inaugural address to the Dialectic Society. “Let us dare to excel & success will crown our exertions.”⁵⁰ Students selected pieces for declamation that helped them to demonstrate emotion, sympathy, and elegance. In 1796, John Taylor “spoke the Speech of Adherbal to the Roman People imploring their Assistnace against Jugurtha”; Hinton James, “Spoke a piece on Genius”; Edwin Osborne “Spoke the Speech of [A]Eneas to

⁴⁷ William Bonner, Jr., Inaugural Address, 1858, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Henry Branson Elliott, Inaugural Address, 04 May 1826, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Queen Dido giving an account of the Sack of Troy.”⁵¹ In 1793, James Hall “spoke advice to youth”; Frank Dancy “spoke Cato Soliloquy”; Laurence Dorsey “spoke on Liberty and Slavery”; Benjamin Sherred “spoke on industry”; John Pettigrew “spoke from Popes Temple of Fame.”⁵² Minutes from the literary societies list the speeches that students declaimed only until the early nineteenth-century; afterward, membership increased and students ceased recording every minute of the meeting. Nevertheless, the speeches from the early national period are instructive of how declamation served as a uniquely republican pedagogy.⁵³ Published works on eloquence, oratory, and rhetoric held in students’ literary society libraries provide further evidence of the nature of declamation and its connection to intellectual manhood in the early republic and antebellum periods.

Students’ literary society libraries held an array of works on rhetoric and oratory that contained useful examples of oratory for declamation.⁵⁴ First, students used anthologies as sources from which to draw speeches for declamation and use as models for writing their own addresses and orations. The Dialectic Society held in their library, for instance, Thomas Browne’s *British Cicero*, which, contrary to the title, contains selections of speeches by British orators as well as several chapters that introduce oratory and rhetoric to students. Similar titles include John Wetherall’s *Sixteen Orations on Various Subjects* (1803), which contains mostly selections of religious sermons; William Hazlitt’s *Eloquence of the British Senate* (1810), containing historic legal and political speeches; Canning’s *Speeches*; and Erskine’s *Speeches*. These collections of historic

⁵¹ R. D. W. Connor, *A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina. Volume 2: 1776-1799* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 147-48.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁵³ Longaker, *Rhetoric and the Republic*, 75

⁵⁴ On literary society libraries, see Chapter Five.

British oratory provided examples of “modern eloquence” that complemented the curriculum’s emphasis on “ancient eloquence.” Students used them as models for style and they mined them for quotations from them for the use in their own oratory.⁵⁵ Second, students used instructional works on rhetoric by eighteenth-century British authors that were commonly used in American academies, colleges, and universities. The most significant among these works on which North Carolina students relied heavily were Hugh Blair’s famous *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) and J. Mossop’s *Elegant Orations, Ancient and Modern* (1788). Early in the University’s history, British models were most prevalent, though students gradually supplemented their collection of works on rhetoric with American guides in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

American works emphasized eighteenth-century notions of literature and civility most famously addressed by Hugh Blair and other thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Students found familiar themes in these works: oratory empowered men to perpetuate the progress of civilization that began in the ancient world and was realized in the founding of the United States. Because instruction on oratory in literary societies that depended on these eighteenth-century works, students located their identities, in part, in a long lineage of European thought that had been entrenched in higher learning by the founding generation.

⁵⁵ See, for example, students’ marginalia and underscoring in William Hazlitt, *The Eloquence of the British Senate: Being a Selection of the Best Speeches of the Most Distinguished English, Irish, and Scotch Parliamentary Speakers, from the Beginning of the Reign of Charles I to the Present Time: With Notes Biographical, Critical, and Explanatory* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Printed by Thomas Kirk, 1810). This book and the others listed in this paragraph have been preserved in the Old Library of the North Carolina Collection, making marginalia analysis easier and more reliable than those books that continue to circulate in the main library at the University of North Carolina.

In the 1820s, students in the Dialectic Society acquired for their library E. G. Welles's, *The Orator's Guide* (1822), which provided practical instruction in oratory that fit the literary society pedagogy of performative learning. The rhetorical instruction in *The Orator's Guide* was sound, emphasizing rules for accent, emphasis, cadence, and gestures as well as the history of language and writing. He instructed students to seek to possess "clear ideas" on subjects they present, to compose frequently, but not carelessly, and to familiarize themselves with the best authors.⁵⁶ "One of the most important objects in the education of youth," He wrote, "is to engage them very early in life, in such studies, as are calculated to produce a relish for the entertainments of taste."⁵⁷ Welles also included selections of exemplary ancient and modern orations ranging from Byron to Cowper to Milton and to Eliphias Nott, president of Union College for practice in declamation.⁵⁸ He intended, moreover, that his selections demonstrate how oratory "prepared the way for the civilization and refinement of the barbarian." Students could see in the progress of oratory, for example, from the rise and fall of ancient empires to the modern period, that oratory "emancipated millions from slavery," "redeemed innumerable captives," and gave its most capable practitioners "immortality" in the history of belles lettres.⁵⁹ Students could read Welles's guide and learn the powerful, liberatory power of speech. As we will see in the following chapter, many students put these lessons to use in weekly debates.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸ E. G. Welles, *The Orator's Guide, Or, Rules for Speaking and Composing: From the Best Authorities* (Philadelphia: Printed for the compiler G. L. Austin printer, 1822), 29.

⁵⁹ Welles, *The Orator's Guide*, 4-5.

The importance of rhetoric and oratory in a republican form of government was another common theme in students' books about oratory and eloquence. This perspective was most pronounced in several works by American authors and pedagogues, which students kept in their society libraries and read carefully. After 1820, the Dialectic and Philanthropic libraries expanded, and students increasingly adopted works on oratory intended for the instruction of American students. The most popular of these American oratorical guides that students held in their libraries was *The Columbian Orator* (1797), which was compiled by Caleb Bingham, an antislavery editor from Connecticut and 1782 graduate of, and later professor at, Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. This was the famous work, too, that noteworthy Americans ranging from Frederick Douglass to Andrew Johnson read and admired. Bingham's *The Columbian Orator*, like its British counterparts, emphasized the power of elocution through examples of ancient and modern master orators such as Cicero, Demosthenes, and Englishmen such as Erskine and Pitt. But Bingham's textbook also sought to imbue American youth with republican ideals of equality and individual liberty. Speeches of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Jonathan Mason, a Boston Federalist, underscore Bingham's hope that, by instructing American youth in elocution, they might "support the sacred cause of freedom," "Plead for injured innocence, and suffering virtue" so that the American republic might "escape those quicksands of vice, which have ever proved the bane of empire."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian orator: containing a variety of original and selected pieces; together with rules; calculated to improve youth and others in the ornamental and useful art of eloquence...*, 2nd ed. (Boston, May, 1799), 34, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <http://find.galegroup.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multi page&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW125280652&source=gale&userGroupName=uncbrcr&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE> (accessed 31 January 2010). On Bingham, see also Daniel Walker

Another popular work on oratory in the Dialectic Society library was John Quincy Adams's, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (1810). The ways in which students engaged with this text suggest how they linked their oratorical training to maturation as citizens and leaders of a republic. In 1806, Adams delivered the first discourse in his lectures to the students at Harvard University, and he continued to give weekly public lectures, which were attended by the upper two classes of undergraduates as well as graduates in residence at the university. Having given thirty-six lectures in addition to the inaugural discourse, Adams completed his course of lectures two years later in 1808. So popular were his lectures that students approached him before he even completed the series and asked him to publish them, which he did in 1810. Though first intended for a local readership, Adams's lectures soon became popular in colleges and universities in other academic communities.

Adams's defense of what he called the "science of rhetoric" and the "art of oratory" echoed the moral imperative of ancient eloquence, especially the works of Cicero and Quintilian that were, as we have seen, central to the classical curriculum. Adams explained, that liberty and oratory were mutually dependent. When Roman liberty declined, for instance, with the decline of the Republic, so, too, did Roman oratory. "Under governments purely republican, where every citizen has a deep interest in the affairs of the nation," Adams explained, "the voice of eloquence will not be heard in vain." He urged his collegiate audience, therefore, "March...with steady undeviating step to the prize of your future calling" and "gather fragrance from the whole paradise of

Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 646.

science and learn to distil from your lips all the honies of persuasion.”⁶¹ Storing up knowledge from the arts and sciences and then disseminating that knowledge with speech would ensure republican liberty and social morality. “Since eloquence is in itself so powerful a weapon, and since by the depravity of mankind this weapon must, and often will be brandished for guilty purposes,” Adams explained, “its exercise, with equal or superior skill, becomes but the more indispensable to the cause of virtue.”⁶² Thus while Adams wrote his oratorical compendium to teach students how to be effective speakers, his ultimate goal was to promote eloquence as a vehicle for virtue and liberty.

Students found Adams’s *Lectures* useful, informative, applicable to their intellectual formation in college, and even necessary for their formation as men. On May 9, 1844, some members of the Dialectic Society inscribed the following commendation on the verso of the second volume’s final page: “We have read through the two volumes, and have not only derived a great deal of pleasure but also much information. Those who may be inclined to follow us, will do well to remember that...they must be content to receive it with its peculiarities of style, manner &c &c.” On one level, students read for instruction, and they underscored the rules Adams set forth for correct rhetoric and oratory and marked passages describing the usefulness of oratory for different professions. For instance, when Adams likened a student’s pursuit of eloquence to a soldier’s fight for victory, and wrote, “it [eloquence] is to give you a clue for the labyrinth of legislation in the public councils; a spear for the conflict of judicial war in

⁶¹ John Quincy Adams, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory: Delivered to the Classes of Senior and Junior Sophisters in Harvard University* (Cambridge, Mass.: Printed by Hilliard and Metcalf, 1810), 30-31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65.

the public tribunals; a sword for the field of religious and moral victory in the pulpit,” one student wrote in the page’s margins, “this is oratory.”⁶³

Not all students agreed with Adams. When, for instance, Adams argued, “moral duties were inculcated” in the youth of antiquity “because none but a good man could be an orator,” one student reader responded (albeit with fallacious logic), “Ergo every orator is a good man== [is equal] to an absurdity.”⁶⁴ Students knew from their own experiences listening to classmates deliver addresses in literary societies that not every orator was a good man. In one instance, for example, Adams explains that sometimes speakers misapply another speaker’s points for their own contradictory arguments. One anonymous student, identified as “Reader” wrote, “Very common to those who know nothing but wish to be thought wise.” To which comment another reader of the text responded, “common in our society halls.”⁶⁵

Markings in the text suggest that students followed Adams’s thesis relating oratory to virtue and republican thought. One student bracketed Adams’s definition of virtue as “the oxygen, the vital air of the moral world.”⁶⁶ The same reader then noted Adams’s point that “The only birth place of eloquence therefore must be a free state. . . . Eloquence is the child of liberty, and can descend from no other stock.” Adams’s *Lectures* legitimated students’ intellectual pursuits in literary societies as manly and useful. For example, one student bracketed off this paragraph in its entirety, suggesting its significance to the intellectual work in the Dialectic Society:

⁶³ Adams, *Lectures*, 61-62.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

He [an orator] must have a soul of fire; and iron application; indefatigable, unremitting assiduity of exercise in writing and composition; unwearied patience to correct and revise; constant reading of the poets, orators, and historians; the practice of declamation; the exercise and improvement of memory; the attentive cultivation of the graces; and a habit of raillery and humor, sharpened by wit, but tempered with the soberest judgment, to point their application.⁶⁷

This was Adams' ideal orator ought—truly virtuous and possessing an honest heart, endowments of the mind, and dispositions of the temper.⁶⁸ This orator, too, was also students' ideal man.

Thus by reading a range of works on rhetoric and eloquence and declaiming exemplary orations from history, students received not only an education in speech but also an education in manhood. Speech education introduced young men to seemingly perfect, innate, and timeless notions of greatness—grace, eloquence, emotions, passion, and sympathy. If students imagined greatness in others and attempted to imitate it in literary society composition and declamation exercises, then they could move along the path to distinction, success, and ultimately eminence. This is what Henry Chambers told his fellow Dialectic Society members in 1805: “The men so celebrated for their eloquence, did not acquire it in a moment. We then like them must progress to perfection gradually and by incessant exertions.”⁶⁹ Not only did students need to imitate the words—the eloquence—of great men, but they also needed to consider carefully the means by which history's orator-heroes themselves learned to speak like men.

The men whom students hoped to emulate were the great men of antiquity. Demosthenes was antiquity's quintessential example of how a young, through hard work, could perfect the oratorical arts and achieve distinction as an eloquent speaker and

⁶⁷ Adams, *Lectures*, 103.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁶⁹ Henry Chambers, Inaugural Address, 1805, Dialectic Society Records.

effective leaders. “If you find your utterance bad,” William Hill said in 1843. “Recollect Demosthenes declaiming on the sea shore with a pebble in his mouth,” perfecting the art of speech, Hill continued.⁷⁰ Demosthenes, once he learned the power of speech, was able to rally Athenians, among other Greeks, against the invading Macedonians in the middle of the fourth century, B.C. Demosthenes used the power of eloquence to inspire others to defend his nation. When Philip of Macedon, “with his host of barbarians was standing upon his [Demosthenes] country’s borders, eager to rush down and consume with fire and sword all that civilization had reared,” Alfred Merritt explained to his fellow members of the Dialectic Society in 1852, Demosthenes

roused his fellow citizens by efforts of oratory almost superhuman, and wrought with in them a willingness to cast their lives as sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. His bosom was the home of patriotism. His head was the seat of what may with justice be called a superior intellect. By means of which he was enable[d] to infuse in other those feelings, which made his own heart beat quick and reared his valiant arm.⁷¹

Demosthenes was an example from antiquity that every collegian across the United States could cite as an exemplar of the heroic orator, whose defense of liberty against tyranny made him a quintessential republican.⁷² By the antebellum period, Demosthenes had,

⁷⁰ William Hill, Address, 25 October 1843, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷¹ Alfred Gowan Merritt, “The Man of Superior Intellect alone gains admiration,” 06 October 1852, Dialectic Society Records. See also Alfred M. Burton, Composition, April 1805; Robert John Donnell, Composition, 03 August 1805; Henry Branson Elliott, Inaugural Address, 05 May 1826; Bedford Brown, Inaugural Address, 27 June 1839, Dialectic Society Records; William Hooper Haigh, “Eloquence,” Junior Oration, Chapel Hill, 19 November 1840, NCC; Henry Armand London, Jr., Diary, Folder 2, Vol. 1, Henry Armand London Papers #868-z, SHC. On Demosthenes’ role in American education, see David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution, 1750-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 63; Winterer, *Culture of Classicism*, 13-14, 26, and esp. 76; Durrill, “Power of Ancient Words,” 472; Carolyn Eastman, *A Nation of Speechifiers: Making an American Public after the Revolution* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), chap. 1. So pervasive, in fact, was the Demosthenes archetype for eloquence that students at the University of Georgia named one of their literary societies the Demosthenian Society and created a society emblem that illustrated Demosthenes declaiming on the seashore. See E. Merton Coulter, *College Life in the Old South* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 103.

⁷² William Polk Boylan, Inaugural Address, 20 October 1824, Dialectic Society Records.

according to Caroline Winterer, “emerged as the archetype of the manly, muscular speaker,” whom northerners and southerners known for their oratorical skills, including Hugh Legaré, Thomas Pinckney, and Daniel Webster, extolled and emulated.

Demosthenes, college students and educators believed, promoted an emotional, simple, balanced, and forceful style of speech that had, by the antebellum period, come to characterize oratorical culture.⁷³

Students relied on one another as “living instructors” to achieve this heroic Demosthenian oratorical ideal. The age differences that existed among students made this peer education possible, as older students—usually the officers of each society—hoped to impress upon their younger classmates the importance of eloquence to intellectual manhood. Predictably, younger students sometimes felt intimidated and discouraged to speak in front of their classmates. Young members had to be encouraged to speak in societies, that is to declaim and to debate. One member of the Dialectic Society said to the younger members of the society in 1858, for instance, “We know how embarrassing it is to you to attempt to speak. We were once in the same position. But we advice [sic] you to begin now.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this was easier said than done. Thomas Miles Garrett noted empathetically in his diary, for instance, “the debut of Freshmen into the flower fields of oratory.”⁷⁵ Often upper-classmen were not so gentle. Older members often laughed at the slightest mispronunciation of words, or nit-picked a speech’s content and delivery. Sometimes this criticism may have even resembled a form of verbal hazing.

⁷³ Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism*, 72-73

⁷⁴ William Bonner, Jr., Inaugural Address, 04 February 1858, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷⁵ Garrett, 14 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 128.

These shortcomings of peer education aside, students taught one another to speak like virtuous republicans: physically powerful, rhetorically accurate, and humbly democratic.⁷⁶ In addition to the society's President, who delivered his advice on how to improve in society exercises in each term, other officers, especially Correctors (in the Dialectic Society) or Supervisors (in the Philanthropic Society) helped students to improve in composition and declamation. In 1809 Philemon B. Hawkins, then President of the Dialectic Society, recommended to his fellow members that they pay attention to their speaking in Society in order to excel in declamation and to pay attention to the Correctors' remarks in order "to divest yourselves of any awkward jesture [sic] disagreeable tone or affected motion." The correctors, as he explained, "are the persons appointed to this duty, and no offence [sic] should be taken at any of [their] observations, for it is all for your particular benifit [sic] together with the discharge of their duty."⁷⁷

Correctors and Supervisors were diligent in their efforts to point out the rhetorical and compositional shortcomings in their peers' work as well. They did not usually criticize members individually, but made general claims to trends within the society that kept students from excelling in their duties, or even improving. Carelessness in composition and reading aloud and not writing compositions longer than a page were frequent observations among Correctors in the antebellum period; so also were the appearance of writing quickly and hastily "without reflection and weighing his thoughts." Correctors also admonished against poor selection, preparation, and performance of speeches. "When the duty [declamation] is to be performed in this hall," one Corrector explained in 1851, "some old worn-out, hackneyed speech is selected, the sentiments

⁷⁶ Daniel Moreau Barringer, Inaugural Address, 23 November 1825, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷⁷ Philemon Hawkins, Inaugural Address, 25 April 1809, *ibid.*

grunted out and the feeling, pathetic parts are smothered up in a frigid, careless, life-less manner, that would freeze to death an Iclander.” Spelling, grammar, and punctuation did not escape the Correctors’ scrutiny either. One critic in 1853 was quite specific in his advice to members: “The members seem to be especially deficient in spelling and punctuation and we would recommend Websters [sic] Elementary spelling book and Murrays [sic], Smith’s, or Bullions [sic] English grammar-and also Perkin’s Aid to English composition.”⁷⁸

In addition to criticizing poor performance of literary society duties, student officers of each society complained about the lack of enthusiasm in declamation, composition, and debate in general. They emphasized the importance of passion and energy—“manly vigours”—to speech and intellectual manhood.⁷⁹ Henry Elliott provides commentary on what was a consistent topic in presidents’ inaugural addresses throughout the period. “Declamation has dwindled into a dry – monotonous rehearsal,” Elliott complained in his 1826 address. “A listless, apathetic indifference is too often the characteristic of the dull declaimer.” Members of each society needed to overcome apathy and strive to perform with “that zeal for oratorical excellence” that should lead “aspiring youth with a noble emulation” of greatness.⁸⁰ Similar problems continually appear in society records related to the performance of duties of composition and debate. Students often wrote their compositions hastily and read them with a similar dullness that Elliott critiqued in his 1826 address. Compositions either were too short and unsubstantial, or they were too long and unfocused. Elliott critiqued the latter. “We

⁷⁸ Correctors Records, 14 November 1851; 17 October 1851; 13 May 1853, Dialectic Society Records #40152, UA.

⁷⁹ Thomas Bog Slade, Address, 10 September 1819, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁰ Elliott, Inaugural Address, 04 May 1826, Dialectic Society Records. Emphasis in original.

cannot collect & express in a clear systematic & lucid manner all of our ideas upon a subject in one sitting,” he explained to a Dialectic Society that seemed to him unusually and alarmingly deficient in composition in 1826. “We must meditate & reflect: we must write & revise if we wish to become more than mere scribblers.”⁸¹ In arguing for how young men should execute their literary society duties, society officers laid out an ideal rubric of intellectual manhood. Young men learned from one another that energy, pathos, clarity, and logic—as well as meditation and self-reflection—were qualities that characterized ideal oratorical manhood, ideal intellectual manhood.

In addition to these qualities, students also emphasized the rhetorical importance of humility and sincerity, which were tantamount to upper- and middle-class styles of self-presentation. These values underscored an individual’s civic virtue, as Thomas Hall explained to the Dialectic Society:

Whenever anyone demeans himself with an air of modesty & reserve that are the constant accompaniments of youthful merit, and becomes celebrated for his singular integrity abilities and patriotism, the people who when left to themselves are never slow in discovery and rewarding true merit, will not suffer his talents to lie dormant for want of proper opportunities to exert them.⁸²

Significantly, men’s rhetorical self-deprecation was different from women’s, reflecting the important gendered nature of the public sphere. Women used rhetorical gestures of modesty and humility to excuse and underplay taking a public stance through language; men used these rhetorical gestures to demonstrate deference to the majority. Modesty, in short, was a virtue that would win a man public esteem.⁸³

⁸¹ Elliott, Inaugural Address, 04 May 1826, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸² Thomas Pleasant Hall, Oration [ca. 1825-1827], *ibid.*, 8

⁸³ Eastman, “The Female Cicero,” 268.

Students practiced rhetorical techniques to imply democratic values. This was particularly the case in inaugural addresses of newly elected literary society presidents, who wished to demonstrate authority and deference at once. For example, Virginius H. Ivy of Norfolk, Virginia, began an 1845 Valedictory address to the Dialectic Society by introducing himself as “the humble representative of my classmates.” Sometimes the gravitas of a particular topic required humble and sensitive introductory remarks. This was the case in 1805, when Daniel Forney, a student in the Dialectic Society, advocated abolition of slavery in an address to his fellow members. “I am deeply impressed with a sense of the high honor conferred [sic] upon me in being appointed to address you upon this important, this interesting occasion,” he began. “I am highly sensible of my inability to discharge of the duty devolved upon me, and sincerely wish some person more adequate than myself had undertaken the task.”⁸⁴ Similarly, when John Briggs Mebane gave an address about women’s education, he began with a humble mark of deference to audience: “When I look around and behold the countenances of so many turned upon me I shrink with a heart wounded by the keen edge of criticism, and with feelings agitated by my inadequacy to do that justice to the subject. . . .”⁸⁵ Students practiced deference in speech because it was a republican virtue that indicated speakers emanated from—and were sympathetic to—the concerns of the body politic.

So it happened that peer-leaders such as Henry Elliott—and dozens of others throughout the antebellum period—took the reins of education in literary societies in order to impress upon their fellow members the importance of speech education for success. Speech education, though not always taken seriously by everyone, was

⁸⁴ Daniel Forney, Inaugural Address [ca.1804 and 1805], Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁵ John Briggs Mebane, Address, 24 May 1809, *ibid.*

nevertheless of the essence. And even youth, who did not practice what was preached to them by leaders such as Henry Elliott, nevertheless heard (probably more often than they desired), and understood (probably more than they knew) about the importance of speech for manliness and success. The most important lessons students emphasized was that speech education was an important aspect of a young man's preparation for American civil society, which demanded that they learn to speak like men. The ability to shape civil society through language was not limited to formal speech, to oratory and eloquence, however, and students also taught one another about the importance of manly conversation to American public life.

Informal Speech Education: Conversation

Not all speech at the antebellum University was formal. College life presented many opportunities for students to learn about the power of the spoken word in everyday life. In a short piece for the North Carolina University *Magazine*, "Conversation Enriches the Mind," an anonymous student argued that the all-male culture on campus often led students to develop bad, unmanly speech habits:

Among a large collection of young men and *boys*, where women's radiant countenance is not present to place a bridle upon the tongue, the morality of conversation is very apt to be held in very low estimation—boys are prone to descent to vulgarity. Now this is a lamentable fact and ought to be guarded against. It is a well known truth, that not only here, but everywhere, when boys assemble to converse, the confab invariably closes with *something* by no means becoming. There is a Chinese proverb, and a very true one, which says, a single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years mere study of books. Since conversation is of such momentous value, let yours be wise, elevated, chaste, and refined.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ "Conversation Enriches the Mind," *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. III, No. 3 (Apr., 1854): 138-39. Emphasis in original.

Conversation was essential to elite manhood. Elite men were supposed to demonstrate their intelligence, virtue, and education through conversation. Aside from formal speech, conversation was the primary means by which men projected and defended their identities and their reputations.⁸⁷

One gauge of the importance of conversations to students was the frequency with which they referred to conversations—topics they discussed, impressions they had, and how long they lasted—in their diaries and letters. As can be expected, students’ conversations ranged the gamut of serious to frivolous. Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson wrote in his diary in October, 1841, for instance, that he and a friend “had a long discourse upon reading history and likewise upon the uses and trust in the twentieth Chapter of Blackstone.” George Thompson also enjoyed a conversation in his dormitory room with his friend “J. Wilkerson,” which lasted an hour. They talked about “the pleasure and beauty there was to be enjoyed & seen at the cities on North,” especially Philadelphia. They also had a conversation about “Miss Sue Lindsay,” whom both students “admire[d] very much.” While conversations distracted students from their studies, as they do in dorm rooms throughout the country today, students believed they had a necessary, educative value. Hugh Brown made this point in his diary in 1857: “I have neglected my law recitation to night, in order to enjoy myself in conversation with some friends; but as I find on looking over it, that is not very hard. I don’t know that I repent the manner in which I have spent the night. Social intercourse is as necessary to the healthy condition of the mind as out door [sic] exercise is to the body.” Students valued good conversation

⁸⁷ On the importance of conversation to public reputation among elite and middle-class Americans, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 110-111.

among their classmates, and they often recorded their impressions of an exceptionally good conversation in their diaries.

Though boys learned the rules for conversation early in life at home, when they came to college, records suggest, students seemed to require reminding of the rules for polite conversation among elite men and why they were in place. Often students spoke more like boys than they did men. Swearing, in particular, was a form of low culture that characterized student life on campus. In 1797, John Pettigrew wrote in a letter to his father, “The Students in general have nothing very criminal in their conduct except a vile, & detestable practice of cursing, & swearing, which has become very fashionable here, there can be hardly a sentence spoken without some of those highflown words which sailors commonly use to divert on each other.” Pettigrew explained that older students (such as himself) did not swear nearly as much as the younger students. “[T]here are here a great many small boys the half of whom do little or nothing with regard to improvement,” he explained. “[T]hose are the ones that make the greatest proficiency in the art of swearing.”⁸⁸ Though swearing was not what elite young men were supposed to do; it was an element of campus culture that required correction, if boys wished to learn to speak like men.

Students received reminders that speech indicated gentility in letters from parents, older siblings, and even peers at other colleges. In the antebellum period, southern codes of gentility combined with evangelical notions of sin and salvation, and swearing on campus not only indicated poor breeding, but immorality. Reflections on swearing from students in the 1840s indicate that students continued to pay attention to their own use of

⁸⁸ John Pettigrew to Charles Pettigrew, 27 June 1797, Pettigrew Family Papers #592, SHC.

language in the context of genteel culture as well as evangelicalism. On August 1, 1841, for example, Professor William Mercer Green delivered a sermon to the students on the “utter folly [and] great wickedness of profane swearing.” In attendance were James Lawrence Dusenbery, and William Sidney Mullins, who had similar reactions to Green’s sermon. For example, James Dusenbery wrote in his diary, “I head a sermon last Sabbath morning for the first time since leaving home. It was delivered by Prof. Green [and] set forth in glaring colours, the utter folly [and great wickedness of profane swearing. It is a habit that I have resolved never to indulge, not only for the sufficient reason that it is sinful, but because it is useless, immoral [and] ungentlemanly.”⁸⁹ Mullins recalled the sermon as “an excellent sermon on the vulgar, and disgusting practice of profane swearing.” He added to his reaction that the sermon “seemed to have a very beneficial effect on his audience, if their countenances were an index to their feelings.” For his part, though, Mullins wrote that he was “thoroughly ashamed of ever having been guilty of so low, and disgraceful a vice.” Yet he admitted that despite his own “repugnance to the practice, so strong is the force of habit that I find it impossible to abandon it...[I]t has become so linked to my conversation by long usage, that so far my most strenuous efforts to cease the polluting evil have entirely failed.”⁹⁰

Not only did students receive messages from adults about proper language for everyday conversations, but they also repeated those messages to one another. In 1810, Thomas Williamson Jones received a letter from his friend Elias Hawes. Hawes addressed his “dear young Friend” and wrote about a “sinful habit which I am now

⁸⁹ James Lawrence Dusenbery, Diary, 07 August 1841, James Lawrence Dusenberry Diary and Clipping #2561-z, SHC.

⁹⁰ Mullins, Diary, 01 August 1841.

ashamed of & which I trust I have overcome,” that is “the silly, ragged habit of swearing.” He told his young friend that swearing was a “contagious disorder” and a “disease of the mind” that was traceable “to that innate depravity of our nature which makes us more apt to acquire vice than virtue.” Speaking with the language of gender, that men were more prone to vices such as swearing than women, Hawes then pointed to the root causes of swearing. He listed being too eager to speak, being too determined in a dispute to speak “without hearing and maturely...weighing the arguments of our opponent,” arguing about “trifling matters” and engaging in “too free intercourse with those we do not respect. “No well bred man will be profane in the presence of Ladies,” Hawes explained, “nor before aged men who have any weight of character.” For elites, manly character required listening patiently, examining one’s own behavior, and avoiding expletives.⁹¹

In addition to speech education between friends, each literary society prohibited swearing in its rules. In a 1795 meeting of the Dialectic Society, for example, one student made a formal complain that a classmate used “profane Language” during a meeting. Because the erring student evidently did not know the rules of the society at the time he swore, he was “acquited [sic]” and not fined. In 1808, use of profanity in the Dialectic Society had caused the incoming president, William Cowan, to feel compelled in his inaugural address to admonish his fellow members for frequent swearing. He reminded them that “[u]nrestrained use of language is destructive to the peace of Civil Society.” Swearing and civility were incompatible, and students attempted to regulate language in their literary society meetings. Thus, students were aware that, as historians

⁹¹ Elias Hawes to Thomas Williamson Jones, 19 March 1810, Folder 1, Thomas Williamson Jones Papers #3684-z, SHC

have argued, learning how to act like a gentleman required learning how to regulate language.

Conclusion

In July, 1853 William Lafayette Scott, President of the Dialectic Society, stood up before his classmates and offered this advice about speaking:

[W]e are not merely thinking, but speaking beings....Here, of course, I allude not to common parlance, but to public speaking. You may not all be called upon to make long and labored speeches – in fact very few of you may –; but there are none of you, if your lives are spared even till the prime of manhood, that will not perhaps find it necessary on some public occasion to arise in an assembly of men and make a few, plain, practical remarks, or suffer your views on some matter....⁹²

In classrooms and in literary societies, students engaged with the oratorical ideal for male citizens to create manly identities. These identities were rooted in timeless notions that oratorical genius was a crucial component of intellectual manhood. While Scott underscored oratory rather than “common parlance,” everyday conversation was also a form of public speech for which students cared greatly. They valued polite conversation as a form of intellectual engagement and as a symbol of maturity and, as much as possible, actively strove to cultivate genteel parlance in everyday life. Whether speech education occurred in formal classroom settings, literary societies, or intimate conversations, learning to talk like men depended very much on how students viewed their own potential as youth to become great men. Literary society debates bring to focus the broad relevance of speech education to students’ higher education, including their development as citizens, leaders, and men.

⁹² William Lafayette Scott, “Presidential Address of Will. Lafayette Scott,” 23 July 1853, Dialectic Society Records..

CHAPTER FOUR

“Every great public question”: Literary Society Debates

Debate was the most important literary society duty, if not the most valuable component of antebellum students' higher education. Like composition and declamation, debates were entirely student-organized and occurred without faculty supervision or audience, but they were educational nonetheless. Debate “strengthen[ed] the reasoning powers,” students believed, “and extend[ed] the empire of research.”¹ Every week during their regular meetings, members of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies held debates on national and global topics related to the arts and sciences, philosophy and morality, current affairs, government, and history.² Whereas the classroom required rote memorization and recitation of literature and facts, debate promoted active engagement with the world through rigorous disputation. This pedagogy prepared students for American civil society, where elite white men were expected to speak extemporaneously when called upon—either in private or public—to discuss “[e]very great public question, whether of war or of peace, whether of internal or external policy.”³ In a republic, every question ultimately hinged on an individual man's ability to use knowledge and erudition

¹ William John Long, Inaugural Address, 1838, Dialectic Society Records.

² On the cosmopolitan reach of debate questions in literary societies, collegiate and non-collegiate, throughout the South, see Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 423.

³ James Biddle Shepard, “James B. Shepard's Address: Delivered before the Two Literary Societies of the University of North Carolina, June 5, 1844,” *The North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 6 & 7 (August & September 1844): 258.

for the common good. Debate, therefore, was most useful for preparation for the learned professions—politics, law, the ministry, medicine, and business—and making public policy. Yet even if a student did not enter any of these professions—which was quite common—and ran his family farm, debate taught him to think on his feet and to have confidence in himself and his convictions. This public demonstration and use of intellectual manhood was necessary in town and county meetings that he would attend.⁴ Debate, therefore, was a practice of civic virtue—the sacred bond between self and society that was absolutely necessary for a healthy republic.

Debates helped students prepare for this most exalted concept of civic engagement by training them to define, interpret, and use knowledge for others' benefit.⁵ By debating “every public question,” antebellum students demonstrated that the most important questions to them were those that addressed state development and the advancement of republicanism and American civilization. Debates dealing with these topics, moreover, provided opportunities for students to use current political ideologies to advocate their positions. Thus, debates played an important role in helping students articulate and defend their emerging political identities. This was especially true among antebellum students, who generally approached public questions from either Whig or Democrat perspectives (or sometimes both), though they rarely made the debates about

⁴ Kemp Battle, remembering his experiences at the University of North Carolina, explained that if an antebellum student received nothing at all from his classes or scholarship, “[h]e could speak on his feet. In county meetings he knew rules of order and how to conduct business. He had confidence in himself, and realized that he secures the fruit who has boldness to seize it and hold it with tenacious grasp.” Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina from Its Beginning to the Death of President Swain, 1789-1868* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1907), 781.

⁵ Cultivating knowledge was the object of all eighteenth-century literary societies in the United States and Europe. See Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 14-15 and Albrecht Koschnik, *“Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together”: Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

parties *per se*. In all, students believed their civic and political duties were one in the same: to improve—even perfect—the early American republic.

Although students took on many important political debates that occurred in the national and state legislatures, their engagement with the antebellum period's most important and contentious issues—slavery and Indian Removal—provide insight into how elite white southerners reconciled their pursuit of civic virtue with enslavement and removal. Before the 1830s, North Carolina students generally opposed slavery, but after Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion and the subsequent rise of abolitionism, they increasingly expressed pro-slavery beliefs, though even those attitudes did not go unchallenged. Students' debates about Native Americans occurred concurrently with slavery debates. They shed light on the process by which students came to believe that a good society was a white society. Debates about these topics demonstrate one way in which antebellum students learned to deploy the language of racial and cultural difference to wield great power over others. Most importantly, these debates bring into focus the intellectual process by which students developed identities that became distinctively southern in terms of slavery and race, yet distinctively national in terms of their vision of progress and the hopes of building an American civilization.

Literary Society Debating

Members of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies followed similar debate procedures as literary societies in colleges and universities throughout the early republic.⁶

⁶ David Potter, "The Literary Society," in Karl R. Wallace, ed., *History of Speech Education in America* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1954), 238-58; Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815-1876* (New York: Pageant Press International Corp., 1971); James McLachlan, "The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies

The debates were held among members of one society; rarely did the societies debate each other. They were in the style of English-language forensic disputation, which involved two opposing debaters attempting to offer a persuasive answer to an open-ended question. This debate style imitated the public arena (forensic is derived broadly from the Latin word “forum,” meaning public assembly or affairs) and it was the common legal and legislative style of debate.⁷ Learning to be persuasive in such a capacity was essential to students’ civic education and a mark of intellectual manhood.

Debate questions usually had two sides, an affirmative and a negative. For example, “Does civilization increase happiness?” or “Should a college be located in a city or in the country?”⁸ Queries were announced in meetings at least a week in advance by a query committee and selected by the society president. The president announced the question and appointed students—usually one principal debater and two assistants for each side—to open the debate one week in advance. In the interim, the question sometimes changed. For example, on March 13, 1798 the Philanthropic Society determined, “The question for the next debate is should not all lotteries be considered unlawful unless authorized by the Legislature if they be for the nature of more than five hundred pounds.” But the following week, when the debate occurred the question had

in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University in Society*, edited by Lawrence Stone (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 485-86.

⁷ Potter, “The Literary Society,” 243-245. Forensic disputation differed from Latin syllogistic disputation, another form of debate that had been common in eighteenth-century colleges and universities. Syllogistic disputation, usually theological, involved two opposing debaters attempting to prove or disprove a thesis statement. By the mid eighteenth century, American colleges and universities had begun to abandon the syllogistic style, and by the early national period all debates in classrooms, literary societies, and extra-collegiate literary societies and debating clubs only engaged in forensic debate. Inter-societal debates did occur in antebellum colleges, but this was not a regular exercise; intercollegiate debating as we know it today did not begin until the 1880s.

⁸ Dialectic Society Minutes, 05 June 1855, Vol. S-11 and 19 November 1858, Vol. S-12, Dialectic Society Records. Minutes for both the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies are contained in twenty-seven bound volumes (twelve for the Dialectic and fifteen for the Philanthropic).

been recorded, “Whether ought any schemes of lotteries to be considered as lawful which are not expressly permitted by the Legislature.” The wording became less specific, though the topic remained the same.⁹ Sometimes, too, students proposed questions one week, and motioned to reject them before the debate commenced the following week. In April 1820, for example, the Philanthropic Society was supposed to debate whether a “man of application or of genius” was “the more useful member of Society,” but the Phil rejected the query and chose another in its place: “Ought free schools to be encouraged?” The records do not indicate the reason for rejecting this query; perhaps the debaters were absent or unprepared.¹⁰ Had this been the case, then the negligent student would have been fined for non-performance of duties.

Each society held debates on Friday evenings as part of the society’s “regular business.” The principal debaters opened the debate with speeches they prepared in advance. Their assistants then sustained the debate until it was time to open the question to the floor. At that point, any member of the society could speak. After the president recapitulated the arguments, the society voted, and the secretary recorded the resolution in the minutes.¹¹ Sometimes a secretary elaborated by writing “after a lengthy debate” the question was “decided in the negative.” Secretaries’ descriptions of debate proceedings were usually simple and provide no evidence of points raised during

⁹ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 13 March 1798, vol. 2, Philanthropic Society Records.

¹⁰ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 12 April 1820, vol. S-7, *ibid.* See also Minutes for 08 May 1798, Vol. 2 and 14 August 1800, vol. 3, *ibid.*

¹¹ The rules for debating did not really change during the period 1795-1861, as was the case with each society’s constitution in general: “...Debating on a question shall be regularly performed at each Meeting; the debate shall be opened by two persons appointed for that purpose, under the penalty of a fine; and after they have done, all the Members have a right to join in the Debate.... That the Subjects of Debate be not wanting, it is enjoyed that every person, in the reading class, shall give in a question to the Clerk, on the night on which he reads with his name undersigned.” Dialectic Society Minutes, 1795-1798, vol. 1, Dialectic Society Records, [11].

debates.¹² We have little evidence of how long each debate lasted, for example, or how heated the conversations became after the principal speakers delivered their positions. The minutes do suggest, however, that the Friday meetings at which debates occurred began around 7:30 p.m. and typically ended around 10:00 p.m.¹³

Students were supposed to prepare for debates by reading books on the subject and writing their addresses in advance. Debaters must have circulated drafts of their speeches among the opposing team prior to debates, too, because many speeches from one side of a debate contain exact quotations from speeches from the other.¹⁴ Records suggest, however, that sometimes students were not very diligent. In 1851, for example, George Thompson debated the question “Does the Theatre have an immoral tendency,” but he wrote in his journal that day that he “did not make much of a speech.”¹⁵ Some students merely disliked debating. “Land, how the Society bothers me very much indeed, and I heartily wish I had not ever seen it,” James Hilliard Polk complained in 1859. “To debate is entirely contrary to my principles and having to be fined every other Friday night is rather too expensive, and to make a fool of myself is not what I intend to do if I

¹² The Dialectic and Philanthropic societies archived exemplary debate speeches, but only a few of the Philanthropic Society’s speeches have survived. My work, therefore, necessarily relies on more than eight hundred extant addresses and debate speeches of the Dialectic Society’s archives.

¹³ Battle, *History*, 79-84.

¹⁴ Erika Lindemann has confirmed this observation. See “The Debating Societies,” *True and Candid Compositions, Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp05-02/chp05-02.html> (accessed 24 July 2008).

¹⁵ George N. Thompson, Diary, 24 January 1851, George N. Thompson Diary #2367-z, SHC. See also Johnson Pinkston, Inaugural Address, 15 April 1842, Dialectic Society Records.

can avoid it.”¹⁶ Many students like Polk would rather have paid a fine than participate in debates.¹⁷

The Questions

Literary society debates fell into five major categories: education, arts, and sciences; philosophy and morality; current affairs; government and political economy; and history.¹⁸ Questions about current affairs were the most debated category overall, comprising 37 percent of nearly 4,000 debates held in the Dialectic Society between 1795 and 1861. These were debates about current political and legal questions discussed at the national, state, and local level, American foreign relations, and also ethical problems that emerged in light of current events in the United States and abroad. After current affairs, questions about philosophy and morality comprised 22 percent of debates. These questions addressed three types of philosophical inquiry commonly categorized in the nineteenth century as mental, natural, and moral philosophy. Questions in this category dealt with theology, the meaning of life, the origins and happiness of man, art and nature, right versus wrong, and conduct of life. Government and political economy questions comprised 17 percent of debates. These questions dealt largely with the “nature of civil government and the perfect right of individuals,” “republican principles,” the “stability of

¹⁶ James Hilliard Polk, Diary, Folder 1, James Hilliard Polk Diary #5259-z, SHC, 67.

¹⁷ The minutes of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies are replete with reports of students who had to pay fines for not being prepared to participate in composition, declamation, and debate. On fines, see Virginius Henry Ivy, Inaugural Address, 18 October 1844, Dialectic Society Records.

¹⁸ These categories of analysis are mine; students did not categorize their debates. I have based them on nearly 4,000 questions debated in both the Dialectic and Philanthropic Society. There is no study that has systematically quantified, classified, and analyzed literary society debate questions. The only other study to analyze college literary society debate questions is Harding, *College Literary Societies*. As much as possible, I have chosen my categories of analysis based on nineteenth-century epistemology more so than twenty-first century academic categories of analysis. Harding, for instance, identifies sociological questions, which students would not have labeled as such.

government,” and the “preservation of liberty.”¹⁹ Likewise, modern and ancient historical and biographical questions comprised 17 percent of debates. Forty-four percent of these debates concerned Europe, 28 percent focused on America, and another 28 percent dealt with ancient Greece and Rome, and general historical inquiries, combined. Finally, questions within the education, arts, and sciences category were the least debated, comprising 7 percent of debates. Questions in this category examined knowledge, learning, and literature; the collegiate classical curriculum, especially ancient versus modern languages and literature; and student life, faculty governance, and discipline at the University of North Carolina. (Questions in this category, however, do not deal with public policy issues related to education, which are included in current affairs.) In all, the questions students posed for debate between 1795 and 1861 suggest that students possessed a broad and cosmopolitan outlook.

Questions related to college life, youth, and manhood appeared consistently across categories and over time.²⁰ For instance, students debated conduct of life questions that resonated with college youth. In 1795, students debated whether or not “Debauchery or Drunkenness [was] most prejudicial,” and resolved that debauchery was most prejudicial.²¹ In 1815, they debated “whether dancing [was] inconsistent with true

¹⁹ These are phrases that students used in government and political economy questions. Students were interested especially in types of government; taxes; public office; agriculture versus commerce; and representation, or theories and ethics related to representation. Questions about government and questions about current affairs tend to overlap. When students posed questions about specific governmental policies and practices related to the United States or North Carolina specifically, or used the term “at present,” I assigned the question to the current affairs category. In any case, questions about current affairs and about government often were part of a similar inquiry about the new republican experiment.

²⁰ This was true among young men throughout the South in the early republic and antebellum periods. See O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 424.

²¹ Dialectic Society Minutes, 12 November 1795, vol. 1, Dialectic Society Records.

morality” (they decided that dancing was immoral).²² Students’ questions also anticipated marriage and family, addressing polygamy, divorce, and moral obligations to marry (or not). In 1796, for instance, students debated whether “temporary marriages or marriages for life” were “best,” and they decided in favor of the latter. In 1800, they asked whether “the passion of love increase[d] man’s happiness,” and resolved that love made men happier.²³ These moral and philosophical questions dealt with how young men contemplated an individual (man’s) role to himself, society, and to God.

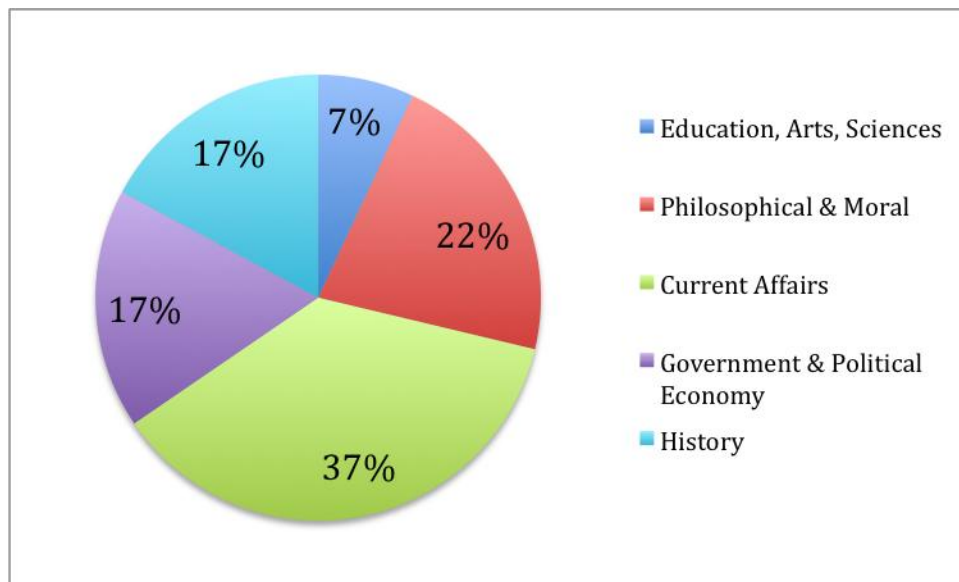


Figure 8 – Percentage of Total Debates in the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies by Category, 1795-1861 (n=3,871). Source: Dialectic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-9, S-10-12, Dialectic Society Records #40152; Philanthropic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-4, S-5, 6, S-7, 8-11, S-12, 13, Philanthropic Society Records #40166, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²² Dialectic Society Minutes, 11 May 1815, Vol. 5, Dialectic Society Records.

²³ Dialectic Society Minutes, 03 April 1800, vol. 3, Dialectic Society Records. For more examples, see Dialectic Society Minutes: 1805 whether polygamy was “justifiable” (it was not); in 1807 whether “divorces [were] morally or politically admittable [sic] on any occasion” (they were); in 1835 they asked whether “marriages contribute to the happiness of life” (they did); in 1824 they decided that a man should never “marry for money”; and in 1850 they even asked whether a man was “morally bound to marry” (and they decided that he was).

Students also posed questions about ethical problems facing lawyers and clergy, two professions to which many nineteenth-century students aspired. In 1812, for example, students debated whether it was “the most laudable [for lawyers] to advocate...the side of justice or mercy,” and resolved in favor of justice. Sometimes students juxtaposed professional dilemmas.²⁴ In 1815 they debated whether a “lawyer who endeavors to convince you of a thing he knows to be false, or a divine who preaches doctrine he does not believe [was] the more culpable” of wrongdoing; students resolved that a dishonest preacher was more culpable than a dishonest lawyer.²⁵ Connected to these issues of conduct of professional life were more general questions about telling the truth and keeping promises. These were issues covered consistently in students’ moral philosophy courses between 1795 and 1861, and they were important to the moral development of “intellectual manhood.”²⁶

In every generation, too, students were curious about professions that produced the most social happiness and, at the same time, distinguished young men in public life. In other words, what professions best suited students’ belief that intellectual manhood had to be useful? “Wherein does man most answer the design of his creation, in retirement or in public life?” students questioned in 1810. They decided in favor of public life. Similarly, in 1819, students debated whether law or medicine was the “most

²⁴ Dialectic Society Minutes, 14 August 1812, vol. 5, Dialectic Society Records.

²⁵ Dialectic Society Minutes, 06 September 1815, vol. 5, Dialectic Society Records.

²⁶ “Ought we always to tell the truth” and “Is the Obligation to observe promises beneficial to the well-being of society?” were important questions. In 1796, the Dis decided that truth was not obligatory and in the 1811 they decided that keeping promises was beneficial to society. Dialectic Society Minutes, 18 August 1796, Vol. 1 and 19 February 1811, Vol. 4, Dialectic Society Records. On the connection to collegiate moral philosophy, see William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 33-37; Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science*, ed. Joseph L. Blau (Cambridge, Mass., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 254-69; Timothy Dwight, Jr., *President Dwight’s Decisions of Questions Discussed by the Senior Class in Yale College in 1813 and 1814* (New York: Leavitt, 1833).

useful profession” and decided in favor of medicine. Finally, what careers were most advantageous to the stability and progress of the early republic—for building a nation and an American civilization? In 1856, students wanted to know whether “the moral or intellectual improvement of the citizens” was “the greater element of national strength.” Intellectual improvement, they decided, made a stronger nation.²⁷ To this end, antebellum students used literary society debates to advocate public education and “free schools.”²⁸ These queries, in sum, reinforced the utilitarian dimension of “intellectual manhood” that students hoped to develop through higher education.

In addition to exploring the individual’s role in a republic, every generation of students also explored the role of government in protecting social happiness and advancing civilization. Questions about ancient and modern history provided entry into these topics, for these were standard themes in the formal curriculum’s required ancient texts. Students were especially interested in why the Greek and Roman republics collapsed. In 1842, for example, the Dialectic Society asked, “Was the constitution of Athens better calculated to effect the happiness of a people than that of Sparta?” They decided that it was not.²⁹ Students knew, however, that constitutions alone did not promote social happiness and guarantee the stability of government. As free moral agents, men were responsible for the stability of state power. Students therefore scrutinized historic leaders for insight into the uses and abuses of power in building and

²⁷ Dialectic Society Minutes, 11 January 1810, 03 March 1819, 03 June 1856, vols. 4, 6, S-11, Dialectic Society Records. For additional examples of questions like these, see Dialectic Society Minutes, 15 October 1795, 10 March 1796, 20 July 1798, 18 June 1802, 28 April 1803, 19 February 1807, 18 January 1809, 15 October 1823, 14; February 1827, 07 March 1832, 28 January 1842, 09 April 1858, vols. 2-4, 6-7, 9, S-12, Dialectic Society Records.

²⁸ Dialectic Society Minutes, 11 January 1810 [retirement v. public life], 3 March 1819 [most useful profession], 23 August 1839 [free schools], 3 June 1856 [national strength], vols. 4, 6, 9, S-11, Dialectic Society Records.

²⁹ Dialectic Society Minutes, 29 April 1842, vol .9, Dialectic Society Records.

defending a nation. They debated whether Cromwell's party was "right in their treatment of Charles I?"; whether Queen Elizabeth justifiably beheaded Mary Queen of Scots; and whether Napoleon's character was at all worthy of admiration. In short, students consistently used debates about history and biography to probe the complicated relationship between individual leaders, society, and free government.³⁰

While every generation of students looked to debates to understand their obligations to self and to society, especially in leadership positions, the questions students asked changed over time. Two substantial shifts in debate questions occurred between 1795 and 1861 (Fig. 2). The most important shift occurred around 1820, when questions about current affairs replaced philosophy and morality questions as the most debated. At the same time, historical questions also began to gain increasing significance among students. By the 1850s, historical questions nearly became the most important modes of inquiry among students, though current events remained very significant. This sustained emphasis of current affairs demonstrates that, among antebellum students, learning to decide "every great public question" mattered more than learning for learning's sake. Fewer philosophical questions suggest, too, a more pervasive decline of the Enlightenment in American culture. The rise of the second party system and practical politics in the 1820s, moreover, came to replace policy making directed by theory about how a republican government should work.

These trends toward current affairs and, later, history are not unrelated. Questions in each category expressed students' abiding interest in public life. Moreover, they complemented questions about government in the abstract, which consistently comprised

³⁰ Dialectic Society Minutes, 16 August 1836 [Cromwell], 04 June 1844 [Elizabeth], 13 October 1854 [Napoleon], vols. 8, 9, S-11, Dialectic Society Records.

about twenty percent of questions debated in each decade between 1795 and 1861. Taken together, current affairs, history, and government provided more palpable ways to understand the world than abstract philosophical questions. As such, these trends represent an important break from the generations of students who attended North Carolina prior to 1820, who looked to philosophy for larger truths than to current events, government, or history.

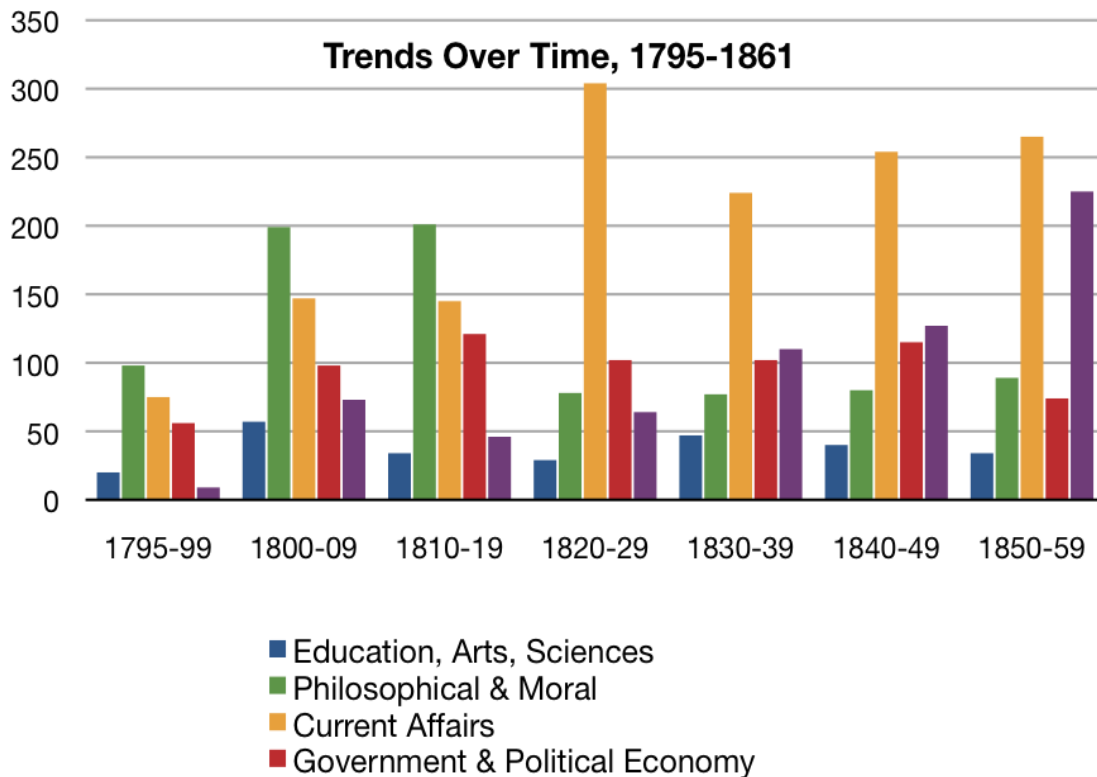


Figure 9 – Debates in the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies by Category, 1795-1861 (n=3,871). Source: Dialectic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-9, S-10-12, Dialectic Society Records #40152; Philanthropic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-4, S-5, 6, S-7, 8-11, S-12, 13, Philanthropic Society Records #40166, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

These epistemic shifts were rooted in print and communication developments that led to greater availability of print material in rural areas, including the South, by the 1820s. At the University of North Carolina, literary society libraries grew tremendously, as we shall see in the next chapter, giving antebellum students greater access to print materials that had not been available to earlier generations of students. In addition to purchasing new titles—especially histories, biographies, and fiction—literary society libraries began to subscribe to major national and regional periodicals that provided sources for debate, including *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *North American Review*, *DeBow's Review*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger* to name only a few titles.³¹ Often students' families sent newspapers through the mail for students to keep up with local news from home. Students also read local newspapers, including the *Hillsboro Recorder* and the *Raleigh Register*, the most widespread newspaper in the state. The editors of the *Register* maintained a close relationship with the University between 1795 and 1861. Their office printed addresses for the literary societies, provided books, and in the late antebellum period, printed the students' literary magazine. The *Register* identified closely with the political parties in power during the period—first the Jeffersonian Republicans and then the Whigs—and flourished, in fact, on account of maintaining government printing contracts when each respective party was in power. The *Register* followed national politics closely and espoused nationalist ideologies in

³¹ Laura Frances Parrish, "Books Read by Members of the Philanthropic Society and Their Correlation with Debate Topics, 1828-1832," M.S.L.S., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979, 14-15, 27. Periodical literature comprised almost the smallest category of works held in the Philanthropic Society library between 1828 and 1832. Favorite titles included the *North American Review*; *Edinburgh Review*; *Spectator*; *American Quarterly Review*; *Analectic Magazine*; *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; *Monthly Magazine*; *Quarterly Review*; *American Journal of Science*, or Silliman's *Journal of Science and Art*; and the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The only newspaper that the Philanthropic Society subscribed to was the *Raleigh Star*. Students preferred to spend their money on books; they could get newspapers more easily.

every current debate, save for abolition of slavery.³² While the records do not suggest a direct correlation between articles printed in the *Register* or any other news source, which is not the object of my investigation, they do suggest a correlation between increased availability of news sources and interest in current affairs.

Current Affairs and Civic Identity Formation

Current affairs related to the United States comprised 70 percent of (1,421) debates in the current affairs category, those related to North Carolina comprised 20 percent, and those related to global events comprised 10 percent. Current affairs provided many opportunities for students to probe questions about ethics and morality by observing the world around them. In the process, they learned to develop civic identities and articulate political ideologies that they thought best addressed “every great public question.”³³

Typically antebellum students debated political issues, but they shied away from discussing particular positions or candidates. The Philanthropic Society posed more questions about current legislation and presidential politics than the Dialectic Society. In the late antebellum period, for example, the Dialectic Society debated whether students should even study politics, let alone discuss politics in literary societies.³⁴ Party banter was not useful, and many believed it neither indicated civic virtue nor promoted the public good. Students in fact frequently admonished one another in society addresses for displaying too much “party spirit,” causing factions to form among students. Ideally,

³² Robert Neal Elliott, Jr., *The Raleigh Register, 1799-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955).

³³ Simon Hart Rogers, Presidential Address, 29 May 1845, Dialectic Society Records, 2.

each society was a “band of brothers,” who disagreed along ideological, though never political, lines.

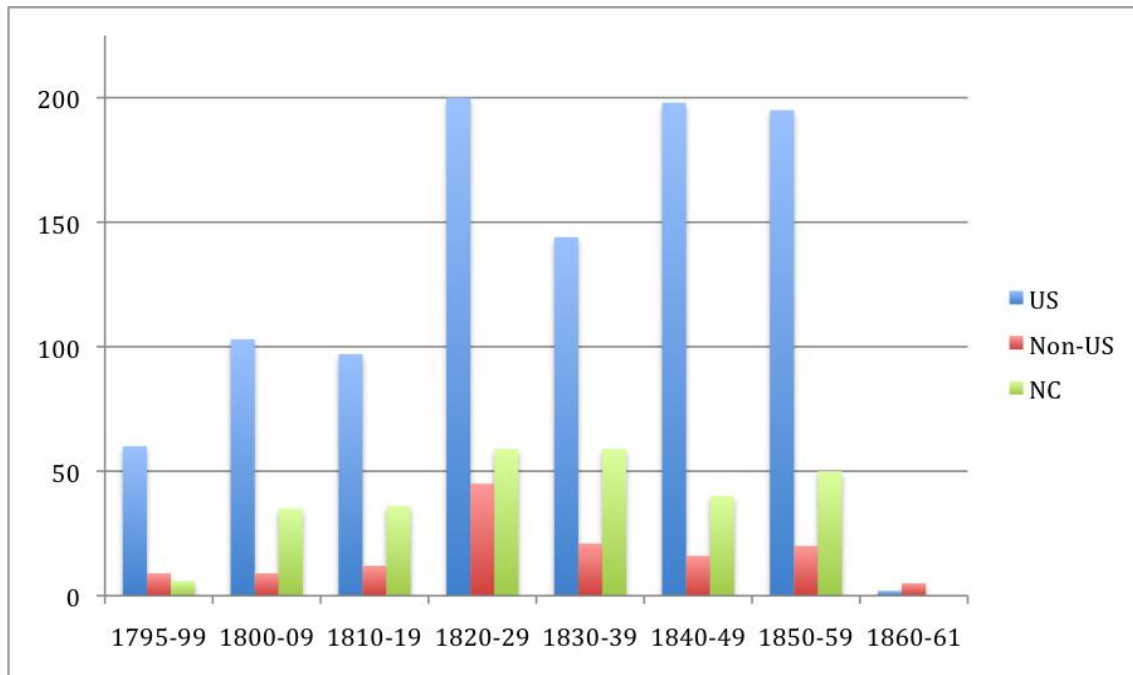


Figure 10 – Number of Current Affairs Debates Held in the Dialectic and Philanthropic Society, 1795-1861 (n=1,421). Source: Dialectic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-9, S-10-12, Dialectic Society Records #40152; Philanthropic Society Minutes, 1795-1861, vols. 1-4, S-5, 6, S-7, 8-11, S-12, 13, Philanthropic Society Records #40166, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Before 1820, students tended to debate major ideological issues that preoccupied Federalists and Republicans, including questions about whether agriculture or commerce created the most fitting political economy for the new republic, regulation of commerce, territorial expansion, especially regarding Jefferson’s Louisiana Purchase. Questions about Anglo-US and Franco-US relations dominated this period, and students frequently debated whether or not the United States should go to war with either France or Britain and, if war should break out, they wondered whether war with one country would be

³⁴ “Should political questions be discussed in debating societies?” [Decided in the Negative.] Dialectic Society Minutes, 27 August 1852, vol. S-11, Dialectic Society Records. Also see John Washington Graham, Inaugural Address, 16 October 1856, Dialectic Society Records.

more advantageous than war with another. Students also followed the Napoleonic Wars closely, trying to determine whether the legacy of the French Revolution was positive or negative and whether the character of Napoleon's leadership was ultimately conducive to European progress. In all, the questions students chose to debate between 1795 and 1819—and the ways in which they resolved them—demonstrate students' growing identification with Jeffersonian republican ideology that fit squarely in North Carolina's early national political culture.³⁵ By 1800, students in the Philanthropic Society favored Jefferson as “the most proper person for President of the U. States” with nine votes in favor of Jefferson and only two for Adams.³⁶

After 1820, when current events became the most debated category of questions, students continued to mirror the state's political culture. For example, as North Carolina transitioned from one-party Republican governance to a robust two-party system of Whigs and Democrats, students began to identify party-based ideologies with their developing civic identities. This became especially apparent in debates leading up to the elections of 1824 and 1828, when students discussed presidential politics more frequently. The Philanthropic Society, for instance, debated three times who ought to win the election of 1824, each time voting against Andrew Jackson and once explicitly for the Old Republican candidate, William H. Crawford, who was the favorite of most political leaders in North Carolina at the time.³⁷ When the Dialectic Society cast their

³⁵ On the influence of Jeffersonian republicanism see Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 184-186; Delbert Harold Gilpatrick, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina, 1789-1816* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 179.

³⁶ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 13 May 1800, vol. 3, Philanthropic Society Records. See also 07 September 1802, *ibid.*

³⁷ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 11 September 1822, 24 September 1823, 31 March 1824, vol. S-8, Philanthropic Society Records. On Crawford, see Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome,

votes in an 1823 debate, however, they voted for John Quincy Adams. Likewise, in anticipation of the election of 1828, the Phis gave their support to Jackson over Adams; the Dis did not debate the election at all. In all, these debates reflect the long-recognized ideological split between western North Carolina and eastern North Carolina. The Dis, coming from western North Carolina, identified more with Whig candidates and policies than the Phis, who tended to support Democrat candidates and policies.

Regardless of their political leanings, by the antebellum period, students were taken with the idea of state development, and they used debates as opportunities to discuss the solutions to North Carolina's most important problems. The most important problem facing North Carolina, the debates suggest, was penal reform. Approximately 51 percent of Dialectic Society debates about North Carolina's current affairs dealt with improving the state's penal code, which was a duplication of the harsh, often torturous system of punishment imported from English common law during the colonial period. North Carolina's antebellum penal system allowed for branding of women, imprisonment of debtors, and execution of individuals for dueling, theft, horse-stealing, forgery, among other crimes. These capital offenses met with the worst punishment: execution by hanging, torture, whipping, and life imprisonment. There had long been public concern over the harsh penal codes in the state as well as legislative agitation for a state penitentiary. North Carolina's literary societies questioned whether individuals should be imprisoned for debt or hanged for stealing horses, but the most prevalent question was whether North Carolina should erect a penitentiary for reforming criminals.³⁸ Archibald

North Carolina: A History of a Southern State, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 340.

³⁸ The Dialectic Society debated penal reform and the establishment of a penitentiary fifty times between 1795 and 1835, and continued at this rate throughout the antebellum period. See Dialectic Society

Murphey, a North Carolina alumnus and member of the Dialectic Society, in fact, had first recommended that the legislature establish a penitentiary, though the bill was rejected by a popular referendum in 1846 and never passed before the Civil War.³⁹

Nevertheless, students participated in ongoing debates to reform the penal system because they believed doing so advanced the common good and promised to modernize North Carolina's criminal justice system.

The second most important problem facing North Carolina in the antebellum period, according to students' debate questions, was constitutional reform. Questions about North Carolina's 1776 constitution comprised about one quarter of the questions students posed about North Carolina current affairs. At least three reasons account for this interest in constitutional reform. First, there had been statewide agitation for reform beginning in the early 1820s. In short, western North Carolinians believed that the East held too much voting power in the legislature and they advocated greater representation by allowing suffrage to non-freeholders.⁴⁰ Second, other states had begun to reform their state constitutions at the same time. Third, students' moral philosophy course emphasized constitutional history in the context of ethics and morality. Students first entertained these questions of constitutional reform in the early 1820s, when movement

Minutes 15 June 1797, 16 May 1799, 21 August 1800, 06 March 1800, 08 October 1801, 18 March 1802, 21 April 1802, 07 June 1804, 01 March 1805, 08 August 1805, 23 January 1806, 17 April 1806, 10 July 1806, 16 October 1806, 21 July 1808, 28 July 1808, 29 September 1808, 01 February 1810, 18 July 1810, 13 September 1810, 27 September 1810, 02 April 1812, 25 March 1813, 7 October 1813, 14 April 1814, 17 March 1815, 28 June 1815, 30 August 1815, 31 July 1816, 9 October 1816, 29 January 1817, 12 August 1818, 26 August 1818, 19 October 1819, 23 February 1820, 21 March 1821, 6 February 1822, 5 February 1823, 29 September 1824, 01 February 1826, 01 March 1826, 17 October 1828, 04 May 1831, 31 March 1832, 04 April 1832, 01 October 1833, 22 January 1834, 04 February 1835, 09 September 1835, vols. 1-8, Dialectic Society Records.

³⁹ Lefler and Nesome, *North Carolina*, 371. Agitation for ending capital punishment and reforming penal codes was a national endeavor, too. Walt Whitman's New York literary society, for example, engaged in debates about abolishing capital punishment in the 1830s. David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 59.

⁴⁰ Lefler, *North Carolina*, 334-35.

for a convention first occurred and again in the 1830s when another convention was called. In these debates we see the clearest evidence that students from the western part of the state—the Dis—expressed Whig principles and those from the eastern part of the state—the Phis—expressed Democratic principals. Nearly every time the Dis debated whether or not a constitutional convention ought to be held, whether voting should be opened to all white men, rather than just free-holders, and whether the governor ought to be popularly elected, they favored reform.⁴¹ On the other hand, each time those instances came up in the Philanthropic Hall, the Phis tended to favor the status quo, exhibiting the most resistance to democratization.

This regional disparity was also evident in each society's debates about internal improvements, another important aspect of North Carolina's antebellum reform. For instance, each society debated whether or not North Carolina should establish a central railroad system in 1828, when the sitting president of the University, Joseph Caldwell, published a series of article, *The Numbers of Carlton* in which he extolled the power of railroads and proposed that the state government build a railroad from Beaufort through New Bern and Raleigh. He hoped this railroad would channel trade and improve the

⁴¹ Dialectic Society Minutes, 25 October 1820 [favored calling a constitutional convention], 27 February 1822 [the N.C. legislature should not have repealed resolutions to assemble a constitutional convention], 27 April 1826 [the state constitution should be reformed to allow Roman Catholics rights to holding public office], 14 April 1830 [Buncome and Burke counties should be split for greater representation], 03 February 1831 and 16 April 1834 [a convention ought to be convened], vols. 6-8, Dialectic Society Records. The one exception to this desire for a more democratic constitution was that members of the Dialectic Society believed that sheriffs should not be elected by popular vote. Cf. Philanthropic Society Minutes, 22 September 1819 and 14 January 1822 [against calling a convention], 17 March 1824 [voting should not be confined to freeholders alone], 20 April 1825 and 05 October 1825 [it's fine to exclude non-Christians from the Legislature], 27 September 1826, 16 April 1828, 19 February 1829 [sheriffs should not be elected by the people], 04 November 1829 [governor should not be elected by the people], 10 February 1830 [against calling a convention], 27 January 1831 [against calling a convention], 02 February 1831 [governor should be elected by the Legislature], vols. S-7 and S-8, Philanthropic Society Records.

state's lagging economy.⁴² Interestingly, not all Democrat-leaning Phis rejected antebellum reform, and not all Dis embraced it. The Phis often supported the establishment of common schools in North Carolina along with the Dialectic Society.⁴³

Antebellum students' debates about current affairs in North Carolina rarely involved electoral politics. Instead, students fashioned themselves as "modernizers" and "democratizers," to use Daniel Walker Howe's language. To an extent, all antebellum students fashioned themselves as "modernizers." They all believed in the necessity for North Carolina to prosper and they all had high hopes for the advancement of American civilizations and its free institutions, which they believed were the bulwarks of republican virtue and liberty and signifiers of progress. On the other hand, they differed over how best to achieve those ends. The Dialectic Society voted in favor of the railroad twice that year, while the Philanthropic Society rejected it in the one debate they held on the subject.⁴⁴

Progress and improvement, however, call to question the limits of the spirit of progress in the antebellum period. These same students, as they looked for opportunities to exercise civic virtue in "every great public question" also confronted the glaring contradictions in their progressive world-view. How did they reconcile their belief in

⁴² Lefler, *North Carolina*, 362.

⁴³ The Phis supported Internal Improvements once on 24 August 1825. They supported common schools in debates on 17 September 1830, 19 October 1831. See Philanthropic Society Minutes, vol. S-8, Philanthropic Society Records. The Dis voted against common schools on 13 April 1811, but supported it in every debate after that point, viz. on 02 September 1818, 06 March 1822, 08 November 1826, 05 November 1828. See Dialectic Society Minutes, vols. 5, S-7,S-8,S-9, Dialectic Society Records.

⁴⁴ Dialectic Society Minutes, 17 March 1828, 30 October 1828; Philanthropic Society Minutes, 20 August 1828, vol 7, Dialectic Society Records. On 10 May 1828, the Philanthropic Society voted in favor of common schools *over* internal improvements. See Philanthropic Society Minutes, vol. S-8, Philanthropic Society Records.

republican virtue, liberty, reform, and material progress in a state and nation that legally condoned enslavement?

The Greatest Public Questions

Debating Slavery

Questions about slavery comprised a significant portion of U.S. current affairs debates held in the Dialectic and Philanthropic societies in every decade of the University of North Carolina's antebellum history.⁴⁵ Between 1795 and 1799, questions about slavery comprised fourteen percent of twenty-nine questions about US current affairs (forty-eight percent dealt with Franco- and Anglo-US relations and the French Revolution). In the first decade of the nineteenth century, slavery questions comprised eleven percent of the forty-three questions about US current affairs and issues. Between 1810 and 1819, questions about slavery comprised eighteen percent of the thirty-six US current affairs questions; between 1820 and 1829 they comprised twenty percent of seventy-eight questions in the category; and between 1830 and 1839 they comprised twenty-six percent of fifty-three questions. In other words, the numbers rose in the period leading up to the Missouri Compromise and dropped to fourteen percent by the time of the Mexican War. In the final two decades before the Civil War, questions about

⁴⁵ Sometimes slavery also appeared in debates on other topics not about slavery *per se*. For example, on June 20, 1832, the members of the Dialectic Society debated whether the United States, were it to be divided one day, would become a republic or a monarchy. The society resolved that republican forms of government would be established. In the process of debating this point, William Hayes Owen, discussed slavery in his debate speech, arguing that slavery was an institution that “paralyzes the energies of freemen.” William Hayes Owen, “William H. Owen’s Debate on the 20th of June 1832 on the negative of the question, ‘If a separation of the union were to take place, is it probable that a monarchical form of government would be established?’” 20 June 1832, Dialectic Society Records.

slavery returned to approximately twelve percent of the total questions about US current affairs, and none appear in the records between 1860 and 1861.⁴⁶

In each generation, North Carolina students wanted to know whether slavery produced social happiness among whites—that is, whether or not slavery provided any benefit to communities and to nations. Second, students wanted to know how policy should be made with regard to slavery. They debated state and national policy issues such as gradual emancipation, abolition, and expansion of slavery into territories. These were not simple issues for students, whose default position rarely favored slavery before 1820. After the rise of northern abolition, while opinion remained mixed, students tended to resolve debates in favor of slavery and in affirmation of its advantage to the republic.

Students in the early and antebellum republic debated questions about slavery that suggest curiosity about, if not a struggle with, republican claims to liberty and race-based chattel slavery. Early debates in each society indicate, anti-slavery sentiment had been strong among the first generations of students who attended the University of North Carolina. In 1799, for example, Jeremiah Battle read a composition, written in the form of a letter to a friend living in the country, before the Dialectic Society. He cautioned his friend against accumulating too many slaves and urged him to consider the implications of “perpetual slavery”:

Is it not to be expected that slavery will, ere long, be abolished in our state, as it already has in several others? I presume it will. Justice & humanity urges its necessity, while example corroborates its certainty. We anticipate the time when justice shall prevail over tyranny, and liberty shall triumph among the Africans, as it once did among the Americans. I confess I see no way by which we can restore tranquility among them without difficulty or danger, or some disquietude among

⁴⁶ These numbers are based on debates held in the Dialectic Society only, though they are representative of the overall trends in both societies.

ourselves: but we must suppose these will be surmounted, and some plan fallen on to restore them their liberty.

Battle could see no other way by which the United States could promote happiness among whites or restore peace among slaves than by “restor[ing] them [slaves] their liberty.”⁴⁷

In debates between 1795 and 1820, students tended to debate whether slavery was disadvantageous to state and national development and to the stability of a republican government. In 1800, for example, one year after New York passed a gradual emancipation statute, and when Gabriel Prosser’s rebellion was revealed in Virginia, members of the Dialectic Society debated whether North Carolina should adopt a plan for immediate emancipation and determined that it would be proper. Similarly, in 1804, when New Jersey passed a statute for gradual emancipation of slaves, North Carolina students debated—and supported—the proposition that the United States should stop importing slaves. Indeed, as the 1808 end of the transatlantic slave trade approached, students took interest in debates about abolishing slavery nationally and in their own state.⁴⁸

Whether a student argued for or against the abolition of slavery, the argument tended to address the relationship between slavery and republican government rather than racialist positions that would emerge after the rise of abolitionism in the 1830s. In 1807, when the Dialectic Society argued the question of whether slavery “ought to be abolished in the United States,” John D. Jones, arguing that slavery ought not to be abolished,

⁴⁷ Jeremiah Battle, letter, 17 April 1799, Dialectic Society Records.

⁴⁸ Dialectic Society Minutes, 02 October 1800, 11 March 1802, 08 September 1803, 02 February 1804, 06 June 1807, 15 May 1806, 09 July 1807, vols. 3-4, Dialectic Society Records.

likewise appealed to republican values and patriotism.⁴⁹ He argued that the question did not require addressing human nature, claims to black inferiority, or natural rights' of humans to enslave one another. All that mattered, he argued, was whether or not the peculiar institution was compatible with republican government and the federal Constitution in particular. "[W]hat rights a man may have to retain the Africans in servitude," in Jones's opinion, was not as important as the question "whether the manumission of slaves is compatible with the interest of the United States." Espousing a utilitarian perspective, Jones insisted that civil society requires men "to consult the good of the whole aggregate," and from that conclusion determined that slavery advanced the material progress of the republic, which was beneficial to the common good. The general welfare of the republic trumped questions about natural rights either of the enslaved or free. To anyone who might argue that slavery contradicted the Constitution, then, Jones argued that the "necessity which influenced the importation of negroes and the impracticality of ever getting clear of them make this inconsistency nominal only." Yet, Jones' appeal to civic virtue and patriotism did not win the day, however, as the affirmative side won the debate, arguing that slavery ought to be abolished based, presumably, on moral philosophy and the natural rights of man.

Early national students' attitudes about race may explain much of this discourse between arguing for slavery based on compatibility with free institutions rather than based on human nature claims. Students in the early national period were, intellectually at least, coming to terms with the meaning of physiological differences between human beings. As early as 1799, students were curious about the origins of human difference.

⁴⁹ John D. Jones, "A Speech delivered in the Dialectic Society at the annual meeting July 9th 1807 advocating the negative of this question. Ought slavery to be abolished in the United States," 09 July 1807, Dialectic Society Records. This is the only extant debate speech on the topic of slavery from this period.

Students questioned human origins, including whether different “races” of man were, in fact, different species. In 1799 and 1801, for example, the Dialectic Society debated the theory of polygenesis, or in their words, whether “all mankind [were] descended from one pair.” While eighteenth-century philosophers had solved this problem, the early nineteenth-century witnessed increased scientific scrutiny of the idea of the unity of a human species, and the theory of polygenesis emerged, suggesting that multiple creations accounted for visible racial difference. Polygenesis was almost categorically untenable among southern whites, including slaveholders, who were unwilling to reject biblical explanations of human unity.⁵⁰ Students at North Carolina were no different from the vast majority of southern intellectuals who spurned the theory of polygenesis for the less-risky Christian theory of monogenesis. They resolved every debate about human origins in favor of monogenesis.⁵¹ Students did not argue for the innate inferiority of the enslaved or “savage” Indians. Students, therefore, in this period, often resolved that blacks could be educated and that Indians could be civilized.

If students could allow for the innate equality of races and the improvability of all humans through education and civilization, then they had to deal with the potential of a multi-racial republic. After the War of 1812, this began to bother students, especially as they imagined the expansion of American civilization into western territories. Perhaps the best way to ensure a monoracial republic was by removing blacks altogether, if not through emancipation then through colonization. Students expressed interest in

⁵⁰ Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 59.

⁵¹ Dialectic Society Minutes, 06 March 1799, September 1801, 22 July 1858, vols. 2, 3, S-12, Dialectic Society Records. By the early antebellum period, however, students tended to develop more nuanced racial attitudes. By 1834, for example, the Philanthropic society was, by a comfortable majority of eight votes to five, willing to concede that “[n]egroes [were] black by nature,” rather than by climate. Philanthropic Society Minutes, 07 May 1834, vol. S-9, Philanthropic Society Records.

prevailing discourse about the removal of free blacks from the United States through colonization. In 1818, students debated colonizing freed slaves in the Pacific Northwest, and determined that establishing the colony would not be “politic.” Likewise, they resolved in 1822 that it would not be “expedient in the U. States to appropriate 500 million acres of land” to emancipated slaves in Africa. Yet, in 1826, the Dis agreed that the American Colonization Society was “worthy of individual and national patronage.” In 1827, they resolved that freed slaves should not be moved anywhere west of the Rocky Mountains, though in 1832 a different group of students decided that Liberia should be protected by the U.S. flag. These debates suggest that students, ideologically at least, were eager to see slaves withdrawn from white society, but did not wish to colonize them in the United States.⁵²

Students defined and defended their positions in light of leadership and the progress of a society that produced the most happiness among whites. During the national debate over the admission of Missouri into the United States as a slave state, students debated the usefulness and benefits of slavery and the expansion of the institution into the territories. In 1819, students debated whether the government ought “to prohibit the carrying of slaves into the new states,” and they resolved against the westward expansion of slavery. In 1820, students debated the Missouri question explicitly: “Would it be a justifiable measure in Congress to exclude slavery from the Missouri [territory] at the admission of it as a state?” But in 1820, the majority of members in the Dialectic Society seemed to have made a convincing enough argument to reverse the society’s thinking of a year earlier, for the society voted that Congress would

⁵² Dialectic Society Minutes, 14 January 1818; 30 January 1822; 22 June 1826; 04 April 1827; 29 February 1832, vols. 6-7, Dialectic Society Records.

not be justified to exclude Missouri as a slave state. Two years later, in 1822, when Americans heard about Denmark Vesey's rebellion in South Carolina, students at North Carolina debated whether the United States should "declare war against the Haytians [sic] for proffering their assistance to the blacks of South Carolina." They resolved that the United States should not declare war. A little more than one year later, on March 31, 1824, students asked whether the "slaves at Charleston [were] justifiable in their insurrection in 1822," and they determined that the slaves were justifiable!⁵³

A marked anti-slavery sentiment pervaded the University of North Carolina well into the antebellum period, but for reasons other than the racial equality of all people. A major argument against slavery among North Carolina students was that it impeded state development and the progress of civilization. In 1832, a year before he was appointed justice to North Carolina's Supreme Court, Judge William Gaston delivered a speech on advice to young men before the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies at Chapel Hill. In discussing students' responsibilities as adults, he identified slavery as the "worst evil that afflicts the South":

It [slavery] stifles industry and represses enterprise—it is fatal to economy and providence—it discourages skill—impairs our strength as a community, and poisons morals at the fountain head. How this evil is to be encountered, how subdued, is indeed a difficult and delicate enquiry, which this is not the time to examine, nor the occasion to discuss. I felt, however, that I could not discharge my duty, without referring to this subject, as one which ought to engage the prudence moderation and firmness of those who, sooner or later, must act decisively upon it.⁵⁴

⁵³ Dialectic Society Minutes, 10 April 1819; 2 February 1820; 16 October 1822; 04 February 1824, vol. 6, Dialectic Society Records.

⁵⁴ William Gaston, "Address Delivered Before the Philanthropic and Dialectic Societies at Chapel-Hill, June 20, 1832. By the Hon. William Gaston" (Raleigh: Jos. Gales & Son, 1832), 14.

Thousands of copies of Gaston's speech had been published after he first delivered it and it went through two publications in other states, including Alabama. Thomas White, the founder and long-time editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in fact, received a letter from Chief Justice John Marshall in 1832 about his excitement that Gaston's address would be published in the Messenger. "The advice he gives to students is excellent," he wrote. "It may be read again and again to advantage by every youth who wishes to avail himself to the utmost of the instruction to be acquired in our seminaries."⁵⁵ Indeed this happened at North Carolina, where Gaston was a hero among antebellum students.

David Swain, President of the University, frequently recommended that students read his address. In July 1841, for instance, Ruffin Tomlinson recalled in his diary that Swain delivered a lecture on campus upon "matters and things in general," during the course of which he read from Gaston's address.⁵⁶ In 1844, students published Gaston's address in the first volume of the *North Carolina University Magazine* because of the esteem with which the American literary world received his speech. While the speech circulated widely for its advice to young men, it is significant too that Gaston's stance on slavery did not undermine its popularity.

The emergence of northern abolition in the 1830s did much to wear away the anti-slavery sentiment at the University, though it never did completely until North Carolina (reluctantly) joined the Confederacy in 1861. When Congress adopted a "gag rule" in 1835 to prevent the House of Representatives from reading antislavery petitions on the

⁵⁵ "Hon. William Gaston's Address," *The North Carolina University Magazine*, August & September 1844, 297-316.

⁵⁶ John L. Sanders, ed., "The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, the University of North Carolina, 1841-1842," *The North Carolina Historical Review* XXX (January 1953), 95. Also see William Sidney Mullins, Diary, 19 July 1841, Vol. 2, William Sidney Mullins Diary #531-z, SHC.

House Floor, North Carolina students debated the issue also. In 1836, members of the Dialectic Society argued that Congress was *not* “justifiable in not receiving the petitions praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.” In 1838, however, they reversed the decision, arguing that Congress *should* “reject the petitions of citizens praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.”⁵⁷ In the 1840s, expansion of slavery again became an issue of debate among students, not surprisingly, as they contemplated the Mexican war and the annexation of Texas. And in 1850, students debated the politics of slavery as they relate to the Compromise of 1850. As with debates about abolitionist petitions in Congress, students’ resolutions on these issues varied, suggesting a formidable lack of consensus among literary society members on the issue of slavery. Granted, their resolutions did not necessarily indicate belief. Often students voted for the most convincing argument, belief notwithstanding, or even the most popular speaker. Nevertheless, the consistent and varied discussion of both the morality and politics of slavery demonstrate that the subject played an important role in students’ education in civics.

That students debated slavery after the rise of northern abolitionism is significant. It stands in stark contrast to historical interpretations of antebellum intellectual life. In *Freedom of Thought in the Old South*, for example, Clement Eaton has argued that the southern mind closed to controversial topics of slavery after Nat Turner’s 1831 insurrection.⁵⁸ Whereas the South’s Revolutionary generation—steeped in Enlightenment optimism and Lockean liberalism—championed freethinking,

⁵⁷ Dialectic Society Minutes, 10 February 1836, 3 February 1838, vol. 8, Dialectic Society Records.

⁵⁸ Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), 174.

imagination, and even skepticism, the antebellum generation rejected that legacy in favor of the culture of Jacksonian democracy and romanticism. In this context, the enlightened few increasingly had to answer to the unenlightened many, who feared servile insurrection too much to allow anyone to imagine that blacks and whites could live harmoniously in a free society. Indeed, the case of Benjamin S. Hedrick, a North Carolina alumnus who became a science professor demonstrates that student culture may have been unique in its allowance of freedom of thought.

Hedrick became Professor of Chemistry at North Carolina in 1854. He was opposed to the extension of slavery into the western territories. In August 1856 rumors began to circulate that, if he could, Hedrick would have voted for John C. Frémont, the Republican candidate, who opposed extending slavery in the territories. The *Raleigh Standard* printed a scathing article, and, according to Hedrick, “the mandate went forth from that representative of sham Democracy ‘if there are Black Republicans amongst us let them be driven out....’” Even after Hedrick wrote a piece for the *Standard* in his own defense, the students taunted him and even burned him in effigy, yet not one of them refused to attend Hedrick’s class. By October, however, Hedrick was dismissed for having voiced his political views.⁵⁹

Even in this climate, students did not shy away from debating slavery, including the westward expansion of slavery. One reason for this freedom of thought in student intellectual culture may have had to do with the secrecy of their meetings. Not open to the public, or even the faculty, student debates could have engendered a greater degree of free expression than otherwise might have existed on campus. Another reason for

⁵⁹ Benjamin S. Hedrick to Hinton Rowan Helper, 27 October 1856, Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers #325, SHC.

persistent debates about slavery may have been what Amy Murrell Taylor has identified as “an ideological congruence on the issue of slavery” among young men and their fathers’—and even grandfathers’—generations.⁶⁰ Late antebellum students’ grandfathers and fathers wrestled with the slavery issue as it appeared as a national concern between 1820 and 1840. By the 1850s, students continued to argue both sides of the issue, but typically resolved slavery debates in favor of the pro-slavery argument that earlier generations had wrestled with and had attempted to reconcile with compromise. Over time, students espoused a stronger, though by no means unanimous, pro-slavery ideology that came to replace the anti-slavery leanings of the first three decades of the University’s history.

Debating Native Americans

Antebellum students debated whether Europeans justifiably took possession of Indian lands, whether United States had any rights to those lands, and whether white citizens had a moral obligation to protect Indians from impending extinction.⁶¹ These themes were important to all of students’ debates about Indians, but especially to two major current developments in federal Indian policy that students followed: civilization

⁶⁰ Amy Murrell Taylor, *The Divided Family in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 25.

⁶¹ Between 1810 and 1820, students often discussed whether or not Europeans had justifiably “[taken] possession of America by driving away the original inhabitants.” Dialectic Society Minutes, 18 May 1800 [Negative], 09 September 1802 [Affirmative], 08 July 1805 [Affirmative], 07 February 1806 [Affirmative], 28 March 1811 [Affirmative, viz. Indians had right to land], 19 March 1817 [Affirmative], 24 April 1820 [Affirmative], and 16 April 1841, vols. 3-6, 9, Dialectic Society Records. See also Philanthropic Society Minutes, 13 June 1797 [Negative, viz., not “consistant [sic] with Justice to drive the Indians from their territories”], 12 February 1799 [Negative], 25 October 1815 [Negative, viz., Indians “had the greatest right to the continent of America”], 03 October 1816 [Negative], 12 September 1832 [Affirmative], 02 April 1834 [Negative], vols. 2, S-7, S-9, Philanthropic Society Records.

policy and removal, or “benevolent colonization.”⁶² In debating these issues, students explored central concerns in the early republic about national belonging, the expansion of American civilization, and the civic duties of “intellectual manhood.”

Like many educated white Americans, North Carolina students believed that Indians lived in a state of nature and, as a result, were a “dying race.” Yet, students believed that Indians were not innately inferior; rather they possessed a “natural disposition” to civilization but, having been “long clouded and obscured by barbarism,” they did not know how to civilize themselves.⁶³ One student put it this way in 1825: “Did Rome - did England produce her specimens of great talents, whilst in a state even as much better [than] that of the American Indians? But sir they [Indians] do possess talents, which were the[y] cultivated would shine as bright as those of the proud Americans.”⁶⁴ The duty fell to civic-minded and virtuous American citizens to educate and Christianize Indians. Civilizing Indians fit perfectly the world-view that students inherited from the Enlightenment and learned through the formal curriculum: humans

⁶² On changing perceptions of Indians from culturally to racially different from whites, see Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1978). See Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Bernard W. Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (Chapel Hill, Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1973). Thomas Jefferson flirted with the idea of establishing a colony of Indians in the Louisiana territory in 1803 and again in the Arkansas territory in 1808. For early attitudes about colonization, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 199. On race, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). See also Nicholas Guyatt, “‘The Outskirts of Our Happiness’: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 987.

⁶³ Dialectic Society Minutes, 03 February 1819, vol. 6, Dialectic Society Records; Alexander M. Rogers, “Was it just & equitable that the Europeans should take possession of those lands in America formerly held by the aborigines?” 09 August 1804, *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Henry Elliott, “Debate,” 09 June 1825, dialectic Society Records

were infinitely perfectible given the right environment. Students debated, for instance, whether or not civilization or savagery produced more social happiness twenty-two times combined. Only twice did the Dis—and once did the Phis—resolve that a “natural” state of society produced more happiness than “civil” state.⁶⁵ These esoteric debates had practical application in Indian policy, and civilization fit perfectly with students’ understanding of civic virtue: learning how to act for the good of others helped the republic. For these students, then, American Indians provided current ways to talk about philosophical ideas of savagery and civilization and, at the same time, cultivate a sense of civic virtue.

Between 1800 and 1825, students debated whether or not the federal government should attend to civilizing American Indians. Students in each society voted, in every instance, in favor of establishing religious missions for civilizing Indians and for a federal civilization policy. In August 1818, members of the Dialectic Society debated—and supported—Congress’ recent Civilization Bill, which, in their words, allowed the federal government to take “measures to civilize the Indians within their Territories.” This bill provided subsidies to churches to establish missions in Indian country. And, in 1823, the society agreed that missionaries should be “encouraged in Christianizing the Indians.” When the question of whether or not civilization policy should be continued emerged nationally in the early 1820s, both Dialectic and Philanthropic societies voted for its

⁶⁵ Dialectic Society Minutes, 17 May 1798, 07 August 1800, 15 August 1801, 26 January 1804, 04 October 1804, 13 March 1806, 08 May 1807, 11 February 1813, 13 April 1815, 23 August 1816, 30 June 1817, 21 August 1822, 12 March 1829, 08 October 1834, vols. 2-8, Dialectic Society Records. Philanthropic Society Minutes, 22 September 1801, 10 August 1802, 16 August 1808, 14 January 1812, 18 October 1814, 14 March 1815, 18 October 1820, 24 April 1824, vols. 3-4, 5, S-7, S-8, Philanthropic Society Records.

continuation, arguing that civilization was “practicable” and that Congress should not repeal the annual grant for civilization.⁶⁶

In the 1820s, the Dialectic Society and Philanthropic Society each took interest in the idea of a federal removal policy, but tended to vote against it. Students used prevailing arguments for and against removal policy in their debates. On June 8, 1825, for example, students in the Dialectic Society debated the question, “Should the U.S. remove the Indians now within her territory beyond the Mississippi and would it be of advantage to them?”⁶⁷ In the end, the Dialectic Society voted that the United States should not remove the Indians beyond the Mississippi. Yet the resolution is not as significant as the shared assumptions that each side offered.

Henry B. Elliot, a junior from Randolph County, North Carolina, opened the debate in support of the affirmative position, appealing to his classmates’ interest in civilization. The “[S]tate of the Indians...requires that we collect the scattered tribes of Indians now with[in] our territory, establish them in a permanent home, strip them of their barbarism – enlighten their clouded reason - & arrest the hand of death which is gradually thinning their numbers.” Removal promised to promote “justice to ourselves” and “justice to the Indians.” The affirmative side offered five reasons for removal. First, removal guaranteed that miscegenation would “be greatly checked by the removal of the Indians beyond the Mississippi.” Second, whites had a paternalistic duty to protect Indians. Elliot explained, “It is the duty of the United States to protect the Indians to act in the manner of guardians over them, to point out for them the way of life which would

⁶⁶ Philanthropic Society Minutes, 15 September 1818, 27 April 1822, 11 February 1824, 13 September 1826, 5 March 1828, vols. S-7, S-8, Philanthropic Society Records. Dialectic Society Minutes, 13 February 1822, 23 October 1823, vol. 6, Dialectic Society Records.

⁶⁷ Dialectic Society Minutes, 08 June 1825, vol. 6, Dialectic Society Records.

be most conducive to their general happiness, and to the endeavour to persuade them to follow that way.” Third, removal promised to promote more peaceful relations among whites and Indians. Otherwise, whites and Indians would continue to fight among themselves until Indians were completely extinct. Fourth, removal would excite “national pride and emulation” among Indians. Finally, Elliot argued that Indians “would be under less temptations [sic] to vice on the other side of the Mississippi than on this.”⁶⁸

According to the affirmative debaters, those who opposed Indian Removal debated in an “able” and “elegant manner,” and depicted “the miseries of the Indians in...glowing language.” First, they argued that Indians would not have the strength or power to “maintain continual peace with the neighboring nations,” if removed from white society. Second, Indians did not “wish to be removed,” and that whites “should let them remain in the situation they are at present.” Third, removal would “only delay their final destruction.” Western lands, they argued, would never be exclusively for Indians, for whites’ manifest destiny was to expand the republic westward. So those opposed to removal concluded that Indians’ survival would not be due to removal, but to continued contact with white society, which alone civilized and saved savage peoples. “They [Indians] are rapidly advancing towards a state of comparative refinement, but their removal will have a tendency to give them an increased relish for their former [barbaric] pursuits” and “cause them to forget the sweets of civilized of life; and prefer to pass their lives in their favourite forests, following the pleasures of hunting and the chase, rather than be compelled to obtain their subsistence by the cultivation of the soil,” opponents to

⁶⁸ Ibid.

removal argued. Civilization among whites, and not removal from them, promised the most social happiness for whites and natives.⁶⁹

Those who participated in this 1825 debate only differed over the questions of whether Indians should be civilized while mixed in society with whites or in their own territory. Each side based its arguments on three shared assumptions. First, Indians could not be happy unless they were civilized (and they could be civilized). Second, virtuous republican citizens had to mediate civilization building among Indians. Each citizen's responsibility was to promote the general welfare—"happiness," to use their language—of their fellow man, white or Indian. Finally, students based their historical and contemporary arguments on claims about American Indians' humanity—where they came from, what made them human, and that they could be civilized. Indians' cultural, rather than racial, otherness was a common thread holding together North Carolina students' debates about Indians. Students learned to combine the languages of civilization, civic virtue, and cultural difference to argue for and against public policy.

Conclusion

Literary society debates made speech education relevant because they developed young men into citizens and leaders. Questions that antebellum students debated provide insight into who students were and the types of men they wished to become. Whereas prior to 1820 students were more concerned with abstract moral and philosophical questions about republicanism and civil society, after 1820 students tended to favor questions

⁶⁹ Oliver Wolcott Treadwell, Speech, 08 June 1825, Series 2.1, Dialectic Society Records #40152, UA. Emphasis in original. Treadwell was actually assigned to support the affirmative position, that the United States *should* remove the Indians. There are no extant debate speeches from the negative side, but because Treadwell diligently quoted and paraphrased the negative position in his own rebuttal, it serves as a reliable summary of the main points argued in support of each position.

relating to practical ethics and practical politics. Students in this generation strove to cultivate masculine identities that were imbued with a spirit of usefulness and progress, as debates about penal and constitutional reform and internal improvements suggest. Yet in these conversations, students did not abandon eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinking. They believed that the duty of educated men was to promote the common good; doing so would produce the greatest possible happiness for themselves and for others. And they looked back into history for examples of how civilizations prospered and how leaders led because they believed those were the most important tasks facing leaders of a new American civilization.

Students' commitment to the progress of civilization stands in stark contrast to representations of southern higher education as uninterested in progress. Fredrick Rudolph writes, for instance, "Progress was not an idea in which the South believed; it held off all that the word meant for as long as it could."⁷⁰ Yet, students at North Carolina debated questions that consistently emphasized the duty of educated men to promote progress and greater democracy (albeit for free white persons) in their state and in their nation.

Debates about slavery and Indian removal shed light on all of these important themes that characterize debates overall. First, debates on each topic served to help students argue from ethical positions—especially those that they honed through moral philosophy classes and reading in the subject in general—and incorporate those ethics into rational argumentation that could be implemented in legal and political discourse. Second, in each type of debate, students demonstrated the importance of intellectual

⁷⁰ Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), 57.

leadership for the promotion of a morally just, good society. Society, as they viewed it, could be truly happy, just, and good were Indians and slaves removed from it entirely. Third, students honed arguments, common in nineteenth-century disputation, which relied on appeals to history and to human nature. Students used notions of the “condition” of both Indians and slaves, for example, in order to make their claims for their humanity and, thus, for how policy ought to be crafted. Finally, debates about Indians and slaves also helped students to crystallize their assumptions and attitudes about race and cultural difference and relate those ideas to concrete issues regarding ethics, policy, and politics. Students learned to articulate what the role was of white leadership toward humans whom they believed to be innately different and inferior, both culturally and biologically.

Debates about each topic certainly changed over time and held different meanings for students in each generation because the issues themselves were so dynamic. But the dynamism of social and political views over time did not change the fact that, in every generation, students used debates as a means to apply prevailing attitudes and assumptions to contemporary policy issues. What is most striking is that students tackled issues that have long been characterized as too contentious for public discourse in the South and adopted positions that were often not tolerated—anti-slavery and anti-removal positions. The most salient example was that students could criticize slavery in their literary society chambers, but professors such as Benjamin Hedrick were chased out of town for such sentiments.

Literary society debates were important educational mechanisms for antebellum students because they facilitated discussion of the greatest questions facing educated

leadership in the antebellum period: the role of educated men to make and uphold laws and thereby promote happiness, civilization, and order in a republic. Their concerns were neither local nor narrow, as some historians have argued; nor were they imbued with a disdain for modernization and democratization. Instead, students imagined that educated men were obligated to address those very themes in which antebellum politics and society were steeped. Students' debates, therefore, comprised an essential pedagogy for making wise and moral men, which was the primary goal of an antebellum higher education. But for this speech education truly to be relevant, students also had to take books and reading seriously.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reading Makes the Man: Young Men and Reading

When nineteen-year-old Thomas Miles Garrett was a junior at the University of North Carolina between 1849 and 1850, he kept a diary in which he recorded responses to at least fifty-two literary works during the summer and academic year. Some were textbooks; others short pieces in current periodicals, historical tomes such as Hume's six-volume *History of England*, and novels. Garrett was a serious and good student—self-disciplined almost to a fault. He took pleasure in studying “infinitesimals” for Calculus class just as much as reading about Elizabeth I in his leisure. In fact, hardly a day went by when he did not make some reference to a book. So when Garrett had to write a composition for one of his classes, he decided to examine Francis Bacon's maxim, “Reading makes a full man, conversation a ready man, and writing an accurate man.” “Reading makes a full man, but what does reading imply?” Garrett wondered. “Does it merely mean that one should pronounce the words and run through the sentences of an author?” No. Reading was much more than that, he thought, and “one could not be termed a full man who read only with this view.” Instead, real reading involved “employing the attention to discern, reason to apply, and memory to retain what we read.” This reading, moreover, was *manly* reading. Garrett concluded, “there is not probably a single instance of the rise of any great man...or at least any well ballanced

[sic] mind” who did not read in this way.¹

Like many young American men in the early republic, Garrett had high hopes for greatness, fame, and distinction. He grew up in Bertie County, North Carolina—an agricultural county in the state’s northeastern Albemarle region. His family was not extraordinarily wealthy. His parents died when he was a boy, and when he matriculated at the University of North Carolina he was the legal ward of his brother and financially dependent on a maternal uncle. Garrett hoped to become a lawyer—which he ultimately did—and he worked hard in college to achieve high academic distinctions. He also believed, like so many other antebellum students, that wisdom and virtue—the two objects of an antebellum higher education—required attentive and manly reading habits.²

North Carolina students such as Thomas Miles Garrett viewed reading as an important cultural practice and a path to manhood.³ Library records, letters, diaries, and

¹ Thomas Miles Garrett, “Thomas Miles Garrett Diary, 1849-1850,” Typed Transcript, Southern Historical Collection, 134.

² John Bowen Hamilton, ed., “Diary of Thomas Miles Garrett at the University of North Carolina, 1849,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan., 1961): 63-65.

³ More than forty years ago, Bernard Bailyn urged scholars to examine books, libraries, and readers in the context of education, but historians have omitted this line of inquiry in nearly every recent work dealing with southern schooling. See his *Education in the Forming of an American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 85-86. Thanks to recent work on the history of readers, reading, and the book, Bailyn’s suggestion is now possible. My analytical and methodological approach critically examines readers’ responses to texts and, consequently, could be considered audience history just as much as reading history. This approach owes much to the rich historical literature on reading and books: Roger Chartier, “Texts, Printing, Readings,” Chapter to *The New Cultural History*, edited by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 154-175; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984); Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Stanley E. Fish, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, edited by Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), and *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982); David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); James L. Machor, “Fiction and Informed Reading in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47 (December 1992): 320-348; Christine Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

speeches reveal that students often discussed becoming men in terms of books and reading.⁴ Reading qualified students “to appear with ease and effect in polite and refined society,” where literary taste and erudition legitimated social and cultural power and reflected an individual’s reputation and honor.⁵ Students also believed that reading prepared them for public life. Because men were expected to exhibit virtuous leadership, make and interpret laws, protect republican institutions and liberties, and disseminate useful knowledge through public discourse, they had to take reading seriously. In all, students believed that books provided a wealth of cultural capital—discerning taste, refinement, and erudition—which legitimated elite men’s social authority.

The style of reading that Garrett praised, moreover, was tied closely to the formal curriculum’s goal of creating men with disciplined minds and sound morals. Students derived these ideas about reading largely from eighteenth-century texts, including (though not exclusively) James Beattie’s *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783); Lord Chesterfield’s famous letters to his sons; Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1793); and the writings of Joseph Addison and Samuel Johnson. These authors encouraged active and careful reading that developed reasoning skills, and careful

1991) and *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001); Barbara Ryan, ed., *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002); Barbara Sicherman, “Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism,” *American Quarterly* 45 (March 1993), 73-103; Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

⁴ On gentility, male respectability, and education among southern elites see Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 83-111 and Evelyn D. Causey, “The Character of a Gentleman: Deportment, Piety, and Morality in Southern Colleges and Universities, 1820-1860,” Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2006, 6, 52-53.

⁵ Thomas Jefferson Pitchford, Address, 11 November 1830, Dialectic Society Records. See also William Andrew Shaw, Inaugural Address, 04 April 1821, *ibid*.

selection of books, which typically included history, biography, philosophy, and the Bible—most of the genres included in students’ literary society catalogs—but usually not fiction, and especially not novels. Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1793) typifies the eighteenth-century perspective.⁶ Blair argued that readers faced the same moral choices between good and bad, order and disorder, civility and savagery that characterized civil society. Training young men to promote virtue, order, and civility included training them to exercise discernment in selecting reading material.⁷ Faculty taught these ideas in the formal curriculum—usually in the junior-year rhetoric and belles lettres course and the senior-year moral philosophy course—and they comprised the official standard for manly reading with which students would evaluate their own reading habits.

While the official position on young men’s reading favored serious, instructive reading, this was not the only notion of what manly reading could include. On campus, a vibrant extracurricular literary culture provided opportunities and resources for other forms of reading besides textbooks. Students’ engagement with and responses to literature in everyday college life—including news, letters, and private reading—reveals that desultory leisure reading played an important role in students’ overall education and character development. Students read constantly and they created social and private rituals for reading that often stretched the official eighteenth-century understanding of manly reading.

⁶ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 683.

⁷ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 688-691. Students at the University of North Carolina read Blair consistently throughout the antebellum period. For one example, see James Boylan to Kate Boylan, September 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Haywood Papers #1901, SHC: “I wish you to get Blair’s Lectures (in 2 volumes) out of the Library and send them up.”

The most important “institutions of reading” in the antebellum period were students’ literary societies, which maintained large libraries for their members. These libraries not only provided resources for reading but also facilitated conversations about books, reading, and manhood among youth.⁸ Between 1820 and 1861, literary society libraries grew rapidly, as new printing technologies provided more cheaply reproduced books, and as transportation innovations helped get print materials farther outside of urban centers and into places such as Chapel Hill, North Carolina in the rural South. The Dialectic and Philanthropic society libraries each amassed dozens of new works every year during this period, especially novels. The popularity of novels in the antebellum period generated an ongoing discourse among students about literary genres, especially about the merits of reading for amusement rather than instruction. This discourse about reading-as-amusement gave voice to deeper concerns about changing expectations for traditional elite manhood in the antebellum period’s new literary marketplace.⁹

In conversations about reading and genre, antebellum students attempted to mediate one another’s private reading habits and engaged in a process that historians of reading have termed “literary socialization.”¹⁰ They echoed the characteristics of manly

⁸ Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter, eds., *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

⁹ American intellectual history abounds with studies of the influence of these market developments on everyday readers, especially in the urban northeast among middle-class men and women. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*; Reynolds, David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995) and *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1988); Zboray, *A Fictive People*; Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas*; Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), esp. 151-165. Less is known about the influence of new forms of books and reading on young southern men.

¹⁰ Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 83-109. See also Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas.*, xv-xvii, and esp. xix, 87, 110. Basic literary socialization of boys and girls in the early nineteenth century occurred primarily in institutions such as schools, churches, and especially families. In late childhood and early youth, academies, colleges, library companies, and literary societies continued the process. For

reading that Thomas Miles Garrett emphasized in his diary—attention, reason, memory, and application—and argued that real, manly readers ought only to read textbooks or, if they must choose a “course of reading,” then they ought to choose serious works of history and biography. In other words, they instructed one another always to read for mental and moral improvement. Nevertheless, while students upheld this official position during the entire antebellum period, their actual reading practices suggest that multiple literary cultures overlapped in antebellum campus life, forcing students to confront the contradictions in theory and practice of reading and to think about reading as an important aspect of fashioning manly lives.

Everyday Readers: Antebellum Students’ Engagement with Literature

Reading permeated antebellum college students’ daily lives. For these students, three different modes of engagement with literature constituted what we call “reading”: study, desultory reading, and perusal.¹¹ In other words, students “studied” texts such as Homer’s *Iliad* or the Bible and then recited them in class, but they “read” letters and newspapers and “perused” novels, biographies, histories, among other literary genres. Students’ everyday reading activities also included a variety of literary rituals: sending and receiving literature through the mail, responding to literature in diaries, keeping commonplace books, and talking to one another about literature. Moreover, students viewed themselves as belonging to broad reading communities that extended beyond the immediate campus of the University of North Carolina. Their everyday reading habits

gender and literary socialization in clubs see August, *The Clerk’s Tale* and Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). On class and literary socialization, see Barbara Sicherman, “Reading and Middle-Class Identity in Victorian America: Cultural Consumption, Conspicuous and Otherwise,” 137-160.

¹¹ Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas*, 165.

were at once social and private, and, consequently were often fraught with conflicting expectations for what and how young men ought to read.

Social Engagement with Literature: Epistolary Reader Response

The exchange of literature and ideas about literature through the mail comprised one important part of students' reading culture. Students frequently wrote home for textbooks, but also for novels, newspapers, and popular magazines.¹² In 1841, Montezuma Jones thanked his father for having sent "several newspapers," and wrote that he would be "glad to get more of them."¹³ In 1858, William Little wrote a letter to his father, George, and asked, "Did you bring the book, Don Quixote, from Aunt Mary's? If you did not, and go down there again before I come home, I wish you would get it, as you said it was such a nice copy."¹⁴ Students also sent literature through the mail to friends, including copies of the *North Carolina University Magazine* and addresses delivered before the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies.¹⁵ Letters in which students

¹² See John Cagrill Jones to Thomas Williamson Jones, 28 May 1812, Folder 2, Thomas Williamson Jones Papers #3684-z, SHC; Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 20 September 1841, Box 6, Folder 82, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC; Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, "The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, the University of North Carolina, 1841-1842," *NCHR* XXX (1953): 96. Aside from the University Library, one possible, though uncommon way of obtaining books was purchasing them, though this was uncommon. In North Carolina, booksellers were scarce, and while students sometimes purchased books from local printers, usually in Raleigh, or from a local bookstore, the nearest of which was in Hillsboro, they did not do so often. Sometimes students bought books from book peddlers who came through or near Chapel Hill. Another possible source of reading materials was the family library.

¹³ Montezuma Jones to Calvin Jones, 31 December 1841, Box 2, Folder 18, Calvin Jones Papers #921, SHC.

¹⁴ William Little to George Little, 27 March 1858, Little-Mordecai Collection, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, N.C.

¹⁵ For example, see Hugh T. Brown to Carrie L. Gordon, 14 August 1857, Box 2, Folder 14, Gordon-Hackett Papers, #1040, SHC.

requested literature suggests both a desire among students for reading material and the importance of wider literary networks to literary culture on campus.

The transfer of literature through epistolary networks in turn generated discussions about literature. Reader responses to newspapers, for example, were often quite lively. This was especially true in the 1840s, when popular political participation was at an all-time high among North Carolina students. For William Bagley, sending newspapers through the mail facilitated conversation about the developing state elections. He wrote to his friend, for example, “Agreeably to your request, I sent you a paper containing an account of the elections. Although the ‘locofocos’ had gerrymandered our districts, still we have, I believe, four to their five in Congress, you can see that Rayners is our representative, and is elected by a large majority & that there is a great falling off in old Martin....”¹⁶ Reflections on events in the news, especially during exciting political times like the 1840s, was one way in which students engaged with literature and reading in everyday life, and also remained connected to life beyond campus.

Students also described their current reading and offered commentary on literature in their letters. The extent of their responses to literature varied considerably from vague references to general courses of reading to specific references to individual works.

Walter Lenoir reported to his father having not read much during the academic year, except “Tytler’s history (the new edition enlarged)” and “several volumes of light reading and poetry.”¹⁷ Jesse Goodwin Ross wrote to his mother, too, after he had “just placed aside a Biography which for hours has enchained my unremitting attention and peculiar

¹⁶ William Bagley to Moses G. Pierce, 09 September 1843, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC, 98-99.

¹⁷ Walter W. Lenoir and Thomas I. Lenoir 12 May 1840, Folder 79, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

interest.”¹⁸ Other responses were more specific. In 1845, for example, William Whitfield wrote to his friend Theodore—a North Carolina alumnus—explaining that he had read an unnamed play that Kingsbury had recommended. “I do not like it as well as ‘She Stoops to Conquer,’” he wrote, “but notwithstanding if it is well acted, it will appear remarkably well....” By including reader reports in letters, students created broad, epistolary networks for exchanging ideas about books and reading. These networks also served as valuable opportunities for students to assert their identities as readers to far-off family and friends.

In addition to responding to literature, incorporating literary excerpts into letters home was a common practice. James Boylan did this, for example, when he drew from Scott’s *Marmion* (1808) to address his sister: “And now to you dear Kate,” he wrote, “fair goodnight,/ ‘And rosy dreams and slumbers light’/ May heavenly visions crowd thy bed,/ And angels guard thy youthful head.”¹⁹ Such transcriptions as these served at least two purposes for antebellum writers. First, by copying verses and quotations into their letters home, students enhanced the emotional quality of letters and turned everyday correspondence into meaningful literary experiences. Second, students deployed literature to affect sentimentality and indicate sincerity—two important epistolary conventions that characterized the writings of refined and learned gentlemen. In all, deployment of literature allowed students to define themselves as serious and authoritative readers, who knew how to recognize and use literature to good effect.

¹⁸ Jesse Goodwyn Ross to mother, 01 September 1860, Box 1, Folder 5, UNC Personal Papers, Misc. #3129, SHC

¹⁹ James Boylan to Kate Boylan, September 1839, Box 1, Folder 5, John Haywood Papers #1901, SHC

Students also demonstrated their identities as readers in letters to younger siblings by encouraging them to read. William Bagley, for instance, took interest in his younger siblings' educations and wrote to them often about the books that he thought were especially valuable. In 1843, he wrote to his sister, "I hope you will have read the life of Washington entirely through by next winter, so you can read it to Bud," their brother.²⁰ Similarly, John Dudley Tatum encouraged his sister to read works that he read and admired. "I am now reading the life of S. G. Goodrich, or Peter Parley as he is otherwise called, it is written by himself and is quite interesting, probably more so to me because I have always been a great admirer of him," he wrote to his sister, Anna, in 1857. "I hope that you will not neglect to read his [Goodrich's] museum as it was a great source of pleasure as well as profit for me."²¹ Months later, he wrote again to his sister, who read the books that he had given her, and he recommended that she share the books with their brother, Herbert, and discuss them in his absence. He also explained to her that he was "reading the life of Washington by Irving and am very much pleased with it."²² Both William Bagley and John Tatum valued reading and books as well as the exchange of ideas about each. They encouraged their siblings to form attachments to literature and to one another through literature.

By writing about books and reading, students demonstrated that reading identities were manly identities. They forged important literary relationships, especially with younger siblings, with reading at the center. And they wrote to parents about their

²⁰ William Bagley to Clementina Bagley, 07 August 1843, Folder 1, Volume 1, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC, 96.

²¹ John Dudley Tatum to Anna Tatum, 14 February 1857, Folder 1, John Dudley Tatum Papers, #3279-z, SHC.

²² John Dudley Tatum to Anna Tatum, 18 September 1857, *ibid.*

reading habits, as well, to demonstrate their developing maturity. These literary exercises allowed students to articulate their adult roles in the larger web of family and peer relationships and responsibilities. As one historian has argued, letters were literary enterprises that helped authors locate identities “within a web of roles and obligations” related to home.²³ Writing home about reading allowed students to redefine their roles as men rather than boys. This social process of literary self-expression, however, rested on hours of private engagement with literature, where students selected, read, contemplated, and preserved literature.

Private Engagement with Literature: Individual Reading Methods and Habits

Students took great care to preserve memories of their reading experiences at college.²⁴ They often wrote about their private reading lives—when they read, how they read, and what they read—in private journals and diaries. Students’ private writing about reading reveals that young men read whenever they had the chance: in the morning before class, before the fire, at night before bed, in between meals, on vacation, and every time in between. Sometimes they spent an entire day reading one book, other times they read for a few hours before bed. They also read a wide range of materials—textbooks, obviously, but also periodicals, short stories, poems, histories, biographies, and novels. Antebellum students were less apt than students today to draw distinctions between reading for class and reading for leisure; their reactions to required reading were often mixed into their reflections on daily life and extracurricular reading.

²³ Augst, *Clerk’s Tale*, 74; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

²⁴ Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas*, 151-160.

Student responses to literature varied. Sometimes their responses followed or preceded daily reports about the weather, class, and health. In 1841, for example, Ruffin Tomlinson reported in his diary, “Rain last night, but a splendid morning this. Read until breakfast. After breakfast recited to Prof Mitchel [sic] upon chemistry, in the afternoon upon Bigalow’s technology.”²⁵ And in 1863, Henry London simply wrote in his diary, “cloudy & raining. Saw G Burgwin on a drunk at his room. Read and played cards in afternoon. Last day of my 17th year and tomorrow I will be 17.”²⁶ Other times, students offered more than reports about reading and described the content of literature, evaluated its aesthetics, and even responded emotionally or intellectually to specific themes. Examples of these higher levels of engagement with literature provides insight into the many ways in which reading transcended everyday life and figured prominently in young men’s literary socialization as readers and as men.

Edmund Covington’s diary exemplifies the range of reader responses that characterized antebellum students’ private engagement with literature. Born in Richmond County, North Carolina, Covington entered the freshman class at North Carolina in 1839 at the age of seventeen and began his diary on his nineteenth birthday, September 25, 1841. A sentimental young man, Covington was fond of music, romantic poetry, and American literature, and he helped to found the *North Carolina University Magazine* in 1844. His diary was a work of literature—“A Literary Miscellany,” in Covington’s words, “[d]evoted to Extracts, prose and poetry, English and Latin quotations, quaint and pointed remarks, original compositions, strange and whimsical

²⁵ John L. Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson, the University of North Carolina, 1841-1842,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* XXX (January 1953), 112.

²⁶ Henry Armand London, Jr., Diary, Folder 2, Vol. 1, Henry Armand London Papers #868-z, SHC.

circumstances.”²⁷ He also included a brief, one-page “Catalogue of Books read by ED Covington Commencing Jany 1st 1842” and ending that November. According to this catalog, Covington read at least twenty different titles, consisting of thirty-one volumes, including modern history, biography, plays, and essays, classical literature, contemporary fiction, and current periodical literature.²⁸ Preserving the titles of books was just as important to Covington as recording the weather or writing about his professors and classmates.

In addition to reporting the content of his reading life, Covington recorded general and specific reader reports to the literature he read. On October 11, 1842, for instance, Covington provided the following report: “Came to my room at night with a headache—read a few pages of Thompsons Seasons – fine poet – he is the poet of nature and of nature’s God.” He also crafted more critical responses. In an undated diary, for example, Covington provided the following evaluation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:

The play is certainly the poet’s masterpiece in tragedy—But there is so much contradiction such seeming inconsistency in the character of Hamlet (who is supposed to have been meant by the poet as the hero of the drama) that this play has been the subject of much dispute by writers and has not consequently been subjected to the severest critical censure.²⁹

²⁷ Edmund Covington, undated entry, Diary, Edmund De Berry Covington Diary #1506-z, SHC.

²⁸ Covington listed the following titles: “Irving’s Edition of M. M. Davidson’s Davidson’s P. Rem[ai]ns”; “Goldsmith’s Rome”; “Middleton’s Cicero”; “Shakespeare’s Plays [twice]”; “Sismondi’s European Literature”; “...Specimens of class. Po’try”; “Scott’s Poet. Works”; “Hume’s England Commenced”; “Herber – Pollock and Hemans”; “Milton – Gray – Beattie – Collins”; “Stewart’s Philosophy of the Mind”; “Life of Governor Morris”; “Montgomery’s poems”; “Hallams Middle ages”; “Last of the Mohicans”; “New York Review [thrice]”; “Thompson’s Seasons”; “Human Nature.” Covington, “Catalogue of Books read by ED Covington Commencing Jany 1st 1842,” Diary, 141.

²⁹ Ibid.

Following this evaluation, Covington provided a long excerpt from the play (Act 1, Scene II) in support of his point about Hamlet’s inconsistent character.³⁰ In many ways, Covington’s response to *Hamlet* contained many possible forms of student response to literature: he offered the title and author of the work he read, provided a brief synopsis, and evaluated the work on its intellectual and creative merits. Not all students, of course, went into such great detail in synopsising and critiquing literature, nor did many of them provide evidence of engagement with critical literary reviews. Nevertheless, Covington’s diary contains a range of ways in which many students engaged with literature in their private writings.

Catalogue of Books read by E.D. Covington Commencing Jan'y 1 st 1842		Vols
Classical	King's Edition of M. M. Davidson's Poems	1
	Goldsmith's Poems	3
	Middletown's Cicero	3
Modern	Shakespeare's plays	1
	Lectures on European Literature	1
	Shakespeare's plays	1
	Classical Specimens of Chief Poetry	7
	Literary Hours - By Drake	1
	Scott's Poet. works	3
	Homer's England & Commerce	1
	Nelson Pollock and Remans	1
	Milton's May - Boston Calling	1
	Seneca's Philosophy of the Mind	1
Classical & English	Life of Governor Morris	1
	Montgomery's poem	1
	Hallam's Middle Ages	1
	Last of the Mohicans	2
	New York Review	1
	Do	Do
	Do	Do
	Simpson's Lectures	Do
Lectures on Nature	Small vol	

Figure 11 - “Catalogue of Books read by E D Covington Commencing Jan'y 1st 1842.” Excerpt from the Edmund DeBerry Covington Diary #1506-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁰ Covington likely wrote his “Dissertation on Shakespeare’s Hamlet” in June 1841, when the play was performed in Chapel Hill. See William Sidney Mullins, 08 June 1841, William Sidney Mullins Diary #531-z, SHC.

In addition to explicit reader responses, many students engaged with literature by keeping commonplace books, or book of quotations or other short literary excerpts.³¹ Commonplacing was popular at the University of North Carolina in the 1840s, and it helped students to infuse literature into, and make literature out of, their daily lives. William Mullins “commenced... a Common Place Book, after the plan of the immortal Locke” and David Barnes kept one in miniature in several pages of his diary devoted to extracts of classical authors, including Pliny, Lucretius, and Horace.³² Commonplace writing allowed diarists to use literature to enhance the meaning of events in their own lives as well as to experience emotion through writing. According to two prominent historians of reading, transcription of “verse writing offered an emotional outlet that conventional journalizing often could not.”³³ Joseph Summerell, for example, included in his diary “a collection of choice sentimental, descriptive, eloquent and attractive pieces culled from the most approved authors of prose and poetry,” which he hoped would remind him of the emotional experience of his college days. He explained, “It is by looking over these extracts that I expect to derive much pleasure hereafter [sic], and aided by local associations I shall be delighted to recall...to my mind the recollections of days

³¹ Commonplace writing was a medieval practice that continued through the nineteenth century. See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

³² Mullins, Diary, 02 March 1841; David Alexander Barnes, “David Alexander Barnes Diary,” Folder 16, David Alexander Barnes Papers #3484, SHC. William Mullins’s inspiration was John Locke, *A new commonplace book...* 2nd ed. (London, 1799), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group, <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW117496008&source=gale&userGroupName=uncbrcr&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE> (accessed 01 February 2010). The library of the Philanthropic Society, to which Mullins had access, contained nine volumes of “Locke’s Works,” which may have contained this title. See *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Philanthropic Society at Chapel-Hill. Taken 6th May, 1822* (Raleigh: Printed by J. Gales & Son, 1822).

³³ Zboray and Zboray, *Everyday Ideas*, 52.

and hours that I spent here - most happy moments of my life.” Students extracted and transcribed quotations from what they believed to be the best literature, and, by selecting and transcribing literature, they exercised creativity, thought, introspection, and hard work, giving greater intellectual meaning to everyday literary experiences.³⁴

In all, students used reading for more than passing a leisure hour. Reading was a conspicuous feature of everyday student life, and it helped students to define and to articulate who they were and who they wished to become.³⁵ As everyday readers, antebellum students actively created rituals and spaces for reading. They relied on their literary society libraries, more than any other institution on campus, for reading materials as well as for spaces to talk about literature.

Institutions of Reading: The Dialectic and Philanthropic Society Libraries

The Dialectic and Philanthropic Society libraries, not the University Library, comprised the main sources for North Carolina students’ reading in the antebellum period because the University Library’s shelves were sparsely stocked due to poor funding. The library, housed in a small lecture room in South Building, consisted of about 1,900 volumes in the antebellum period, mostly Greek, Latin, and Mathematics textbooks. A separate library building was not erected until 1850, when Governor Benjamin Smith donated money to the University for a library. The new library—Smith Hall—was built in the style of the Greek revival and was eighty-four feet long, twenty feet high and had five windows on each side. Students found that the library was not always conducive to

³⁴ Joseph John Summerell, Diary, 25 January 1842, SHC.

³⁵ College men’s reading experiences were similar to those of female students described in Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak*, 165-66.

reading.³⁶ When Thomas Miles Garrett went to the library in 1849 and tried to read, he found that “some gentlemen had the room sounding and reechoing [to] the shrill note of their whistle. This is the kind of disturbance which I can in no wise bear. I could not request them to hush, for this they would deem impolite.”³⁷ Not all students were as lucky as Garrett even to find the library open. Professor Hubbard, who had been in charge of the building, more or less through 1868, recalled that “the College Library was never open to the students; on two occasions only, as I remember, consulted by persons from abroad; and almost never...used by members of the Faculty.”³⁸

In contrast to the University Library, the Dialectic and Philanthropic Society libraries were entirely student-driven and -sustained and contained a variety of easily accessible works. Each society built up its library either by purchasing new titles or accepting donations from professors, parents of enrolled students, or alumni.³⁹ The Philanthropic Society’s collection, for example, grew from nineteen titles, consisting of forty-one volumes, in 1797 to 503 titles, consisting of about 1500 volumes, in 1822. That number had doubled by the mid-1830s when each society library held 3,000 volumes; the library collections continued to grow to 5,000 books in each society by 1854 and 8,000

³⁶ Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina from Its Beginning to the Death of President Swain, 1789-1868* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1907), 404-411.

³⁷ Garrett, 08 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 120. According to Michael O’Brien, this was a common feature at most college libraries in the South, perhaps due to faculty mistrust of students and fear of their mistreatment of books. See *Conjectures of Order*, 523.

³⁸ Fordyce M. Hubbard quoted in Battle, *History*, 407.

³⁹ Library records were kept as early as June 1795 for the Dialectic Society and August 1795 for the Philanthropic Society. Evangeline Burbank Murphy, “The Growth of the Library of the Philanthropic Society at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1797-1822,” M.S.L.S., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979, 3. Parrish and Murphy citations. See also, Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815-1876* (New York: Pageant Press International Corp., 1971), 115.

books by 1858.⁴⁰ By the time of the Civil War, the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies' libraries ranked among the largest libraries in North Carolina.⁴¹ These libraries held as many volumes—if not more—than similar college societies in the South and North, except Yale.⁴²

These books were easily accessible to students, as each society library allowed their books to circulate. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, students used their library books for readings and speeches that they delivered in weekly literary society meetings. By the time each society had enough books to warrant a printed catalog in the early 1820s, students withdrew books with greater frequency and used them for private reading more often than for literary society duties. One analysis of the Philanthropic Society Catalog of 1822, for instance, suggests a correlation between greater accession of books, more acute organization, standardized cataloging, regular borrowing, and hence, private reading.⁴³ This and subsequent catalogs show that

⁴⁰ Albert Coates and Gladys Hall Coates, *The Story of Student Government in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Professor Emeritus Fund, 1985), 45-48.

⁴¹ Battle, *History*, 568.

⁴² Harding, *College Literary Societies*, 107, 205. According to Harding's calculations, Yale's society libraries held 15,000 volumes, Dartmouth's held 8,500, Union's held 8,450, and Dickinson's held 7,300 in 1839. North Carolina's holdings approached—but did not quite reach—these numbers in 1839 at 7,000 volumes. Nevertheless, North Carolina's holdings in 1839 far exceeded those elsewhere in the South: Georgia held 3,000, for example, and Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia reported 2,200 holdings in 1834. In 1840, the society libraries at Alabama had 1,000 volumes and those at South Carolina had 1,000 volumes; Virginia had 350. By 1860, the holdings in the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies at UNC doubled to nearly 14,000 volumes. See also, Murphy, "The Growth of the Library of the Philanthropic Society at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1797-1822," 46. This growth was a result of the print and transportation "revolutions" of the 1820s in which an unprecedented quantity of print material entered into the South.

⁴³ Murphy, "The Growth of the Library of the Philanthropic Society at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1797-1822," 19. Between 1795 and 1822, the literary societies maintained manuscript inventories of their books. The Philanthropic Society was first to translate its inventory of books into a printed catalog. The society made two hundred copies to distribute among members and within home communities. Before that time, manuscript inventories of books kept in the Philanthropic Society's library were kept frequently between 1801 and 1818. As the library grew, the librarian only listed lost or damaged books. A motion was first made for a catalogue of books in 1810, though it was rejected. A motion for "a neat catalogue" was made in 1819 and, again, in 1820, when it was passed. See

students' book collecting and borrowing mirrored trends in book buying in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century United States (as did their habits).⁴⁴

Students filled their bookcases with books in genres that they associated with refinement, gentility, and manhood. For instance, a student contributor to the *North Carolina University Magazine*, explained, “[A]s a young man’s character may be known from his association, just so we may estimate a man’s taste from the books which comprise his library. These are his intimate friends, his daily companions....”⁴⁵ Students collected works by the ancients as well as the moderns; American authors as well as European authors. The catalogs listed titles in the following subject classifications: Biography, Geography, History, Novels, Plays, Poetry, Politics and Political Economy, Travels and Voyages, and Theology. The section entitled “Miscellanies,” included epistles, sermons, and science books, and was quite large.⁴⁶ Library catalogs show students’ collective effort to develop manly identities that were cosmopolitan in scope, rooted in the tradition of liberal arts, and approved by a larger literary community.

The society libraries were centerpieces of student culture in the antebellum period.⁴⁷ For instance, just one month before Walter Lenoir, a serious-minded and dutiful

Philanthropic Society Minutes, vol. S-7, Philanthropic Society Records and *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to the Philanthropic Society at Chapel-Hill. Taken 6th May, 1822* (Raleigh: J. Gales & Son, 1822).

⁴⁴ Harding, *College Literary Societies*. Harding does not show incredible regional differences in society libraries. Cf. other elite southerners who were not in college in Clyde Cantrell, “The Reading Habits of Ante-Bellum Southerners,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1960, ix-xii, 1-23.

⁴⁵ *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1852): 95.

⁴⁶ Students arranged books on their shelves according to these subjects and then alphabetically by short title within that subject, though, as Ronald J. Zboray found in bookstores in New England, there was a great deal of “permeability between boundaries of different genres.” Zboray, *A Fictive People*, xxi, 136-37.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Thomas L. Spragins to Melchizedek Spragins, 22 September 1808, Box 1, Folder 5, UNC Personal Papers, Misc. #3129, SHC.

son of a prominent Whig family from western North Carolina, was graduated from the University of North Carolina, he wrote a letter to his sister, Sarah, he described his disappointment in having to leave behind the Dialectic Society library. “You said rightly that I would miss the Library,” he conceded to his sister. “Oh! what an inestimable friend is a good library. It fits itself with the nicest discrimination to every mood of our minds.... I would shed bitter [tears] if I were cut off forever from the society of such a friend. But do not be alarmed because the Dialectic library is not in the Valley.” Though the Lenoirs were a well-off family and possessed a family library that could “afford a considerable [sic] amount of literature,” Walter could hardly imagine any library that provided so many opportunities for reading as the Dialectic Society’s library at the University of North Carolina.⁴⁸

Students borrowed from these libraries frequently and they also actively encouraged one another to take advantage of the rich store of books available in them. Between August 19, 1840 and August 31, 1841, for example, Walter Lenoir, surprisingly, only charged four books from the Dialectic Society library: “Curiosities of Literature” (volumes one through three); “Peter the Great” (volume one); “Hist U.S.”; and “Hist Indian Wars.” On the top of the page above Walter’s name, the librarian wrote, “Take more Walter!” In contrast, William Cowan, whose page of records precedes Walter’s, charged fifty-five titles between August 15, 1840 and March 16, 1841. Cowan borrowed works ranging from John Todd’s “Student’s Manual” to “Radcliff’s Novels” to “Mrs. Edgworth’s Works.” John B. Smith, whose page in the librarian’s book follows Walter’s, charged nineteen volumes, ranging from “Shakespeare” to “Life of Van Buren”

⁴⁸ Walter W. Lenoir to Sarah J. Lenoir, 04 April 1843, Box 7, Folder 87, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC. On Walter Lenoir’s education, see William L. Barney, *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir’s Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32-36.

to “Napoleon.” In all, borrowing activity varied, but remained constant and encouraged (as Walter Lenoir’s records suggest) throughout the University’s antebellum history.⁴⁹

Literary society libraries were more than collections of books; they were also important social spaces. For most of the first half of the nineteenth century the society libraries were kept in their meeting chambers. Prior to 1814, the societies shared a meeting space, including library space, in Person Hall, which was the first chapel on campus. After 1814, however, each society acquired its own meeting room on the third floor of South Building. These meeting rooms housed the library collections as well. In 1848, when two buildings on campus—East and West—were expanded to allow for a growing student body, the Dialectic and Philanthropic halls came to occupy separate spaces. The “Dis” met on the second floor of Old West and the “Phis” met on the second floor of Old East. Their libraries were on the third floor of each building.⁵⁰ Students retired to these spaces after weekly meetings to peruse the shelves for books, read at a table or on a sofa, or even chat with classmates. On weekends, society libraries were open to the public, and townspeople milled around looking at books of all sizes, many of which were covered in cloth for preservation. Occasionally, students brought friends into the libraries as well as girls whom they were courting.⁵¹ Students wanted others to view them as members of a society that could boast a refined and erudite parlor culture. Their membership in such a society marked them as mature gentlemen. These public, social

⁴⁹ Circulation Records, 1832-1840, vol. S-2, Dialectic Society Records.

⁵⁰ Battle, *History*, 565. See also Lindemann, “The Debating Societies,” *True and Candid Compositions, Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp05-02/chp05-02.html> (access 09 August 2008).

⁵¹ Henry Armand London, 30 January 1863, Jr., Diary, Folder 2, Vol. 1, Henry Armand London Papers #868-z, SHC; Battle, *History*, 574; Edwin W. Fuller, *Sea-Gift: A Novel* (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, Publishers, 1873), 189-91.

rituals centering on students' libraries demonstrated students' commitment to books, reading, erudition, and refinement.⁵²

Members of each society constantly competed for the best library. Students believed that collecting books into libraries excited a "healthy emulation" to be the best students.⁵³ In 1849, for example, Thomas Miles Garret, a member of the Philanthropic Society, examined the Di Society's library in order to see whether it held books that were unavailable to him elsewhere. After spending "a few hours" in the rival library, Garrett concluded, "I found none scarcely except what we have in our library. I think the selection is not superior to that of the Philanthropic, the arrangement not half as good."⁵⁴ Members' pride in their societies' books and libraries was an important aspect of individuals' membership in literary societies.

Literary societies functioned not only as repositories for books and social spaces, but also as educational spaces, where students learned how to handle, select, and read books. Because students occasionally lost books (or stole them), ripped pages from them, and wrote in them, each society appointed librarians to enforce rules for the collection, preservation, and borrowing of books and to levy fines for late, missing, or damaged volumes. Librarians reported to the society presidents, who frequently addressed the society on the state of the library. In 1848, for instance, Thomas Jefferson Robinson commented on the state of the Dialectic Society's "well-read and well-stored" library:

⁵² This cultural fluency was expected of gentlemen in an age in which refinement of manners and tastes mattered. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 85-86, 287-289.

⁵³ Lindemann, "The Debating Societies," *True and Candid Compositions, Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/chapter/chp05-02/chp05-02.html> (accessed 09 August 2008). See also, Dialectic Society Minutes, vol. 1, Dialectic Society Records, [93].

⁵⁴ Garrett, 22 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 140.

“These rich productions of genius...with which our shelves are loaded claim your protection. They have suffered much from abuse and may still suffer more. It is confidently expected, that the recently adopted system of Laws will go far towards lessening this disgraceful and general destruction of books, and place our library once more in its true position.”⁵⁵ Students explained that maltreatment of books was ungentlemanly. One student explained that any man “professing to be a gentleman,” who tore pages from a book, committed a “great crime.” He continued, “Let the next man that puts his fingers upon the leaf of a library book to tear it out remember that he is about to destroy that which he is not, & perhaps never will be able to restore,” he warned, “and more, that he is peradventure robbing some dead author of the only monument that was left by him to perpetuate his memory among men.”⁵⁶ If young men were to attain intellectual manhood, then they had to learn to respect books.

Libraries not only provided opportunities for peer instruction in how to treat books, but they also provided opportunities for learning about how gentlemen were supposed to select and read books. When they talked about reading in their literary societies, students usually discouraged one another from excessive leisure reading and, instead, encouraged one another only to read respectable works that fostered mental and moral improvement and, by those virtues, had gained the assent of the literary world. Whatever a student read outside of classroom and literary society duties, first had to be useful, or instructive, and entertaining second.⁵⁷ Students also recommended careful reading. In 1825, for example, Erasmus North explained to his classmates, “A very

⁵⁵ Thomas Jefferson Robinson, Address, 21 July 1848, Dialectic Society Records.

⁵⁶ Robert Graham Barrett, Inaugural Address, 29 March 1856, Dialectic Society Records.

⁵⁷ Zboray, *A Fictive People*, 108-109. Iveson L. Brookes, Inaugural Address, September 1818, Dialectic Society Records.

common rule with respect to the manner in which we ought to read is always to proceed with the greatest care and attention, examining everything as we go & never suffering ourselves to be in a hurry.... A most important rule is read with an active mind.”

Moreover, a good reader “will always in the course of reading be drawing reflections; applying them to himself where they can be so applied & be comparing one author with another.”⁵⁸

Evidence from student diaries suggests that many students attempted to apply this advice about reading methods to their daily reading habits, too. For example, when David Alexander Barnes began his journal in February 1840, he transcribed a short paragraph written by Scottish philosopher James Beattie (1735-1803) about the importance of reading with attention: “The great art of memory is attention. Without this, one reads, and hears, to no purpose....To read in haste, without reflect on what we read, may amuse a vacant hour, but will never improve the understanding.”⁵⁹ Barnes was not alone. His classmate, William Mullins also wrote in his journal, “Reading carefully...trains the mind to habits of thinking in the same perceptive manner, and leads to the detection of error in writers, who have not that armor, or defence [sic] for their deviations from truth.” Mullins, therefore, proposed to read “with all the attention that I can possible [sic] give” and to select works that promised to “teach one how to think, not

⁵⁸ Erasmus Darwin North, 03 August 1825, Address, *ibid.* Emphasis in original. See also William Hayes Owen, Inaugural Address, 17 April 1833, *ibid.* Some students took a harder line against extracurricular reading. See William Hill, Address, 25 October 1843, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Beattie quoted in David Alexander Barnes, “David Alexander Barnes Diary,” Folder 16, David Alexander Barnes Papers #3484, Southern Historical Collection. Barnes’s citation is “Beattie. Lib. 1st p. 23.” Barnes was likely reading from the first volume of the ten-volume *Works of James Beattie* (Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809), held in the North Carolina Collection’s Old Library, which is comprised only of books that belonged to the Dialectic and Philanthropic society libraries. The first volume of the series contains Beattie’s *Dissertations, Moral and Critical*. On the importance of Beattie and other Scottish moral philosophers to intellectual life in the Old South, see O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 999, 1001, 1007, 1017, 1029.

what to think.”⁶⁰ Conventional prescriptions for young men’s reading, therefore, appealed to many students, who believed that order, reason, and moderation were manly values and that reading helped young men to acquire them.

In sum, literary society libraries were valuable institutions of reading—places in which students could gather respectable books, model their manly love of erudition, and reinforce formal expectations for proper reading. In their literary societies, students established temples to the Enlightenment—they surrounded themselves with the accoutrements of eighteenth-century learned society and stood before audiences of their peers and prescribed advice about reading that was characteristic of Lord Chesterfield, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson. They taught one another that reading was a matter of disciplining the mind, improving the heart, and ordering civil society. And many of them read exactly what and how they were instructed to read. Yet literary society libraries also presented students with a multitude of books in a variety of literary genres. Students had absolute autonomy in their private lives to select books to read and to read them for amusement rather than mental and moral improvement, and they often did.

Cultures of Reading: Ideals, Conflict, and Mediated Leisure

The official culture of reading, rooted in eighteenth-century expectations for gentleman, was not the only culture on campus. Students looked to reading and literature as something more than sources for intellectual and moral improvement—they were also sources for amusement and inner, emotional development. And their borrowing habits and reader responses prove it. Philanthropic Society borrowing records between 1828

⁶⁰ Mullins, 23 January 1841, Diary. Also see Garrett, Diary, Typed Transcript, 240.

and 1832, when the records are most complete, show that the most borrowed genres (in order of popularity) were: literature (poems, essays, drama), history, fiction, and biographies.⁶¹ Students' social and private engagement with each of these genres shows how students did (and did not) draw on contemporary ideas about reading to shape their reading habits as well as their adult lives. History, biography, and fiction each provided students with opportunities to develop manly identities, even if the subject matter or method of reading did not conform to the ideals set by elders and conveyed through prescriptive literature.

History & Biography: Manly Reading

If students were to read anything other than their textbooks, then they were supposed to read history and biography, which furnished the mind with useful information and provided models of moral leadership that complemented the goals of antebellum liberal arts education. Students encouraged one another to read history and biography more than any other genre. One student wrote, for example, "If there is any thing, that improves a man, especially when he is training himself for usefulness in after life, it is reading history and biography."⁶² Students especially believed in biography's "cultural power" to shape their lives around republican ideals of citizenship and leadership.⁶³ The student editors of the *North Carolina University Magazine* wrote, for instance, "The lives of great men of every age and of every country must furnish

⁶¹ Laura Frances Parrish, "Books Read by Members of the Philanthropic Society and Their Correlation with Debate Topics, 1828-1832," M.S.L.S., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979.

⁶² William White Harris, Untitled Junior Oration, Chapel Hill, undated, Senior and Junior Orations, NCC, 3. See also William Andrew Shaw, Inaugural Address, 04 April 1821, Dialectic Society Records; Andrew Polk to Sarah Polk, 18 March 1841, box 2, folder 28, Polk and Yeatman Papers #606, SHC.

⁶³ Scott Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 2, 14, 19, 31-32.

instruction and entertainment to the attentive reader.”⁶⁴ For example, biography was supposed to inspire young men “to perform services, and to achieve deeds as high and lofty” as history’s great men. In all, young men believed that biography had “a beneficial influence upon those who[se] characters are yet unformed, who look to the future with high expectations and brilliant hopes.”⁶⁵

Students’ literary practices reflected these ideals. They stocked their shelves with history and biography, which comprised thirty percent of literary society libraries’ holdings by 1830. Borrowing records also demonstrate that students—like countless other educated Americans—saw biography as “the rage of the day.”⁶⁶ For example, in 1832, William H. Owen, borrowed “Scotts Life of Napoleon”; “Franklin’s life by himself”; “Franklin by Weems”; “History of France”; “Goldsmith’s History [of

⁶⁴ “Biographical Notices,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (October, 1844): 354. See Shaw, Inaugural Address, 04 April 1821, Dialectic Society Records. Students joined countless literary critics in praise of biography. Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 2, 19, 31-32.

⁶⁵ Alexander Franklin Brevard, Inaugural Address, 1846, Dialectic Society Records. See also Jesse Hargrave, Composition, 23 August 1856, Dialectic Society Records.

⁶⁶ Yale Literary Magazine, June 1845, quoted in Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 1. On biography in the South, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 653-71. A sample from the 1840s reveals a wide range of biographical interests in the *Southern Quarterly Review*, which students at North Carolina held in their literary society libraries: “Lives of the Queens of England,” *SQR*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1842): 330-376; “Lives of Literary and Scientific Men of Italy,” *ibid.*, 527-553; “Life of John C. Calhoun,” *SQR*, vol. 3, no. 6 (Apr. 1843): 496-531; “Sketch of the Hon. Hugh S. Legare,” *SQR*, vol. 4, no. 8 (Oct. 1843): 347-362; “Life and Character of M. de Malesherbes, The First Chancellor of Louis XVI. London: 1843,” *SQR*, vol. 5, no. 10 (Apr. 1844); “Life and Writings of Rabelais,” *SQR*, vol. 7, no. 13; “Life, Character and Speeches of the Late Robert Y. Hayne,” *SQR*, vol. 8, no. 16: 596-612 [?]; “Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, Reviewed,” *SQR*, vol. 10, no. 20 (Oct. 1846): 306-328; “The Life and Correspondence of John Foster, by John Sheppard, reviewed,” *SQR*, vol. 11, no. 22 (Apr. 1847): 321-345; “The Auto-Biography of Goethe,” *ibid.*, 441-467. Similar reviews and biographical sketches can be found in issues of both the *Southern Literary Messenger* and *DeBow’s Review*. For one example, see “Dabney Carr,” *SLM*, vol. IV, no. II (Feb. 1838): 9. Occasionally, editors included criticism of the genre more specifically. See, “Biography,” *SLM*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Oct. 1856): 282-288. Students engaged these ideas in literary societies and in the literary magazine. For example, see “Biographical Notices,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (October, 1844): 354-60.

England]”; and “[John] Marshalls life [of] Wash[ington].”⁶⁷ His classmates also borrowed biographies of Peter the Great, Mary Queen of Scots, Lafayette, and Wellington. These works were national and transatlantic in scope, and they reflect a coherent worldview that a man had to be well read in European history as well as American history.⁶⁸

In reading and talking about biographies students manufactured an informal cultural education for themselves. They discussed “character,” “virtue,” and “genius,” and reflected on those characteristics in the lives of “great men.” Likewise, they contemplated the ways in which emulating those men could help them aspire to greatness and distinction. If, as Stephen Berry has argued, ambition was an important masculine value, then biography was an important tool for cultivating that ambition. Students adapted lessons about heroes and patriots to their own journey of self-formation.⁶⁹ Moreover, this journey was oriented toward public life, as students publicly and privately echoed prevailing attitudes about biography espoused by American writers and readers. For example, one biographer wrote in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, “How often have I wished to possess the talent for delineating the characters of eminent men which might enable me to send down to posterity the portraits of the great and good with whom it has been my happy lot to be associated in the journey of life!”⁷⁰ The “great and good” men of history provided young Americans with models of citizenship, heroism, and greatness,

⁶⁷ Entry for William H. Owen, 1832, Vol. S-2, Circulation Records, Series 7.2, Dialectic Society Records, UA.

⁶⁸ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 593.

⁶⁹ Stephen W. Berry, II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

⁷⁰ “Dabney Carr,” *SLM*, vol. IV, no. II (Feb. 1838): 9.

which they could emulate and use to shape their developing identities as the republic's best men.⁷¹

William Sidney Mullins's diary reveals how students engaged with biography and used it as a tool for self-formation, especially for cultivating ambition. In addition to novels, histories, plays, and textbooks, Mullins read several biographical works and contemplated them in his diary. In 1841, after he read James Mackintosh's *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, he praised the biography and wrote, "I have read this recently and seldom have I perused a biography with more pleasure." More's life inspired him to greatness:

If in reviewing the deeds of such nobleness, the spirit glows not with animation, cold and ignoble must it be. I have several times asked myself if the author has not been too enthusiastic in the praise of his subject: if his enthusiasm has not led him to colour too brightly his virtues and entirely neglect his failings. But I have persuaded myself to answer no. It is so pleasant to find all the virtues there blended in one noble picture, that I would fain believe such was the case and continue to emulate the negative dignity of the character which combined them....

In contemplating "the fate of this great and good man," Mullins enumerated many attributes of More's character that inspired him: His "unceasing industry," honor, honesty, and "love of virtue." These "distinguishing characteristics," Mullins concluded, "[p]oints the mind to excellence and glory in any trial... May he [More] be my polar star!"⁷²

Thomas More was not the only sixteenth-century English figure whose character captured William Mullins's attention. Cardinal Wolsey also inspired Mullins to cultivate virtuous and noble manhood. Responding to a biography of Wolsey in Lardner's

⁷¹ Ransom Hinton, Composition, 07 May 1805, Dialectic Society Records. See also, Logan, Composition, 30 August 1810, *ibid.*

⁷² Mullins, Diary, 26 January 1841.

Encyclopedia, Mullins declared, “I will...aim high; my goal shall be noble, and if I fail to reach it, I shall not be utterly without consolation. As I look back on past years, I shall see what I strove to be and shall stand at least a monument of good intentions....”⁷³ In each case, Mullins focused on the lives of two prominent men in King Henry VIII’s court who did not compromise their values or dignity when the King requested. Mullins located his ambition in perseverance, virtue, honor, and honesty.

Just as students read biography for individual examples of private and public virtue, they read histories for those themes writ large across time and space. Thomas Miles Garrett’s interactions with historical works exemplify the ideal of nineteenth-century engagement with history. In July 1849, Garrett made “a list...of what I meant to read this session, if my strength did not fail me.” He included Hume and Macaulay’s histories of England, “Thier’s [sic] French Revolution,” “Gibbon’s Rome,” and “Mitford[’s] Greece” because he “shame[d] himself for being so ignorant of History.”⁷⁴ He found historical reading both useful and entertaining—a healthy alternative to idleness and dissipation. “I see a considerable stir about college all day,” he remarked in August 1849, “a great deal of sitting upon the door steps of buildings chit chatting about nothing.” Garrett preferred history to such idleness. “I close my eyes and my door against all such things,” he wrote, “I found more enjoyment even in reading the early part of English history, I dare say than I could by attending the polls, of the election, or any other than the company of Hume.” What is significant about Garrett’s reaction is that he defined himself in opposition to a common stereotype of rugged and roistering southern manhood. The books he read helped him to cultivate and express an alternative,

⁷³ Mullins, 11 February 1841, Diary.

⁷⁴ Garrett, 24 July 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 69-70.

restrained and reflective style of manhood than the one he observed among many of his idle classmates.

Garrett decided to read Hume's *The History of England* on a rainy, "damp and sultry" July afternoon, when the weather gave no promise of abating. That morning, he "repaired to the [Philanthropic Society] library having become wearied with all the books which I had in my room, to search for something to interest me." Though at first he felt that he might "give way to my feelings...to get to reading 'trash,'" he decided to find a book that he believed "useful as well as entertaining." He sat down for some time with Hume's history. He perused "a few pages of the reign of Elizabeth and found the book in every way equal to my expectation and concluded that it should not receive a hasty consideration." Hume would be his "principle author" that year, he decided and, "besides other miscellaneous writings," he planned to read eight volumes of his history of England, recording his "remarks" on each historical epoch in his journal. And that is what he did. Throughout the year, Garrett wrote extensively about English kings. He first summarized Hume's arguments, then provided vivid examples in the form of quotations, and finally offered his evaluation of the periods under study, which often concerned the vices and virtues of leaders.

Garrett approached Hume—and other historians he read—from a biographical perspective. "I have thought that it would be a most profitable exercise to write something upon the character of each reign [sic] of English History as I read them," he explained. "The character of each reign [sic] may be supposed to have a verry [sic] intimate resemblance to the character of the king."⁷⁵ He noted manly qualities of

⁷⁵Garrett, 04 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 114.

leadership (even in England's female monarchs), including action, virtue, genius, and the ability of individuals to preserve liberty and promote civilization. For example, Garrett praised Henry VIII because "[h]e directed the energies of his people to the attainment of real and solid advantages," including "the elevation of the character and condition of the lower class of subjects." He frequently identified Henry's strong leadership with the "advancement in the civilization of the people," and the improvement of "the manners and morals of the people." Likewise, he praised the king's "ambition and ability" to protect England from external threats to English liberty and Mary Tudor's "bigotry," which "impel[led] her as far beyond the bonds of reason and justice as to endeavor to affect what she might term a reformation."⁷⁶ Hume's *History of England*, therefore, played an important role in helping Thomas Miles Garrett articulate his emerging ideas about government and leadership. From his reader responses concerning nearly every English monarch underscore the corruptibility of power, the fragility of public morals, the need to regulate public morality and protect people from "aristocratic power," luxury, and slavery. While Garrett learned much history from reading authors such as Hume, he derived chiefly moral lessons that spoke to larger issues of leadership and government that interested him.

Garrett sometimes found it rather difficult to sustain the intellectual energy that Hume's *History of England* required. Having finished the first five volumes of the work "without intercession," Garret complained, "I began to feel weary of my labor[.] I might reasonably conclude that I shall not find much to interest me when I retreat from Elizabeth. Even the great reign of that illustrious Princes[s] has been rendered somewhat

⁷⁶ Garret, 15 October 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 167-68.

dull from my weariness.” Garret craved something lighter, something more entertaining. So he went to the Philanthropic Society library to find a novel.⁷⁷

Novels: A “destructive habit”?

No matter how vigorously students encouraged history and biography, they also read fiction, especially novels. One student noted this trend in 1832: “Some admit the necessity of employing every moment in storing away knowledge yet come week after week and load themselves with an armful of Novels, as if they expected to find true wisdom and useful thoughts in these books.”⁷⁸ By the 1840s, one student observed, “[T]he whole cry seems now to be for some thing [sic] exciting. Consequently novels are all the go.”⁷⁹ But for students who had been conditioned to approach reading as an exercise in usefulness rather than amusement, the popularity of novel reading in the antebellum period raised important questions about reading and manhood: Did novels impede the pursuit of virtue and wisdom in college? Did novel reading undermine the values of traditional elite society? In sum, did they weaken a man’s character?⁸⁰ Many students thought so.

⁷⁷ Garrett, 29 October 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 189.

⁷⁸ William Nelson Mebane, Inaugural Address, 03 October 1832, Dialectic Society Records.

⁷⁹ Thomas Turner Slade, Inaugural Address, 18 March 1845, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁰ Students debated variations of these questions occasionally in the early nineteenth century and more often in the antebellum period. Philanthropic Society Minutes, 28 March 1815; 22 April 1843; 01 August 1851; 25 September 1857, vols. S-7, 10, S-12, 14, Philanthropic Society Records. Members of the Dialectic Society debated novel reading and fiction more than their counterparts in the Philanthropic. Dialectic Society Minutes, 27 April 1809; 8 February 1810; 01 October 1811; 09 October 1822; 11 September 1833; 3 April 1841; 9 August 1850; 30 January 1852; 9 March 1860, vols. 4, 6, 8, 9, S-10, S-11, Dialectic Society Records. Even before college, schoolboys debated novel reading in private academies. Philomathean Society Minutes [Greensboro, N.C.], 25 August 1849, Records of the Philomathean Society #1720-z, SHC.

In general, students advised one another to abstain from novels. In 1826, Alfred Nicholson told his classmates to avoid novels “as deadly poison.”⁸¹ In 1833, William Owen—a novel reader himself—said that novels ought to be “sealed books.”⁸² In 1845, another student warned his classmates that novels were “always used in depicting some horrible scene or demonstrating the depravities of the human heart.”⁸³ And in 1849, Thomas Miles Garrett—himself an avid novel reader—admitted, “I know that novel reading is a destructive habit.”⁸⁴ In all, students repeated the concerns of moral philosophers, professors, and popular authors, arguing that novels promoted dissipation, caused students to fall behind in their academic and literary society duties, and promoted lazy mental habits. Moreover, they argued that students’ were too young to handle novel reading—their passions simply were “too wayward and fiery.”⁸⁵ So students formally advised against novel reading altogether, echoing prevailing attitudes that novels were immoral and unmanly.

Novels long had been associated with all manner of vice—idleness, dissipation, frivolity, profligacy, deceit, and seduction.⁸⁶ Fear that novels would seduce the imaginations of youth continued well into the nineteenth century and young men throughout the early republic were instructed to avoid them at all costs.⁸⁷ Adults

⁸¹ Alfred Osborne Nicholson, Address, 14 September 1826, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸² Owen, Inaugural Address, 17 April 1833, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸³ Slade, Inaugural Address, 18 March 1845, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Garrett, 24 July 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 70.

⁸⁵ Walter Leak Steele, Inaugural Address, 22 September 1843, Dialectic Society Records.

⁸⁶ O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 742-48.

⁸⁷ For one contemporary example, see “The Mysteries of Paris, A Novel. By Eugene Sue. Translated from the French by Charles H. Toune, Esq. New-York: Harper & Brothers. 1843,” *SQR*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (Apr., 1844): 497-516. Many academies for women prohibited novel reading, though young women (as well as young men) did not typically heed that advice. Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education*

intervened by way of conduct books to prevent youth from falling into vice and dissipation.⁸⁸ Students studying Francis Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science*, for example, learned about the moral hazards of novel reading: "[N]o one is corrupt in action, until he has become corrupt in imagination. And on the other hand he who has filled his imagination with conceptions of vice, and who loves to feast his depraved moral appetite with imaginary scenes of impurity needs but opportunity to become openly abandoned."⁸⁹ Students found similar attitudes in popular advice manuals for college students that they read in their leisure, including John Todd's *Student's Manual* (1835).⁹⁰ Todd was a Congregationalist minister who traveled throughout the Northeast in the 1830s, speaking to crowds of college students about morality. On the topic of reading, he wrote, "It is a good maxim, in regard to your reading—*Non multa, sed multum* [not many, but much]." Novels, Todd explained, excited the passions and polluted the imagination. "Beware of bad books," he wrote. "The world is flooded with such books. They are permitted to lie in our pathway as part of our moral discipline."⁹¹ The assumption was that the minds and morals of youth were vulnerable and incapable of distinguishing fantasy from reality.

of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 132-133.

⁸⁸ Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 178; Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 151-165.

⁸⁹ Francis Wayland, *The Elements of Moral Science* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1843), 261.

⁹⁰ Sanders, ed., "The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson," 234. The Dialectic and Philanthropic Society libraries each contained at least one copy.

⁹¹ John Todd, *The Student's Manual*, 144-47.

In some ways, many of these worries were not unwarranted. In warning against the immorality of novel reading, for instance, educators, popular writers, and many students they may have had in mind young men like James Dusenbery, who had a penchant for liquor, “bull dances,” carousing with nearby prostitutes, *and* novel reading. “On Friday night Red [a pet name for a prostitute he visited] & I spent a glorious night in bed,” Dusenbery wrote. (As the intellectual historian Michael O’Brien has pointed out, “the other thing he did late at night was [read] Dickens,” though the connection between Dusenbery’s sexual and literary habits is unclear.⁹²) Or perhaps they had in mind classmates like Joseph Summerell, who neglected to attend (required) chapel services one day, “being so much interested in a Novel.” The novel was George Payne Rainsford James’ *The Jacquerie* (1841), which Summerell praised as “a most excellent production of the kind.” He finished the three-volume novel in three days.⁹³ Thus, it is not altogether surprising that students shared the opinion of moral reformers such as Todd that novels stood in the way of mental and moral development.

Students’ concerns about novel reading, however, reached beyond adult preoccupations with dissipation. In condemning novels in literary societies, students voiced legitimate concerns about maturation, class, and gender. “Novel readers are like gay butterflies that flit from flower to flower,” William Owen explained, but the exemplary reader was a “sober reader of works of practical utility,” who “resembles the industrious bee that dives into every flower and gathers its stores of honeyed wealth.” This perspective stands in stark contrast to contemporary images of young southern

⁹² O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 745.

⁹³ Joseph John Summerell, Diary, 09 January 1842, Joseph John Summerell Diary #5296-z, SHC, 10.

manhood as rugged and unrestrained. Students favored the industrious bee—stoic, balanced, attentive, and industrious—over the butterfly—the trifling reader, uninterested in serious pursuits. Thus students advocated a moderate course of reading, which they associated with restrained masculine ideals of elite and middle-class society.

Though students invoked these arguments to curb novel reading on campus, they did not always put them into practice. They may have repeated warnings that novels were destructive, but they did not “passively [endorse] the hierarchy of reading matter delineated by social experts,” as Elisabeth Nichols has argued about antebellum female readers. Instead, they learned to make their own judgment about texts based on their knowledge of what was most and least appropriate.⁹⁴ Indeed this is exactly what the editors of the *North Carolina University Magazine* did in an 1853 review of Donald Grant Mitchell’s *The Reveries of a Bachelor: or, A Book of the Heart* (1853), when they wrote, “We admire independence. We wish every man to read and think for himself.” They recommended the novel not “upon the ground of its learning,” but “for its virtuous and elevating character.” They wrote, “[W]e love the *book* for we are conscious that if we did not get up from its perusal a wiser, we did a better man.” In other words, reading a novel (or at least this novel) had the potential to complement students’ development as men. The readers, in fact, especially commended the novel’s “scenes of boyhood and youth.” In this review of Mitchell’s *Reveries of a Bachelor*, students underscored the fact that genres existed along a continuum between dangerous and instructive.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Elisabeth B. Nichols, “Female Readers and Printed Authority in the Early Republic,” in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950*, edited by Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 6.

⁹⁵ “Ik. Marvel,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1 (Feb., 1852): 8.

According to antebellum borrowing records, even the strongest critics of novel reading and the most serious students read novels.⁹⁶ At a time when students had few forms of amusement in college life, novel reading offered a means to relieve the boredom and homesickness that students felt at college. Reading novels, many students could have argued, was more salubrious than drinking, fighting, and gambling—vices commonly associated with antebellum college youth. Moreover, the fictional works that students read were not widely characterized as “bad books.” Literary Society libraries, for example, did not contain sensational works such as *The Rake*, *The Whip*, *The Flash*, and *The Libertine* that were popular among young urban males and noted for their salacious plots and depraved characters. Nor did students write about reading them.⁹⁷

Antebellum students’ favorite fictional authors comprised many of the works we call classics today, including works by Sir Walter Scott, foremost, Maria Edgeworth, Henry Fielding, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, William Gilmore Simms, Charles Dickens, and Eugene Sue. They read countless other novels, tales, and romances that were popular in the nineteenth century but have long since been forgotten.⁹⁸ These novels provided opportunities for entertainment and for participation in a national and

⁹⁶ See library records for Walter L. Steele, William Long, William Owen, William H. Hill, Circulation Records, Series 7.2, Vol. S-2, 1832, 40, 12, 239, 288, 336, 361, 397, 491, Dialectic Society Records #40152, UA. For southerner novel reading, see O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 747. Clyde Cantrell, “The Reading Habits of Ante-Bellum Southerners,” Ph.D. , University of Illinois, 1960, 112-118.

⁹⁷ Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 151-165; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 125-43.

⁹⁸ Other popular fictional works among antebellum students included Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1817); the works of Martin Farquhar Tupper (1810-99); Sir Walter Scott’s *Rob-Roy*, *Ivanhoe*, and the *Talisman*, and Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1849).

transatlantic popular culture that had begun developing in the antebellum period, which emphasized private experience and imagination.⁹⁹

One of the features of this popular reading culture in which students participated was reading serial and short stories in current periodicals. Each literary society library subscribed to several prominent literary magazines that published serial stories, including *The Southern Literary Messenger*, *The Southern Quarterly Review*, *DeBow's Review*, *The Knickerbocker*, and *Blackwood's Magazine*. In 1857, for example, Hugh Brown read W. M. Thackeray's short story, "The Virginians" in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.¹⁰⁰ "I have been reading to night Thackeray's new story "the Virginians," and like the plot so far as I have seen it very much." Brown worried, however, that Thackeray "tamper[ed] wit the character of Washington" too much. He would have to continue reading the story, he concluded, before passing judgment on the author.¹⁰¹

Students also read serial fiction published in the *North Carolina University Magazine*. Established for one year in 1844 and then launched again in 1852, the *Magazine* resembled other literary magazines of the time and contained biography, history, short stories; published orations, addresses, and lectures; political, philosophical, and scientific essays; serial novels; book reviews; and poetry. The second volume for 1853, for example, included a serial fiction story about courtship, love, and marriage among youth titled "The Banks of the Epac Reef." Alongside serial stories, too, were shorter stories and tales, especially about Native Americans, including "Indian legend," "A visit to the Cartooge-Chage Indians," and "Junaluskee – The Last of the Cherokees."

⁹⁹ Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America*, 81-82.

¹⁰⁰ W. M. Thackeray, "The Virginian," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Dec., 1857): 90-108.

¹⁰¹ Hugh T. Brown, "Journal, kept by H. T. Brown, of his Thoughts and reflections from Sept. the 11th 1857," Diary, Box 6, Folder 110, Volume 23, Hamilton Brown Papers #1090, SHC, 31

The goal of the last piece, “Junaluskee,” was to provide the reader with a “fit example of Indian heart and Indian courage.”¹⁰² Through serial fiction as well as non-serial fictional and even non-fictional tales, students engaged in popular modes of reading.

Students also read novels that were published in serial form in Europe, but presented in volume form in the United States. Dickens was popular among antebellum students, as was the French author, Eugene Sue—one of the first writers to profit from the booming popularity of serialized novels in 1840s France. His most famous novels were *The Mysteries of Paris* and *The Wandering Jew*. According to David Pinkney, these novels “led other authors to follow Sue’s example in hope of winning similar [financial] rewards. Adapting their creativity to the demands of the burgeoning mass market, they made the novel the dominant literary form.”¹⁰³ Library records and reader responses from the 1840s and 1850s demonstrate that Sue’s two novels circulated frequently among students. In pursuit of “some light fascinating work of fiction” after reading five volumes of Hume, Thomas Miles Garrett, for example, went to the Philanthropic Society library to borrow *The Wandering Jew* in October 1849, but found it missing from the shelf. After “learning from a student that Dr. [Elisha] Mitchell had a copy,” Garrett “applied to him for it.” Mitchell let him borrow the book, but Garrett found the three-volume novel “far from being a two penny novel,” but “a very extensive work.” Feeling obliged to read the

¹⁰² “The Banks of the Epac Reef,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Mar., 1852): 59; “Indian legend,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Apr., 1852): 116-119; “A visit to the Cartooge-Chage Indians,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 3 (June, 1852): 116-118; “Junaluskee – The Last of the Cherokees,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 5 (June, 1852): 216-220.

¹⁰³ David H. Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France, 1840-1847* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 125.

book, Garrett ultimately did so and characterized *The Wandering Jew* as “a most delightful novel.”¹⁰⁴

Sir Walter Scott’s novels were by far the most popular among antebellum students, as they were among southern readers in general during this period.¹⁰⁵ At college, students were told that Scott’s literary works were exemplary and that “cheap” and “unsubstantial” literature should not be read at its expense.¹⁰⁶ Students frequently borrowed Scott’s *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817), *Ivanhoe* (1819), *Kenilworth* (1821), and *Anne of Geierstein* (1829).¹⁰⁷ For example, between August 1839 and July 1841, William Mullins, borrowed from the Philanthropic Society library four volumes of Scott’s *Waverly* novels as well as two volumes of *Rob Roy* three times (once a year) and *Kenilworth* once.¹⁰⁸ And when James Dusenbery had a moment in his busy senior year to read a novel, he chose Scott’s *Redgauntlet, A Tale of the Eighteenth Century* (1824). Noting the occasion as special, he wrote, “It is so seldom that I read a novel now a days that I must mention my perusal this week of Scotts

¹⁰⁴ Garrett, 29 October 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 189. See also Garrett’s entry for 05 November 1849, *ibid.*, 204.

¹⁰⁵ These were popular titles among readers in Clyde Cantrell, “The Reading Habits of Antebellum Southerners,” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1960, 112-118. Cantrell argues that Scott was popular in the Old South, but not nearly as popular as historians have argued. In general, Scott’s works had transatlantic appeal and were characteristic of a broader literary ethos in the Victorian era. See Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), chap. 12.

¹⁰⁶ James B. Shepard, “James B. Shepard’s Address: Delivered before the Two Literary Societies of the University of North Carolina, June 5, 1844,” *The North Carolina University Magazine*, August & September 1844, 258.

¹⁰⁷ James Hilliard Polk, 04 and 07 September 1859, Diary, folder 1, James Hilliard Polk Diary #5259-z, SHC, 54-55, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Borrowing Record for William Sidney Mullins, vol. 8, 1838-1841, Library Records, Circulation Records, Philanthropic Society Records #40166, UA.

‘Redgauntlet.’”¹⁰⁹ Though Dusenbery offered no other commentary to suggest why he chose Scott’s novel or what he thought of it, other students did.

Students especially lauded Scott’s depictions of landscape and humanity. Thomas Miles Garrett responded to these themes after reading *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), which is set in fifteenth-century Switzerland and is centered around the journey of two war exiles and a magical woman, Anne, who helps them on their journey. The book, Garrett wrote in his diary, was the only thing that he could find of “any interest” in July 1849. He was taken, first, by Scott’s description of Switzerland, which helped him to imagine a country he had never seen. “There is scarcely any one perhaps who has a correct notion of the scenery in Switzerland,” Garrett wrote, “and although I have erred in forming the idea I have from this novel, the delusion is a happy one for while flatter my vanity by supposing myself aright, I enjoy the rapture which either the mountains in reality or dwelling only in the imagination by their grandier [sic], glory are calculated to excite.” As Garrett’s reaction to landscape suggests, he viewed fiction through the lens of romanticism; for him, representations of nature revealed truths about human nature. He also viewed Scott’s characters in this way. *Anne of Geierstein*’s male characters, in particular, seemed to Garrett to embody virtues that he and his classmates aspired to achieve as men. He wrote, “How he [Scott] paints the wildness, the courage, the simplicity, the pride, the strength and activity of the swiss.” The depiction of the protagonists, Arthur and Rudolph, especially revealed masculine characteristics that appealed to Garrett:

In the intercourse of young Arthur and Rudolph, we see a verry [sic] remarkable truth displayed...that courage, true and genuine, must ever be respected, by the

¹⁰⁹ James Lawrence Dusenbery, 26 September 1841, Diary, James Lawrence Dusenberry Diary and Clipping #2561-z, SHC. Hugh Brown’s sisters read *Redgauntlet* and wrote to him about having done so in 1857. See Carrie L. Gordon to Hugh T. Brown, 7 February 1857, Box 2, Folder 14, Gordon-Hackett Papers, #1040, SHC.

haughty as well as the humble, the intelligent as well as the ignorant the brave as well as the cowardly, and by the one sex as well as the other. In this instance, the respect of all was gained by the manly conduct of young Arthur. He gained the confidence of the proud Donnerfugel, the friendship of the host, and that was of more concern, the smiles of fair Anne.

Garrett delighted in the protagonist's demonstrable masculinity—the same characteristic he lauded in Henry VIII—the rewards of which were the confidence of others and the affection of a woman. In other words, Garrett found a style of masculinity in Scott's characters that reflected his and other young southern men's ideals.¹¹⁰

Many historians have noted that southerners found in Scott's depictions of medieval squirearchy a parallel world. As Christie Anne Farnham has argued, replace serfs with slaves in Scott's work and the outcome is the Old South. Young men's reading of Scott indeed confirms an appreciation of the chivalric code. James Dusenbery, as we shall see in the next chapter, was especially fond of Scott's depictions of chivalry and romantic love. He transcribed into his commonplace book portions of Scott's *Lady of the Lake* (1810), a poem interpreting the Arthurian legend, which evoke similar images of manly courage, gallantry, and the winning of women's affection. While students' reactions to Scott do not explicitly draw on the parallels between a slave society and feudalism, they do underscore gender performances that resonated with their own expectations and experiences. Their reading of Scott, in many cases, reinforced their desire to cultivate a style of masculinity that conformed to southern notions of gentility but also to broader, more transatlantic notions of courageous, strong, and confident manhood—rooted at once in nature and in civil society.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Garrett, 16 July 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, 60-61.

¹¹¹ Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 30-31.

Scott was not alone among students' favorite authors to inspire awe for both romance and medievalism. Joseph Summerell, for example, enjoyed George Payne Rainsford James' *Jacquerie* (1841) in part because it was "a most exciting tale, & the interest is maintained throughout," but in part for its instructive value on the customs and culture of the French. *Jacquerie*, he wrote in his diary in 1842, was "on the whole [an] admirable production & deserves to be read with attention by every one who wishes to gain a knowledge of the state of France the manners & customs of the people & their depressed condition under the feudal system. It is well written & shows the author well versed in the language of the french [sic] & passions of our nature."¹¹² Novels like James' *Jacquerie* and Scott's *Anne of Geierstein* provided insight into human nature and civil society, resonated with students' ambitions to cultivate a truly masculine identity—at once heroic and genteel. And, by transporting students from Chapel Hill to Switzerland, France, and by virtue of the authors, nineteenth-century England, these works likewise broadened the scope of a reader's understanding of the world.

Students encountered similar themes in European literature about North America. This was the case for George Nicholas Thompson. Born in 1832 in Leasburg, North Carolina, Thompson entered the University of North Carolina in 1848 and, in that same year, became a member of the Dialectic Society. He graduated from the University in 1853 and became a planter, physician, and lawyer. In the last two years of his life he served on the board of trustees for the University. He was married three times. Thompson began keeping a short diary during the spring session of 1851, his sophomore year at the University of North Carolina. A leather-bound volume measuring five by

¹¹² Summerell, 09 January 1842, 12 January 1842, *Diary*, 10, 13. This reader response contradicts assumptions that southerners felt an attachment to feudalism and disdained progress.

seven and five-eighths inches, Thompson's diary begins on January 1, 1851 and continues through March 21, 1851. He wrote his entries in pencil and recorded his impressions about a host of topics that paint a vivid picture of student life at mid-century: studies—especially Greek, Latin, and Mathematics; social life and dormitory life; students' conversations with one another; students' views on reading and books; and Thompson's own desires to court a woman whom he identifies as "Miss Susan Lindsay," a young woman from his hometown.

At North Carolina in 1850 and 1851, Thompson found himself drawn to popular European works such as Scott's *Waverly* novels, Byron's poetical works, Eugene Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and British author Charles Augustus Murray's three-volume work on fictional travels in America, *The Prairie-Bird* (1844). Thompson greatly admired Murray's *Prairie-Bird*, and he provided extensive responses to it in his journal. He began the novel on January 17, 1851 and completed it three days later on January 20, 1851. He praised the novel for its style and its depiction of characters: "It is...written with much ease and interest, and it appears by a novelist who well understands the subtleness and bravery and their characters will, and that when at attachment is found by them, it lasts until death..."¹¹³ His responses reveal his enthusiasm for the work's American setting, especially its depictions and characterizations of American Indians.

Engaging with the love-story element of the book, moreover, moved Thompson to write about his own feelings about love and courtship. Sometimes his entries elide into

¹¹³ Thompson, *Diary*, 1851, 35-36.

self-reflective passages about his desires to express his love to “Miss Sue.” In summarizing the end of the book, Thompson wrote the following response:

I saw Reginald Brandon escape all dangers and return safely home, with his hearts only love, the “*Olitapa*” & I saw Ethelston and Lucy again meet, with hearts full of pure and ardent love - I saw them also joined in the holy ties of matrimony, to enjoy, pleasure by day and *happiness* by night - How I would like to take *her* to my bosom, when I so fondly and affectionately adore, if I would imagine that my adoration was reciprocated - as Reginald Brandon Miss Evelyn Ethelston - his faithful friends and kind brother’s Sister!! - but I can scarcely ever believe that such will be my doom - as to enjoy the bliss that those two double Brothers did - Miss Susan.¹¹⁴

Then, quoting Robert Burns’s, ballad, “O Wert Thou In The Cauld Blast” (1800),

Thompson finished his reader-response-turned-admission-of-love:

Were I monarch of the world
With thee to reign
The brightest jewel in my crown
should be my queen”!!¹¹⁵

Thompson’s response to *Prairie Bird* demonstrates that private reading of novels was both a moral and intellectual enterprise that also offered students an informal education in emotion. In creating a space where he could link his reading life and his emotional life, Thompson demonstrated one way in which students pushed the limits of what was educational. Though this form of reading was never discussed in formal and informal literary socialization, it was an important dimension of students’ development, which the following chapter will explore in greater detail.

Thompson did not limit his fictional reading to European works, but also read contemporary American literature. According to his borrowing records, Thompson read “Irvings Works,” Bancroft’s *History of the United States*, *The Southern Literary*

¹¹⁴ Thompson, Diary, 1851, 37-39.

¹¹⁵ Robert Burns, “O Wert Thou In The Cauld Blast” quoted in Thompson, Diary, 1851, 37-39.

Messenger, Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*. To many antebellum students, American literature reflected the progress of American civilization. This was the period of America's first "literary renaissance," and it created a new and exciting national literary culture. Students frequently borrowed the works of Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms at the same time as they borrowed works by Byron, Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Dickens.¹¹⁶ American fiction, they believed, was a sign that American civilization was progressing as it expanded. Responding to the works of Irving, Cooper, and Simms in particular, one student remarked in his diary in 1841, "There is poetry in everything connected with republican institutions... American literature is emphatically the polished history of the dawning and progress of American liberty...."¹¹⁷ Moreover, students believed that American novels compared favorably to European novels because. For example, one student argued before the Dialectic Society,

The Indian novels of Cooper - not to speak of his splendid sea novels - whose scenes are laid in the awful solitude of the forest, and on the wide and desolate prairie, and whose characters were the wild red men that roamed over them, have as much exciting incident, accurate delineation of character, and more grandeur of scenery, than the best productions of the author of *Waverly*.¹¹⁸

Students had great hope for the progress of American civilization, which they believed the emergence of distinctive American fiction reflected. Moreover, by reading American fiction, students could participate in this important transformation in American culture, its manifest destiny to excel Europe in all literary attainments and refinement. Reading American novels, in this context, was an act of patriotism that linked students to their

¹¹⁶ See library records for Walter L. Steele, William Long, William Owen, William H. Hill, Circulation Records, 1832, Vol. S-2, 40, 12, 239, 288, 336, 361, 397, 491, Dialectic Society Records.

¹¹⁷ Covington, Diary, 1-6.

¹¹⁸ Theodore Bryant Kingsbury, "Our Literature" September 1848, Dialectic Society Records. See also Samuel Hall, "Influence of adversity upon literary character," 2 March 1839, Dialectic Society Records. For a response to Cooper's naval history, see Mullins, Diary, 14 July 1841.

country and to the progress of western literature and also reinforced their personal identities as Americans.¹¹⁹

William Mullins, for example, was very familiar with the popular southern novelist, William Gilmore Simms. He especially appreciated Simms's novels for their insight into human nature. In fact, he complained in his journal that William Gilmore Simms failed, in his opinion, to illuminate the natural humanity of his characters. "In relation to Simms' works however it may justly be remarked that his characters too much resemble each other.... This appears to me his great defect: he cannot seize the great principles and components of character and by a proper union of them each time, furnish a new, yet natural character." Believable and "natural" American places, scenes, and characters compelled students to read fiction produced by, about, and for Americans; they expected fiction to enlarge their understanding of humanity beyond their immediate social contexts in much the same way as history was supposed to work.

In addition to reading many of America's first famous novels, students also read comparable literature that has not received much attention today. In 1841, for example, William Sidney Mullins read one of the most popular books in antebellum America and the first Canadian novel—John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832). Set in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, the novel depicts brutal warfare between Native Americans and the British during Pontiac's War (1763). The protagonist is a warrior named Wacousta, an advisor to Pontiac, who believed that a commander of the British army stationed at Fort Detroit had wronged him. The novel traces Wacousta's journey to vindicate his

¹¹⁹ On reading and national identity, see Alison M. Scott, "'This Cultivated Mind': Reading and Identity in a Nineteenth-Century Reader," in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers' Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950*, edited by Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 48.

honor by killing each one of the Commander's children.¹²⁰ The book was very popular in Canada, the United States, and Britain for its depictions of history, landscape, and Native Americans. "I have recently read 'Wacousta. By the Author of Ecarte,'" Mullins wrote in February 1841, "and hasten to give a sketch of the work." Mullins's response reveals that students read for philosophical reflections and moral insights as well as for amusement:

The impressions produced by it [*Wacousta*] on the mind are dark and gloomy in the extreme. Horror succeeds horror until all is involved in indiscriminate gloom and the spirit shudders at the tales' incidents. The author would seem to have [been] a gloomy misanthrope; or else [he is one] of those men who delight to combine all that is dark and harried in one grand coup d'[oeil] and rejoice in the contemplation of the assemblage of ideas, which they have made. He has admirably succeeded in gratifying his taste, if such it be, for nowhere is misery better depicted and in greater abundance. The plot is very well joined to answer the authors [sic] design, and the interest never fails from the time the reader first becomes anxious until he lays down the book. There is no accurate discrimination of character found in the work nor do nay profound philosophical reflections adorn its page. No great moral truth is illustrated, nor is there an unusual grace or beauty of style. But forcible description, striking incidents, and thrilling scenes do occur in abundance, and emotions of the soul are variously and abundantly exercised....*no man who reads it will forget it*; it arrests the attention and holds it chained, until it becomes a part of the mind's acquisitions.

Mullins clearly enjoyed *Wacousta* as entertainment, though he derived no moral lessons from it. Nevertheless, the exercise in reading and writing about this "dark and gloomy" book entertained Mullins and promoted thinking about what a book ought to do (promote reflection and morality) and how it ought to be written (with strong language and captivating plots).

In all, these examples of students' private engagement with fiction demonstrate that novel reading and manhood were not so antithetical in practice as many feared.

¹²⁰ John Richardson, *Wacousta or, The Prophecy; A Tale of the Canadas*, ed. Douglas Cronk (1832, Ontario: Carleton University Press, 1987), xvii-xviii.

Students could read novels and become men so long as they applied the same rules of attention, judgment, and moderation to novels as they did other genres. For this reason, Thomas Miles Garrett criticized attempts to regulate young men's reading habits. In 1850, he attended Sunday services at the Chapel of the Cross, the local Episcopal church, where he heard a sermon in which the minister "condemned many things," including novel reading. Garrett, however, insisted that if *any* reader approached a book uncritically—novel or otherwise—then he hardly ought to read at all. "I would call him a base coward who would fear to read a book," he wrote in his journal. "He is a silly body who can be affected by any thing which he knows to [be] imaginary and fictitious.... Is he one who reads a book to believe it and for no other purpose, without criticizeing [sic] one line or one opinion," Garrett wondered. Such a reader as that, he concluded, "is unworthy to touch such a sacred thing as a book."¹²¹ A man's honor—rooted in his ability to think and discern good from bad—and reading were inextricable.

Students' concerns about novel reading—about genre selection in general—therefore demonstrate reflect larger anxieties about their transition from youth to manhood, and dependence to autonomy. As students, they remained dependent on the authority of educators and texts for guidance on how to think, act, and feel. Yet at the same time, college life afforded them considerable autonomy over their lives, including over their book selections. Their literary societies were of their own design; they selected the books to put on the library shelves, and they had free rein to borrow them. So students were pulled in two different directions: they could bow to the authority of countless sources of reading advice or they could assert their manly independence and

¹²¹ Garrett, 03 February 1850, Diary, Typed Transcript, 268.

read as they liked, confident that they had imbibed the ideals handed down to them. If anything, their discourse about how to read reflected an ongoing negotiation between youth and manhood, deference and authority that reflected the broader transition occurring for college youth.

Students never really came to a consensus about fiction, though based on the ways in which fictional writings were intermingled in their literary magazine of the 1840s and 1850s and the ways in which students responded to reading novels in their diaries and journals, the question did not need to be resolved. Students were quite comfortable with an eclectic culture of private reading that included fiction. In fact, novels served as educational tools for many students' intellectual and moral development.

Conclusion

In all, students believed that reading should be used to direct young men toward manhood. "The studies of youth should be directed so as to bear on the duties and engagements of a mature life," John Madison Stedman argued in his 1830 inaugural address, and urged his classmates to "furnish" their minds with "suitable books." Students could gather knowledge "from a wide circumference," of diverse authors from their society libraries, but they were to seek only those authors that were suitable and did not have any "manifest tendency to corrupt moral principle and violate taste." Literary society addresses like Stedman's, as well as other students' social and private responses to literature, above all else, demonstrate that students were committed to learning how to read like men because they no longer wish to be considered boys.¹²² Defining and living

¹²² John Madison Stedman, Inaugural Address, 25 February 1830, Dialectic Society Records.

out a mature life, however, required learning how to read as men ought to read and to select books that were the most respectable (and therefore useful) for a manly life.

Literary societies especially provided advanced literary instruction for youth in college. Through peer-oriented and -directed reading instruction, students enlarged their understanding of the cultural importance of (and power associated with) reading in the process of character development and enculturation into a society that valued heroism, greatness, and ambition in men. Moreover, as students' private reading habits indicate, the formation of identities also occurred in private and social relationships. Literature was always at or near the center of those social relationships. The next chapter will explore the ways in which students used literature in, and created literature out of, their daily lives at college.

CHAPTER SIX

The Informal Curriculum: Gender and Sex in a “Wilderness of Sin”

In 1841, James Dusenbery, a University of North Carolina student from Lexington, North Carolina, wrote a tale about his best friend and classmate, “Gooly,” who decided to visit “harlots” in the woods with some friends one summer night. His companions were “men of valour of the tribe of freshmen,” and they took with them “gifts of raiment & precious metal” to bestow upon the women when they arrived. Along the way the students encountered obstacles beyond their imaginations. “The very trees cried out” at their approach and “put forth their arms to forbid their passage.” But Gooly and the “men of might” who accompanied him “were hardened in their hearts & pressed forward to give battle to the giants of the forest.” Angry because the impetuous youth refused to heed their warning, the giants “pressed sore upon Gooly & smote him between the eyes & he fell upon his face to the earth.” And thus, concluded Dusenbery, were “Gooly & the worshippers of Baal discomfited before the giants of the wilderness of Sin.”¹

The story of Gooly and the men of might probably unfolded much like Dusenbery said it did: Late at night on August 13, 1841, John Williamson (Gooly), a small group of freshmen, and possibly James Dusenbery set out to meet with prostitutes in the woods

¹ James Lawrence Dusenbery, 14 August 1841, Diary. James Lawrence Dusenberry Diary and Clipping #2561, SHC.

just beyond campus. Perhaps the students were en route to “the depot,” “the fishery,” or “the kingdom”—places around the university where Dusenbery found prostitutes during his junior and senior years. Or perhaps they sought a notorious “old house in the bushes north of the village,” where Peyton Clements lived, a hunter, who “made money...through several physically attractive daughters, not common to all comers but living as mistresses with chosen lovers.”² In any case, the students were on a familiar journey that night, when university tutors, whom Dusenbery personified as trees, heard them slip out of the building, chased after them, and shouted to go no farther. The students ignored the tutors’ beckoning and persisted in their flight from campus, though doing so constituted a serious violation of university rules.³ In the end, the tutors caught up with the incorrigible students and apprehended them—“smote” them in Dusenbery’s language—for having violated university regulations. The next day, after reflecting on all that had happened, James Dusenbery sat down at his desk in “No. 23, on the 3rd passage of the West Building,” picked up his pen, and composed a mock epic about Gooly’s misadventures, which he titled “First Chronicles.”⁴

References to the Wilderness of Sin appear in the historical books of the Old Testament—Numbers, Kings, Deuteronomy, and Chronicles—which detail the history of the early Hebrew people. In “First Chronicles,” Dusenbery transformed the Hebrew world of ancestral tribes, exodus, disobedience, and chastisement into a collegiate world

² Kemp P. Battle, *Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 86. See also James Vickers, et al., *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay Publishers, 1985), 29.

³ For university regulations, see *Acts of the General Assembly and Ordinances of the Trustees, for the Organization and Government of the University of North-Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C.: Printed at the Office of the Raleigh Register, 1838), 14-17.

⁴ Dusenbery, 07 August, 10 October, 21 November 1841, 13 March and 03 April 1842, Diary.

of sex and sin that he seemed to know very well. By using turns of phrase from the King James Bible such as “now it came to pass,” “in the eighth month,” and “in the thirteenth day of the month,” Dusenbery transformed the biblical Wilderness of Sin into a metaphor—and an obvious pun—about youthful desire, impulse, and disobedience. In Dusenbery’s wilderness of sin, the follies of youth were a matter of public scrutiny, a spectacle of epic proportions. Like the disobedient ancestral tribes of the Old Testament, Dusenbery’s younger classmates were chastised for disobedience, subordinated to the will of all-powerful elders, and consequently embarrassed and mocked as boyish by their classmates.

Dusenbery’s decision to write a story about Gooly and the “men of might” suggests that young men’s shared experiences outside of the classroom, though often trivialized as the passing whims of college life, were important educational moments for students as they learned how to become men.⁵ Dusenbery’s mock heroes, for example, learned two valuable, but contradictory, lessons: at college, they were expected to demonstrate restrained masculinity, but youth culture encouraged rugged independence. Students learned that both breaking the rules *and* trepidation in breaking them were unmanly. These moments in which students were left on their own to negotiate between manhood and youth comprised a vibrant “informal curriculum” that played just as important a role in student development as did the curriculum and extracurriculum. In other words, there were elements of students’ social and private worlds that had nothing to do with formal education, but in the words of Richard Storr, “can sensibly be described

⁵ The Wilderness of Sin is not mentioned in either the first or second book of Chronicles, as Dusenbery’s title would suggest, but those books follow the same style and tradition as Numbers, Kings, and Deuteronomy. See Ralph W. Klein, “1 Chronicles: Introduction,” *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (NRSV), ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1993), 605-607.

as educational.”⁶ While most historians have written almost exclusively about men’s experiences outside of the classroom in their works on college youth, Dusenbery’s story reveals a new aspect of college socialization: young men often conceived of their informal activities through a reflective, self-consciously intellectual lens.

James Dusenbery’s reflections about Gooly and the mighty freshmen bring into focus three elements of college life that were educational: young men’s interactions with one another in a rowdy, all-male youth environment; their social and private sexual lives in that setting; and their experiences with love and intimacy. As students interacted socially in peer groups, they encountered countless opportunities to learn about and even challenge the boundaries of what was acceptable manly behavior. Specifically, they learned to live in a culture that was rooted both in traditional southern notions of honor and rugged independence, and in more restrained expressions of manhood such as sobriety, temperance, and chastity commonly associated with northern middle-class manhood. In other words, many conflicting expressions of manliness characterized the college’s all-male environment, complicating students’ transition from youth to manhood. This environment, in turn, provided the context in which young men developed their attitudes about women, sex, and intimacy. This culture, however, existed alongside another one in which students learned to perform the roles of gentlemen in singing and dancing schools, at balls and picnics, and in visiting and courtship rituals. In this more restrained context, students (including James Dusenbery) demonstrated that

⁶ Richard Storr, “The Education of History: Some Impressions,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 31 (Spring 1961): 124. See also Donald Warren, “The Wonderful Worlds of the Education of History,” *American Educational History Journal* 32 (2005): 108-15. One insightful analysis of the informal curriculum in the antebellum South can be found in Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), chap. 5.

they also valued chaste womanhood (and manhood), romantic love, and serious courtship. In a wilderness of sin, how were young men supposed to exercise manly moral virtue emphasized in classrooms and literary societies? What place was there, if any, for intellectual manhood outside of the university's formal educational structures?

To come to terms with the informal curriculum, students often turned to reading and writing, and especially to diaries. Dusenbery's "First Chronicles," for instance, is not only a record of one incident of college life; it is also the product of significant intellectual work and literary imagination. Beneath the tale's plot of rowdy misbehavior lies an important record of inner, emotional development for young men grappling with youth culture's demands to be "men of valour" and manhood's demands to restrain their seemingly natural impulses toward vice and dissipation. Many examples of this genre of student writing from the antebellum period exist, demonstrating that even the rowdiest instances of college life did not escape private reflection and contemplation. Keeping a diary often facilitated this form of private expression and, consequently, was an especially important rite of passage.⁷ For students like James Dusenbery and his classmates, diaries brought together the literary, social, and emotional aspects of daily life into one space. Typically, students' diaries were jumbled with the stuff of daily life—letters, commonplace books, lecture notes, and financial records—but their content almost always tended toward reflective exposition. As students linked intellectual enterprises of reading and writing with social coming-of-age experiences, they extended

⁷ The diary was not new to the antebellum period, of course, but it had new and unique characteristics not found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American diaries. Nineteenth-century diarists viewed the diary as a literary form rather than a record, log, or spiritual guide. The rapid growth of print culture in the first half of the nineteenth century made it a more democratically available literary form, and the romanticization of the diary made it more conducive to self-expression than eighteenth-century diaries had been. See Steven E. Kagle, *Early Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 1-5, and O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 456-457.

their education beyond the formal curriculum and institutional life explored in previous chapters, beyond the wilderness of sin, and into the private, emotional realm.⁸

College Life as a “Wilderness of Sin”

The all-male, largely unsupervised nature of antebellum college life bred misbehavior. According to one student, the “dangers to which a young man is exposed during that part of his life which he passes in college, are numerous and difficult to oppose with a firm, unyielding spirit.”⁹ Students drank, gambled, fought, and pulled pranks on campus. Many students showed contempt for authority and often sneered at discipline.¹⁰ One antebellum student complained to his father, “[A] soujourn of two years and a half in a place like this [Chapel Hill] is enough to ruin a saint much more a mortal.”¹¹ Students associated this rowdy life with youth, not manhood. The editors of

⁸ Dusenbery, 12 September 1841, Diary. On “extended education,” see Thomas Augst, *The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 66. These literary processes were similar to those which Steven Stowe located among elite young women, whose private journalizing created a “narrative of feelings” for coming of age. See *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), chap. 2, esp. 67.

⁹ Bartholomew Fuller, “The ‘Danger of a College Life’,” 1848, Folder 1, Bartholomew Fuller Papers #361-z, SHC. For additional reports of rowdiness and dissipation in student writing, see Lisa Tolbert, ed., *Two Hundred Years of Student Life at Chapel Hill: Selected Letters and Diaries*, Southern Research Report #4 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Center for the Study of the American South, IRSS Faculty Working Group in Southern Studies, Fall 1993), 59-75.

¹⁰ Faculty records are replete with instances of rowdiness and misbehavior. Faculty Minutes, vols. 1:1-6, Faculty Records. North Carolina students were not unlike students elsewhere. See David F. Allmendinger, “The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life,” *Journal of Social History* 7 (Autumn 1973), 75-85, and *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975); Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977); Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 23-55; Jeffrey A. Mullins, “Honorable Violence: Youth Culture, Masculinity, and Contested Authority in Liberal Education in the Early Republic,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 17 (2003): 161-179; Rodney Hessinger, “‘The Most Powerful Instrument of College Discipline’: Student Disorder and the Growth of Meritocracy in the Colleges of the Early Republic,” *History of Education Quarterly* 39 (1999), 237-62.

¹¹ James Johnston Pettigrew to his father, 21 February 1847, Pettigrew Family Papers, #592, SHC. See also Walter W. Lenoir to Thomas Lenoir, 17 February 1841, Folder 81, Lenoir Family Papers #426, SHC.

the *North Carolina University Magazine* went so far as to argue in 1852, for example, that pranks were “essentially necessary to the ultimate well being of affairs” at college. “The pent up fires of juvenile fun are bound to come out,” they explained, “and if not permitted to escape in broken doses such a quantity of combustibility might be generated as to produce ‘somethin’ orful [awful].”¹² The problem, however, was that “somethin’ orful” usually did come out of even the mildest form of “juvenile fun.”

Excessive drinking was probably the most prevalent form of misbehavior on campus, especially during vacations between terms, when many students remained at college because of the difficulty and expenses of traveling. James Johnston Pettigrew complained in a letter to his father that the University was “a great deal more dissipated in the vacation than in the session and the nights I came they were all of them intoxicated in some degree.”¹³ Of course intoxication was not limited to vacations, as countless student letters and diaries indicate. Thomas Miles Garrett remembered a veritable bacchanalia among nearly fifty students who went to the circus in the nearby town of Hillsboro in 1849. Students “engaged in drinking and carousing, each endeavouring to outstrip the other in velocity of his inebriation, the height of liquor in his class.” Before long, several students appeared “in that state of insensibility that they could not exercise [sic] any of their senses. They turned over carriages and broke the wheels of wagons outside the circus. When the evening ended, they stumbled back to campus and loudly

¹² *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (April, 1852): 127. [Need article title. Did not cite title in notes.]

¹³ James Johnston Pettigrew to his father, 13 January 1844, Pettigrew Family Papers #592, SHC.

rang the college bell, disturbing everyone's sleep. The next day lessons seemed to go poorly, at least for Garrett.¹⁴

Another prevalent form of dissipation on campus was "spreeing," which typically consisted of minor disturbances and annoyances of faculty and students, though it often snowballed into more serious incidents of misbehavior, especially when alcohol was involved. For example, in 1845, William Bagley wrote to his sisters about a member of the sophomore class, who went to Hillsboro, where he "got in a drunken frolic." The student went to one of the taverns, & with his fellows, began to be rather noisy & the landlord came out & ordered them off & they not objected he raised a chair at one of them &...immediately shot him." The student fled the scene and apparently left for Alabama and the man whom he shot was able to remove the bullet from his arm.¹⁵

Violence erupted between students as well as townsfolk. Fights were not uncommon at the antebellum university. In August 1841, James Dusenbery recorded in his diary that a fight broke out between two members of the Philanthropic Society, Joseph M. Bunch of Rutledge, Tennessee and William D. Rice of Eutaw, Alabama. Allegedly, Bunch had insulted Rice at the Philanthropic Society meeting the night before, and Rice called for a duel. The next day, the young men met on the street outside of Nancy Hilliard's hotel on the main street in town. Students crowded the street to watch the fight, most of them cheering for Rice (because Bunch was very unpopular): "Beat him Rice—Kill the d . . . ned rascal." According to Dusenbery, "Bunch sustained

¹⁴ Thomas Miles Garrett, 12 September 1849, Diary, Typed Transcript, Thomas Miles Garrett Diary, 1849-1850 #1171-z, SHC, 125-27. Interestingly, Garrett was a member of the local Sons of Temperance.

¹⁵ William Bagley to Clementina Bagley and Marietta Bagley, 15 February 1845, Folder 2, Volume 2, William Bagley Papers #863-z, SHC, 25.

the...fight for some minutes when he received a blow which made him recoil several feet & fall. As he did so, his eye rested on a pistol he had dropped at the first of the fight, which he seized & fired, not at the man he was fighting, but through mistake, at his brother. The ball merely grazed his hip & passed on without farther injury.” The two participants continued to fight “unequally for several minutes,” Rice armed with a stick and Bunch with nothing, until Governor Swain and other professors arrived at the scene and quelled the violence. Both Bunch and Rice were dismissed from the University immediately. In the end, Dusenbery concluded, “Bunch was a rascal & deserved his beating but it was really a shame to compel him to fight at so great a disadvantage.”¹⁶

The foregoing examples of violent campus culture were, on the surface, simply social, but they had a profound influence on students’ private, moral and emotional development as men. William Sidney Mullins’ experiences at college bring into focus the many ways in which this rowdy culture influenced students’ emotional development at college. When he arrived at North Carolina in 1839, both the Dialectic and Philanthropic societies courted him because he had been an excellent student at the Donaldson Academy in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and showed much promise for success at college. Because Mullins identified strongly with eastern North Carolina and aspired to elite social status, he joined the more elite leaning Philanthropic Society.¹⁷

As a freshman, Mullins showed great enthusiasm for schoolwork, hoping to gain the approval from prominent members of his literary society, but in his sophomore year, he fell in with the wrong crowd—“the three most dissipated students in college,”

¹⁶ Dusenbery, 29 August, 1841, Diary.

¹⁷ Judith Mitchell Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill: The College Odyssey of William Sidney Mullins, 1840-42,” Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1993, 71

including Shepard K. Nash, Alfred M. Taylor, and Lucious J. Johnson—who lived in the room next door to his in the East Building on campus.¹⁸ They drank, gambled, and swore, earning them reputations as campus “rowdies.” “Frequently in their company,” Mullins recalled in his diary, “I unconsciously received a tinge from their character, and ere I knew what I was doing, became a rowdy.” He got drunk every night and kept liquor “habitually in my room.”¹⁹ Association with these “rowdies,” moreover, tarnished Mullins’s reputation among the distinguished members of the Philanthropic Society, especially his childhood classmate from Fayetteville’s Donaldson Academy, William H. Haigh. Haigh, in fact, openly criticized Mullins’ behavior. Mullins felt betrayed by Haigh’s attempt “to excite odium” against him in the literary society to which he belonged. Falling in with the wrong crowd, Mullins lamented in his diary, was almost the worst thing he felt he could have done so early in his college tenure.²⁰

By the beginning of his junior year, Mullins’s dissipated friends were making their exit from Chapel Hill. Nash had been expelled, Johnson had graduated, and Taylor would soon be dismissed for misbehavior. Mullins’s junior year therefore looked quite promising until he instigated a campus-wide prank that further diminished his popularity. In October 1840, Mullins and his friend and fellow member of the Philanthropic Society, James Delk, decided to instigate a hoax—a “sham duel.” Their friends made all the arrangements necessary for the staged duel, which promised to be a funny joke until word spread around campus; freshmen in the Dialectic Society reported to be “frightened

¹⁸ Mullins, 15 November 1840, Diary. Despite his dissipation at college, Lucius Johnson went on to become a lawyer. Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 74.

¹⁹ Mullins, 15 November 1840, Diary. See also Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 73.

²⁰ For a fictional account of a very similar story as Mullins’ see “John Bright’s Three Years in College,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Aug., 1852): 230-34.

nearly to death” at the prospect of open violence on campus. Rumors of the “sham duel” culminated in Mullins and Delk’s ultimate admission that it was a ruse. The hoax alienated Mullins from the elites of the Phi Society he so greatly admired, who viewed his dishonesty as an affront to their honor and that of the society. His classmates derided him as the “Hero of the Sham Duel,” which humiliated Mullins, prompting him to threaten anyone who ridiculed him to a duel. He wrote in his diary in November 1840, “I wish to have no trouble, but if they force me to an encounter, I shall not shrink from carrying it to extremes, even if it involves one of their lives. I will endeavour to teach certain individuals that it is not as easy to put down a student, as they may think. That this is their design, I am convinced, and I am forced in self defence [sic], to carry the war into Africa.”²¹ Indeed, Mullins carried his pistol with him on campus, though he never instigated a duel.²²

Reflecting on the “sham duel,” Mullins wrote that he learned “several important lessons.” First, delaying the hoax was “fatal.” He and Delk should have met immediately and demonstrated that all the plans were in jest. Second, he was “not sufficiently prudent” in how he handled the instigation of the hoax. Finally, and most importantly, he learned “*never to engage in such an affair again*. They can do no good—they *may* do much harm. Those who are hoaxed are apt to be offended: and those not, raise a laugh that is rather annoying. They do not produce a favourable impression of an individual’s steadiness or gravity and are well adapted to diminish respect.”²³ In short, Mullins learned about the power of cliques and the strength of notions of respect and

²¹ Mullins, 15 November 1840, Diary.

²² Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 72-76. See also Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 96.

²³ Mullins, Diary, 28 October 1840.

honor in an all-male youth culture. His humiliation as the “hero of the Sham duel” underscores the seriousness with which young southern men did, in fact, view affairs of honor. These young men could not stomach the notion of staged, nearly Barnum-esque humbugs when it came to duels because, as Kenneth Greenberg has argued, they were supposed to elevate honesty.²⁴ But Mullins’s lessons as “hero of the Sham” duel were not limited to southern tradition alone. Mullins also learned that the young men he respected, in turn, respected men who were disciplined, temperate, if not sober, industrious, and polite. In order to stake his claim in respectable elite culture, Mullins had to resist the impulses of youth and withstand the temptations to fall prey to vice and dissipation. Mullins’s participation in a campus-wide prank-turned-sour demonstrates that traditional southern notions of masculinity and newer, more mainstream values commonly associated with middle-class manhood were compatible; in fact, the latter helped men remain honorable.

As Mullins’s sham duel and Dusenbery’s story of Gooly demonstrate, students spent a considerable amount of time in private reflection and contemplation of each other’s manly and unmanly characteristics. Not escaping the scrutiny of their peers, students themselves were educational objects in the antebellum informal curriculum. For example, Mullins’s associations early in college and the affair of the sham duel followed him through college, and several of his classmates wrote derisively of him in their journals. Ruffin Tomlinson wrote in his diary that both Mullins and his roommate, Joseph Summerell, were “hateful wretches,” who “seem to bear their accustomed

²⁴ Mullins’s sham duel confirms Kenneth Greenberg’s argument in *Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8, 25, 49, 135.

malignity to me & my friends.” Mullins, he continued, “is a man – or rather boy...of considerable ability, has some attainments in literature & a great command of language.” Yet Tomlinson found in him “no redeeming quality that can serve as decoration to his acknowledged talents.” He wondered, “What is talent, what is anything, whether of learning & ability without that stamp of character which harmonizes & beautifies the actions of an individual in the eyes of respectable & honest men.”²⁵ Tomlinson’s reflection on Mullins turned into a larger reflection on the characteristics he most associated with manhood.

As with biography, discussed in the previous chapter, students’ observations of one another in relation to college life became part of a larger repertoire of cultural models and anti-models of manhood. William Mullins, in fact, wrote extensively about each member of his class in order to remember his classmates, but also to learn from their character traits:

The task I undertake shall be frankly performed and I will dare to write fully my thoughts.... When I have done, I shall recur to these pages with deep solicitude. My opinion of them then, shall likewise be given here, and I will sit in judgment on myself as well as others. I feel that may make the exercise I am commencing now, most useful to me through life, and my character can now be vastly improved, while my self-knowledge must be...increased.²⁶

Mullins especially noted his classmates who knew their way around the collegiate wilderness of sin. In describing John Davis Hawkins, for example, Mullins wrote, “He loved pleasure, and he pursued it in College, giving to that pursuit the time which of right belonged to self-improvement. Alas. He was not singular in this respect.” Despite the strikingly dismissive tone of students’ penchant for pleasure, Mullins used this entry to

²⁵ Joseph John Summerell, 08 January 1842, Diary, Joseph John Summerell Diary #5296-z, SHC, 9.

²⁶ Mullins, 14 June 1841, Diary. Emphasis in original.

contrast the realities of youth culture with the ideals of manhood that he developed at college in the formal curriculum and literary societies.

In a manner similar to Mullins, Edmund Covington wrote a seven-page “chapter” in his journal, which he entitled “My views concerning the future destiny of my classmates of the Dialectic Society.” In general, Covington offered balanced and thorough scrutiny of his classmates. He commented on their appearance, morals, intellect, and potential for success. He wrote, for instance, that Jonathan H. Clinch “has good sense – lively fancy but will waste his gifts in a career of pleasure. Not good looking at all”; A. G. Foster “affects independence”; Philemon Hawkins was “[a] fellow of very fine feelings but limited capacity for study.” Some students he simply described as “rowdy.” Covington even included commentary on himself, but written by his friend W. L. Steele: “E. D. Covington—as for him ‘nous verrous’ [we shall see]—Is a candid—sensible—good-natured-affable-sympathetic-generous—‘jeune homme.’”²⁷

By observing and interacting with their classmates, many students were also able to observe and contemplate different styles of manhood. Examples of rowdiness in a collegiate wilderness of sin prompted students to outline how those behaviors contradicted the more restrained, ideal notions of manhood to which they aspired. As Mullins and Covington suggested in their character sketches of their classmates, these ideals included the pursuit of improvement over pleasure, sensibility, sincerity, candidness, and self-knowledge through mental and moral improvement.

Students also attempted to counter the almost inherent rowdiness of college life in more social ways, by engaging in debates about dueling, drinking, and debauchery in

²⁷ Edmund Covington, undated diary entry, Edmund De Berry Covington Diary #1506-z, SHC.

their literary societies and by joining local moral reform societies. The Philanthropic and Dialectic Societies each debated dueling, for example, at least once every decade, usually coming down strongly against the practice. The Phis debates whether dueling was justifiable eight times between 1800 and 1816, never once resolving in favor of dueling. Furthermore, when anti-dueling organizations advocated that the federal government to ban the practice, many North Carolina students took up the issue in their literary society debates, agreeing that the government *should* interfere with dueling. In addition to this reform impulse, students joined local branches of the Sons of Temperance and the American Bible Society—moral reform organizations most commonly associated with northern middle-class society. These examples suggest that, no matter how rowdy campus life may have been in the antebellum period, students observed and often attempted to correct that culture by participating in activities that would promote restraint, sobriety—indeed a culture in which intellectual manhood could flourish.²⁸

Students' activities in, and reflections about, a wilderness of sin reveal how informal life on campus contributed to the broader education of male youth. No longer boys and not yet men, these students were pulled in two directions: toward rowdy boy culture on one hand and more restrained, manly culture on the other. The cross currents of these cultures created an often-volatile campus culture that presented moral obstacles

²⁸ James Vickers, Thomas Scism, Qualls, *Chapel Hill, An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Barclay Publishers, 1985), 39-42. William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 60. On the visit of a temperance lecturer, see James Hilliard Polk, 02 September 1859, Diary, Folder 1, James Hilliard Polk Diary #5259-z, SHC, 50-51; For one example of a student joining the Sons of Temperance (and his roommate's response), see Montezuma Jones to Calvin Jones, 08 March 1842, Box 2, Folder 18, Calvin Jones Papers #921, SHC. James Dusenbery took a temperance pledge. Dusenbery, 27 February 1852, Diary. See also Alfred Osborne Nicholson, "Intemperence," Senior Oration, 18 January 1827, Dialectic Society Records.

to students.²⁹ This culture was antithetical to the more restrained culture emphasized in the classroom and in student literary societies; it ran counter to the ideal of intellectual manhood. Yet experiencing that culture inspired students to reflect productively upon what would render them men. Nowhere was this tension more evident than in students' social and private sexual lives.

Sex and Intimacy in a “Wilderness of Sin”

As Dusenbery's tale about Gooly reveals, the collegiate wilderness of sin was characterized by a fixation on sex and intimacy.³⁰ Students engaged in parallel informal curricula in sex and courtship that taught them how to think about and interact with women according to the expectations of elite society. On the one hand, many students actively participated in an informal curriculum of prostitution, casual, and sometimes coercive sex. On the other hand, many of those same students who visited brothels on the weekends regularly participated in another informal curriculum that prepared them for formal courtship rituals. In dancing and singing schools, picnics, visiting parties, balls and formal courtship, students learned to act the part of gentlemen and demonstrate, genteel conduct, manners, and chastity, regardless of whether they possessed those values. In each setting, students were very much on their own to make decisions about coming of age, sexual behavior, and intimacy. And as they participated in these parallel

²⁹ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), esp. chap. 3.

³⁰ In addition to Mullins's description of raping the “common negro prostitute,” Ruffin Tomlinson noted visiting prostitutes in his diary, 13 October 1841, 22 January and 10 February 1842. Mullins also referred to a local woman known to satisfy students' “sexual needs.” See Mullins, 12 October 1841, Diary. See also, Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor at Chapel Hill,” 260-65.

curricula in the wilderness of sin, they reflected on these experiences emotionally and intellectually.

For James Dusenbery and his friends, for example, interactions with prostitutes comprised a significant part of his regular social life while at college. During his senior year, Dusenbery described frequent visits to places where he found illicit sex: “the depot,” “the fishery,” and “the kingdom.” These locations for illicit sexual behavior also appear in connection with females, with whom he described having had sex during his senior year—Em, Miss Redness (or Red), and the “Herring gals.” Dusenbery frequently visited two of these women, Red and Em, whose identities are uncertain, and he seemed to have had on-going and simultaneous sexual relationships with them. “I slept at the ‘Kingdom’ on Thursday night & did not get back to prayers to next morning. Miss Redness was in fine spirits.” The next week he counted three visits to the depot, followed by a visit to Red. “On Friday night Em was from home,” he wrote, and “Red & I passed a...glorious night in her bed.”³¹

Occasionally these trips to “the Kingdom” were social, and sometimes in groups consisting of more than ten students. “Taking Em with us,” Dusenbery wrote as he recalled a trip to the fishery in August 1841, we struck into the woods & half hour’s hard walking brought us to the fishery.... The object of the excursion was to have a real, downright bull-dance with the Herring gals & as many others as we could get together at that place.” Dusenbery, with more than twenty other young men and women “all crowded into the little cabin.... Every man stripped to his shirt & trowsers,” danced until midnight, when the cabin had become too suffocating to dance any longer. Dusenbery

³¹ Dusenbery, 13 and 20 March 1842, Diary.

“was so overcome with sleep & lassitude” that he went to bed, but his friends stayed awake and engaged in “mysterious proceedings...during the dark hours of that ever memorable night.” Though Dusenbery did not describe the events that transpired while he slept, his conclusion, “Let a veil forever cover them,” was enough explanation for Dusenbery.³²

This night in the cabin was not an isolated incident. The next month, Dusenbery penned a second chapter to “First Chronicles,” in which he exposed the illicit sex that occurred at the house of “a certain blind man whose name was Edward,” who had a “daughter, who was a harlot...exceeding comely & fair to look upon, insomuch that she filled the whole land with her whoredoms & abominations.” This girl had fallen in love with “a young man of renown, whose name was Reuben” (read Dusenbery). “In the beginning of the ninth month, even the month Elul,” the story goes, this harlot had sent her sister’s son, “Levi,” to deliver a message to Reuben: ‘Why tarriest thou Reuben? Why comest thou not unto me? My thoughts wait on thee continually. All the day long, am I disquieted concerning thee & in the night time, sleep cometh not to mine eyes, neither slumber to mine eyelids, because of thee. Return though then unto me, O Reuben.’” So Reuben got together his friends Rufus, “the mighty songster” and “Gabriel, who bloweth the trumpet,” and took “a full measure of wine” for the harlot’s father, and “came to the house of Edward” where “they found there two of the damsels,” but the

³² Dusenbery, Diary, 01 August 1841, SHC. Dusenbery left campus with two friends, Joseph P. Nelms of Anson County, NC; and James Augustus Caldwell of Morganton, N.C. They met eight others at the depot: John London Meares of Wilmington, N.C.; Thomas Owen Davis Walker of Wilmington, N.C.; Stephen Sneed Green of Chapel Hill, N.C.; John Cowan of Wilmington, N.C.; Philemon Benjamin Hawkins of Franklin County, N.C.; Leonard Henderson of Granville County, N.C.; and possibly John Baptist Smith of Granville County, N.C.; and George W. Henderson of Mobile, A.L. These young men were juniors and seniors at the university. Erika Lindemann, "Introduction," *The James Lawrence Dusenbery Journal*, unpublished essay, 2007.

third, intended for Gabriel was ill, and Gabriel “threw himself on the ground & grieved sore.” But when Edward’s daughter saw Reuben, “she ran & met him & fell upon his neck & kissed him.” Reuben “embraced her & comforted her all night long.” Likewise, Rufus, spent the night with the other woman, or in Dusenbery’s language: “He prevailed with her & solaced himself in her arms all the night long. She was unto him as the loving hind & the pleasing roe; her breasts did satisfy him at all times & he was ravished always with her love.”³³

Contrary to some historians’ arguments that young southern men did not visit prostitutes to the extent that northern youth did, Dusenbery and his friends may have found in prostitution an opportunity for what C. Dallett Hemphill calls an “apprenticeship in the sex...young men anticipated in marriage.”³⁴ Patricia Cline Cohen has argued that a New York prostitute, Hellen Jewett, sustained relationships with middle-class men—they wrote love letters and playacted courtship. Cohen argues that this sort of fantasy courtship ritual between a prostitute and her clients provided an “alternative intimate relationship, unburdened by the strictures and restraints of bourgeois courtship” and was, therefore, “an apprentice courtship.” Broadly speaking, these relationships were educational insofar as they provided practice in sexual intimacy before marriage without violating elite sexual mores calling for restraint.³⁵

³³ Dusenbery, Diary, 12 September 1841, SHC. One of Dusenbery’s companions was Rufus Clay Barringer (1821-1895) of Cabarrus County, NC, but “Gabriel” remains unidentifiable in the manuscript as well as in student records.

³⁴ C. Dallett Hemphill, “Isaac and ‘Isabella’: Courtship and Conflict in an Antebellum Circle of Youth,” *Early American Studies* 2 (2004), 412-418; esp. 434.

³⁵ Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 95. On the position that prostitution was uncommon, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 262-324, esp. 297; Glover, *Southern Sons*, 126-31. Documented examples of visiting prostitutes at the University of North Carolina in faculty records alone refute this point. See Faculty Meeting Minutes, 14 March 1803, General Faculty and Faculty Council of

Students did not have sustained sexual relations with black women as they seemed to have had with lower-class white prostitutes, suggesting that the informal curriculum in sex reinforced male sexual privilege and southern notions of caste and class. In 1840, for example, a formidable group of sophomore “rowdies” organized a club and initiated a month-long series of pranks, or sprees. The “Soph Rebellion,” as students came to call it, consisted of stealing professors’ horses, removing their tails and painting them, pouring oil over the chapel pulpit, and smearing the building with paint. The rebellious lot even “blackened themselves” and went to a local “negro house,” where they “seized Suky Mayhs, a common negro prostitute, tore off her clothes, and painted her naked body!!!” In other words, students assaulted, perhaps raped, a local slave woman. Their behavior provoked “universal indignation among the Gentlemen of the College” as well as the faculty; the culprits were ultimately expelled from the university.³⁶ Despite the condemnation of the students’ behavior, these examples demonstrate that casual, and even coercive sex was often excused among male youth because the women with whom they were having sex were either lower-class or slaves.

When it came to students’ pursuit of relationships with elite white women, especially in the context of courtship, students received an altogether different education: they were taught to restrain their sexual desire. In courtship and in marriage, men were

the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records, 1799-2002, UA; Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina, 24 March 1810; Faculty Meeting Minutes, 02 June 1829, 16 April 1839, 04 September 1854, 08 March 1856, UA. The reach of sexual commerce in the North and in the South expanded from cities into more rural locations in the nineteenth century, and Chapel Hill was no exception. See, John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 50-52, 130-38, esp. 133. In terms of prostitution, Dusenbery and his classmates more closely resemble the middle-class northern youth described in Frisch, “Youth Culture in America,” 211-37 and in Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 117. Most prostitutes in southern towns were white. See Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1984), 179.

³⁶ Mullins, Dairy, 30 October 1840 and 01 November 1840, SHC. Emphasis in original.

supposed to—and many did—see sexual intimacy as a matter of a sacred fulfillment of romantic love. When describing a young woman walking by him, one student wrote, “The form that flitted by me fairy-like haunts my dream even while here. It is like a gentle spirit that hovers near me – solaces my little sorrows and brightens my joys – forms a golden link of hopeful anticipation between the present and the future.”³⁷

Ethereal and pure, elite women seemed far less attainable, sexually, than poor or black women. Moreover, elite women were expected to tame and restrain the sexual impulses that were typically characterized as masculine in the nineteenth century. “What is man without woman?” another student questioned. “If for nothing else, we ought to cherish, honor & respect them as being the origin of our existence as sensitive [sic] beings.... Who can be ignorant that it is mostly to them we owe the subjection of our angry passions & the softening our dispositions with the mildness & tenderness. But those points need not be insisted on since they must be so evident to every man who has the common feelings of our species.”³⁸ For many southern men, as Stephen Berry has argued, “the gulf between their baser urges and their belief in woman’s unassailable purity proved a vexing, almost maddening problem.”³⁹ Young men, therefore, believed in the purity of women, but meeting the demands of protecting that purity with a restraint of their own sexual impulses was something they had to learn as youth.

There were many informal institutions in place at college to teach students restraint. In the 1840s, unmarried “ladies” from the village, who frequently visited campus, attended lectures (though they were not allowed to enroll in the university),

³⁷ Covington, 12 October 1841, Diary. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ Summerell, 19 January 1842, Diary.

³⁹ Berry, *All That Makes a Man*, 118.

frequented literary society libraries, and participated (though not aloud) in prayer and church services. Students almost always marked these occasions in their diaries. James Dusenbery observed, “several young ladies of the village were present” in lecture one day in 1841, and he recalled, “The Dr. remarked that we could pay no higher compliment to a young lady than to call her an Electro-Magnet.”⁴⁰ Students anticipated women’s attendance at lecture and delighted in their appearance. Joseph Summerell remembered one chemistry lecture “where we had all the fair faces that C. Hill can afford to add brilliancy & interest to our studies especially as these lectures are otherwise so dry.”⁴¹ At social gatherings, singing and dancing classes, parties, opossum suppers, balls, picnics after church, local revivals, young men learned to carry themselves in the presence of “ladies.” They learned to address women, to dance with them, to escort them, to cherish them, and to protect them.

Visiting was also a popular social activity among students, and older friends sometimes initiated younger students as soon as they arrived at college. William Mullins remembered his friend Richard Pearson, who was “passionately fond of the Ladies and with him I made my debut in visiting on the Hill.”⁴² Typically students visited young women in pairs or in groups, and if the acquaintance was strong, they visited individually. “Went to see the ladies,” wrote John Summerell in his diary in 1842, and “found them in good humor & quite fussy—enjoyed myself much [—] So much that without any knowledge of the flight of time I remained until ten o’clock—much later

⁴⁰ Dusenbery, 10 October 1841, Diary. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ Summerell, 19 January 1842, Diary, 23.

⁴² Mullins, 29 September 1841, Diary

than I usually stay.”⁴³ Antebellum students visited women from the communities, including the eligible daughters of professors such as Elisha Mitchell’s daughter, Ellen, and James Phillips’ daughter, Cornelia. Under the close scrutiny of parents, these formal visits emphasized genteel conduct and deference to authority.⁴⁴

Students often wrote about these social events in their diaries, where they sometimes articulated their growing awareness of sexuality, including sexual desire. William Mullins, for example, enjoyed meeting all the girls at one ball in the summer of 1841. “I had taken a full glass of wine at the Ball,” he recalled, and “I flirted with all of them.”⁴⁵ But students did not need to drink wine at balls to arouse their desire for women. In that same summer, Mullins went to his regular singing school class, and a girl in attendance whom he admired, Ellen Mitchell, daughter of Professor Elisha Mitchell, gave him flowers. “I had not seen a flower in so long a time before,” Mullins wrote, “that the poetry of my feelings was so completely aroused, and I felt in the very humor of making love to the whole female sex.”⁴⁶ Edmund Covington, too, used his diary to note a memorable occasion of arousal. “Saw a young lady this Evening who...bowed to me and sweetly smiled and to whom, if I am so fortunate as to—ever become intimately acquainted with her I will show this record.” He then elaborated that “meeting with the ladies always throws me into—perspiration which promotes health, so it is no harm to look at them.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Summerell, 6 January 1841, Diary.

⁴⁴ On visiting local women, see Battle, *History*, 566, 597, 311.

⁴⁵ Mullins, 03 June 1841, Diary.

⁴⁶ Mullins, Diary, 09 August 1841.

⁴⁷ Covington, 12 October 1841, Diary. Emphasis in original.

Antebellum students enjoyed meeting and socializing with many women, but students generally were not in a hurry to begin a serious courtship and they did not believe they were mature enough even to entertain the idea of marrying. “I want my College course to end so I may go home and live with my Mother,” explained Ruffin Tomlinson. “I don’t think I will get married in several years after I leave College & not then unless I can get the girl I want.”⁴⁸ Casual courting, therefore, constituted most of students’ romantic affairs with young women during college. Students commonly sustained brief romances with young women in the community, or on vacations at home, but these were usually not serious relationships. Instead of serious courtship, young men courted many women with the hope of finding an ideal woman whom they might wish to marry.

When it came to expressing romantic feelings to women in written love letters, students were often timid because they feared rejection of their candid sentiments. Ruffin Tomlinson, for instance, had professed his love for a professor’s daughter, Cornelia Phillips, in his diary for an entire year, but he never initiated communication with her. Even after he had written her a love letter, he chose not to send it and, instead, copied it into his diary. Similarly, Edmund Covington, spent a great deal of time making plans in his diary to send a young woman a love letter—“cupid’s arrow,” as he called it—and after he sent the letter, he did not write anything else about either it or the woman. Instead, he preferred to write poetry to women in his diary, which he never delivered.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson,” 109

⁴⁹ Sanders, ed., “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson,” 254-55. Covington, 20 October 1841, Diary. I see young men’s interactions with women substantially as Joseph Kett has described them. “If ‘dating,’” he argues, “is defined as social meetings between young people of opposite sex who have no intention to marry, then it is a more accurate term than ‘courtship’ to describe social engagements in the early 19th century.” See *Rites of Passage*, 42. Conrad Wright has called this sort of intimacy “casual

Students often used poetry to communicate their feelings to local women. The *North Carolina University Magazine* served as an important medium for flirtation and informal courtship. Nearly every issue of the *Magazine* contained poetry anonymously dedicated to local women, including “TO MISS.....of O.....,” “To Jennie,” “To Miss ***** of C.H.,” and “Lines Respectfully to Miss M. E. M. of Pittsboro.”⁵⁰ One poem, “To Miss--,” reveals the poeticism of students’ courtship experiences. The author, “Claude,” writing in a lofty tone, used pastoral images to evoke chivalry and romantic love:

At early dawn, we've often strayed
Along the meadows green,
At summer's eve, beneath the shades,
The lovely flowers to glean.

We've sat beneath the old elm-tree,
Upon our mossy seat;
Those same old tunes so dear to me,
We sang in chorus sweet.

We've chased the golden butterfly
As he skipped from flower to flower,
And plucked the buds to beautify
Thy curls, from hour to hour.

While sitting round the cheerful hearth,
Our bosoms knew no care;

courtship” in his study of eighteenth-century Harvard students. *Revolutionary Generation: Harvard Men and the Consequences of Independence* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 72-75. Ellen Rothman’s distinction between “courtship” and “courting” applies nicely to college students’ relationships with women. See her, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). In most cases, men and women did not even reach the “pre-commitment” phase of courtship that Karen Lystra has described in *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 190-91. Students’ diaries and letters, rather, confirm Hemphill’s argument that young men at this age were more comfortable in a casual courtship until they finished college and could secure independence in a profession. Hemphill, “Isaac and ‘Isabella,’” 412-418; esp. 434.

⁵⁰ *The North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Mar., 1852): 61, 6; Vol. 1, No. 7 (Sept., 1852): 305; Vol. 2, No. 6 (Aug. 1853): 295; Vol. 2, No. 7 (Sept., 1853): 337.

The hours flew by in thoughtless mirth,
And each seemed what we were...⁵¹

So prevalent were such poems, in fact, that readers complained about the printed displays of affection in the literary magazine, and the editors had to respond to their complaints.

“If a girl is to be courted,” they wrote in 1852, “why not court her through the medium of the press?”⁵²

Students wrote frequently about courtship in their literary magazine as well, demonstrating students’ reflectiveness toward and intellectual engagement with the social aspects of their lives. In a fictional story in an 1852 number of the *Magazine*, “Something About Courtship, To Wind Up With Zeb Starkey’s Trial and Confession,” for instance, students used a story about one young man’s courtship to discourse on the merits and demerits of courtship as an institution. The authors argued that formal courtship had many “gross defects,” including too many parties involved, slowness of the process, and “the uncertainty of its operation.” Given that much courtship at college involved visiting, formal arrangements, or meeting young women during vacation and then corresponding with them, many of these defects were quite real. Despite the barriers to intimacy, however, some students did maintain meaningful relationships with women that influenced their moral and even intellectual development at college.

The Reality and Fiction of Sex: James Dusenbery’s Diary

James Lawrence Dusenbery’s experiences at North Carolina in the 1840s demonstrate how students dealt with these two conflicting attitudes about sex and

⁵¹ *The North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Feb., 1852): 13.

⁵² *The North Carolina University Magazine*, No. 1, Vol. 6 (Aug., 1852): 245.

developed their attitudes about women, courtship, and intimacy. James Lawrence Dusenbery was born on December 14, 1821 in Rowan County, North Carolina. The eldest son of Henry Rounsavall Dusenbery (1794-1852) and Lydia Davis (1797-1857), Dusenbery attended the Caldwell Institute, a private academy in Greensboro, North Carolina and matriculated at the University of North Carolina in 1839, when he was eighteen years old. Dusenbery was certainly privileged—perhaps even typical of the well-off students who attended the University of North Carolina in the first half of the nineteenth century. His father was a successful planter, tanner, and merchant, who owned a sizeable plantation and at least twenty-three slaves at the time his eldest son entered the freshman class at North Carolina in 1839. Dusenbery’s father participated in civic affairs as a postmaster, justice of the peace, and a founding member of the First Presbyterian Church (1827) in Lexington, North Carolina. The Dusenberys lived in a beautiful eight-room house, and one of their neighbors was a prominent Lexington physician and planter. James Dusenbery had three brothers and three sisters, each of whom became well educated. Most of what we know about James Dusenbery comes from only a few documents from his student days in Chapel Hill, especially the diary he kept between 1841 and 1842, his senior year at the University of North Carolina.⁵³

Dusenbery’s diary—an eight by nine and one-quarter inch cardboard and leather volume—serves as a window into a literary world in which one student decided who he was and who he wished to become. Spanning more than one hundred forty-one pages, the diary contains three distinct sections: a commonplace book, “*Liber carminum et fragmentorum*” [a Book of songs and excerpts]; a journal, or “Record of my Senior Year

⁵³ Erika Lindemann, “Introduction,” *The James Lawrence Dusenbery Journal*, unpublished essay, 2007. The Dusenbery name has been spelled in three ways in the primary and secondary literature—Dusenberry, Dusenbery, and Dusenbury—but the family preferred Dusenbery.

at the University of NCA”); and a brief letterbook with correspondence with “Mary S.,” whom he courted casually that year. These sections are woven together with threads of poems, songs, and literary quotations that Dusenbery purposefully selected.

One of the most prevalent themes in Dusenbery’s diary is his quest for the ideal woman. He described this quest in a story about his journey to Chapel Hill from his home in Lexington, North Carolina. The last summer of his youth had ended, Dusenbery explained, and he was saddened at the thought of leaving his friends, relatives, and three women he had courted during the summer. Each of the three women had given him a flower as a token of their affections, and he named two of the flowers in their honor, Sarah and Elvira. Along the way to Chapel Hill, the pot holding Sarah and Elvira broke, causing the plants to die. The third plant, “the one with out name,” however, “escaped uninjured amid the wreck of the matter.” The lone survivor “stands in all the pride of conscious beauty & seems to look down in scorn upon its less fortunate companions.” Dusenbery insisted that the death of Sarah and Elvira was an “omen,” which he believed indicated that only the most “uninjured,” or virginal, woman was suitable for marriage. “Neither Sarah or Elvira is ever likely to be mine for weal or woe,” he complained and continued, “I have never yet seen a woman who resembles my ideal model of female perfection.... Until I find one who can enchain my roving desires & fix them on herself alone, my surviving hydrangea shall remain without a name.” Until that time, he promised only to “cherish & guard” the surviving, nameless plant in the place of his “fair incognita.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Dusenbery, 17 July 1841, Diary.

For Dusenbery, poetry created a fictive world in which to explore his emerging gender identity. He spent hours perusing books for passages that idealized the chaste and virtuous women whom he and his classmates aspired to find. For example, his commonplace book opens with “The Knight of the golden crest,” a popular song, which tells of a “knight returned to his princely halls,/ From the wars of the holy land.” When the knight returned he waved a “silken scarf” that she had given him, “which in earlier days she wove,/ When he breathed his vows in the twilight shade,/ And was blest with her maiden love.” Similarly, he also transcribed the poem, “Lochinvar,” from Sir Walter Scott’s *Marmion* (1808), which narrates the story of a knight, “so faithful in love and so dauntless in war,” who rushed from the battlefield to his homeland to rescue his “fair Ellen,” who, in his absence, had been promised to “a laggard in love, and a dastard in war.” Lochinvar arrives on the wedding night to claim his “lost love,” who “look’d down to blush, and she look’d up to sigh,/With a smile on her lips and a tear in her eye./He took her soft hand, ere her mother could bar,” and he carries her away from the castle, never to return.⁵⁵

Lochinvar and the knight of the golden crest embodied what Dusenbery imagined himself to be—“the good & gallant knight, Sir James,” who promised to “do his devoir” on behalf of “fair & injured damosels [sic].” He frequently described his social life in terms of chivalry and honor. On Easter Sunday in 1842, for instance, he escorted Eliza Holt from church, but rather than simply report that he did so, he described himself as “the gallant cavalier who rode by Miss—Eliza’s palfrey.” Similarly, when Dusenbery went out in a thunderstorm to have sex with a local prostitute, Mary, whom he visited

⁵⁵ Dusenbery, 12 September 1841, Diary.

frequently, he portrayed himself as a gallant knight: “My journey thither on Friday night was an undertaking worthy of the famous knight of La Mancha.” Imagining himself as Don Quixote helped Dusenbery create a cavalier identity for himself, which he derived from his private reading.⁵⁶

Yet, literature also allowed Dusenbery to explore his baser sexual urges. Dusenbery transcribed many poems and folk songs that reflected a fascination with women and sex. The fifth poem in Dusenbery’s diary, for instance, Thomas Moore’s “Fanny Was in the Grove” (1808), tells the story of a daring boy, Lubin, who seduces his beloved, Fanny, in a grove with a kiss. After kissing, they unknowingly

...wandered beneath the shade;
Her eye was dim’d with a tear;
For ah! the poor little maid,
Was thrilling with love and fear.
oh! oh! if Lubin would but sue,
oh! oh! what could Fanny do?

If Lubin “would but sue,” that is if he pressed for sex, Fanny certainly would give in to his advances. But what would Dusenbery do? In the poem, these questions are more suggestive than they are rhetorical, which is precisely why Dusenbery, who enjoyed the subtle witticisms of double entendre, may have copied the poem. Moreover, the poem’s bucolic imagery suggests precisely the type of behavior that Dusenbery applauded in his mock epic about Gooly and his not-so-mighty tribe of freshmen. Dusenbery’s story about Gooly abounds with similar images of desire, arousal, and intercourse in the description of the wilderness setting, which recur throughout poems in Dusenbery’s commonplace book. In his deployment of the poem about Lubin and Fanny, as in his

⁵⁶ Dusenbery, 28 March and 06 March 1842, Diary. Other poems that Dusenbery copied into his journal extolled chivalry, including those titled “Sally Roy,” “Ellen Douglas” of Scott’s *Lady of the Lake*, “The Fall of D’Assas,” “The Fall of Tecumseh,” and the “Suliotte Mother,” and “Casabianca.” Lindemann, “Introduction,” *The James Lawrence Dusenbery Journal*, unpublished essay, 2007. 17-18.

satire of Gooly and the mighty men, Dusenbery presented his desire to be a roving, frolicsome male. Perhaps not desirous of exclusive courtship, *per se*, Dusenbery was certainly eager to romp beneath a shade tree.⁵⁷

These two seemingly contradictory impulses toward restrained and unrestrained sexuality came into conflict for Dusenbery sometime in 1841, when he met a “very pretty little country girl,” the “loving, languid, black-eyed Mary,” and began to court her. Shortly before he left his Lexington home to begin his senior year at the University of North Carolina, he opened his diary and reflected on the romantic evenings he spent with Mary that summer. He lingered on one kiss that left him wonderstruck and aroused. Dusenbery and Mary had sat side-by-side at her father’s home (while the rest of the family slept), he recalled, when Mary “pressed her willing lips to mine.” To enhance the memory of the kiss, he transcribed the following verses in his diary:

In linked sweetness, long drawn out;
I thought to myself, if it were not a sin,
I could teach her the prettiest trick in the world:
For oft as we mingled our legs & our feet
I felt a pulsation & cannot tell whether
In hers or in mine—but I know it was sweet
And I think we both felt it & trembled together.

These verses begin with a line from Milton’s *L’Allegro* (1631): “And ever against eating cares/ Lap me in soft Lydian airs,/ Married to immortal verse,/ Such as the meeting soul may pierce,/ In notes with many a winding bout/ Of linked sweetness long drawn out.” While Milton’s original verses describe the “sweetness” of creating poetry, Dusenbery chose to alter their original meaning by adding several lines from Thomas Moore’s ballad, “Fanny of Timmol” (1812), which describes the pleasure of sexual experience.

⁵⁷ Dusenbery, undated, Diary.

Mary's body pulsed against his; their intertwining legs, feet, and bodies trembled as they kissed. The style of day-to-day journalizing could not convey Dusenbery's feelings adequately, but poetry provided an expressive form for his memories of, and desires for, sexual intimacy.⁵⁸

Poetry also gave form to Dusenbery's frustration with the social expectations for male responsibility in courtship that kept him from having sex with Mary. Regardless of his desire to have sex with her, Mary was neither "Red" nor "Em," with whom having sex was mere sport. Instead, Mary was "as virtuous & chaste as most girls are." Again, he found that Thomas Moore best explained his hesitancy to have sex:

By heaven! I would rather forever forswear
The Elysium dwells on a beautiful breast;
Than alarm for a moment the peace that is there,
Or banish the dove from so hallowed a nest.

Dusenbery rarely thought about Mary without wanting to commit "the unpardonable sin against love & gallantry." His "passions" were "unused to restraint," as he complained, but he still wished to be Mary's great protector; to be so was his chivalric duty. Thus Dusenbery refused ever to "abuse that love" between Mary and him. "Sir James" therefore "quelled the tumultuous passions that were raging in my breast" because of his obligation to preserve her virginity.⁵⁹ Of course, this did not stop Dusenbery from dreaming.

In folk ballads and poetry, Dusenbery found an alternate world in which sex with Mary was possible. Between two entries about his relationship with Mary while they

⁵⁸ Dusenbery, Diary, 24 July 1841, SHC. John Milton, *L'Allegro*, *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (Harlow, England and New York: Longman, 2007), 143-144; Thomas Moore, "Fanny of Timmol: A Mail-Coach Adventure," *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore* (1812).

⁵⁹ Dusenbery, 24 July 1841, Diary.

courted in the fall of 1841, Dusenbery copied verses, which he simply titled “Song” that expressed his desires for Mary. He cited no author, for it was probably a popular folk song among students at the time. The song, ostensibly narrated by a young man, is all about the kind of sex that Dusenbery wanted to have with Mary, but would not for fear of making her unchaste: In the beautiful month of May, the song goes, a “damsel, beautiful & gay” goes to the shore of a river and, noticing that no one is looking, pulls off her clothes and jumps into the water. The narrator, a nearby voyeur, watches her from a distance as she swims on her back. He “manfully” pulls off his clothes, and jumps into the water after her. The young pair’s behavior did not stop at skinny-dipping, but ended with sex as the following verses that Dusenbery transcribed suggest:

She gave a shove & down she dove
He brought her up again,
He carried her over to the other shore,
O! then, O! then, O! then.

Fol, da diddle &&c

O God! said she I am undone,
Unless you’ll marry me,
Before to-morrow’s rising sun
Shines on me & thee

Fol d diiddle &&

As the song concludes, the narrator promises that the two will “join our hands in Hymen’s bands/Get married, & do it again.” Unrestrained passions, sex out of wedlock, frolicking in the fertile spring—Dusenbery explored many of his favorite fantasies by writing about a young man and woman who fornicate along the riverbed.⁶⁰

As much as he wrote about his attraction to Mary and thought about having sex with her, Dusenbery was quite ambivalent about their relationship. “Though I do not

⁶⁰ Dusenbery, 24-31 October 1841, Diary.

really love her,” he admitted, “there’s none I would rather be kissing than Mary.” One reason for this ambivalence may have stemmed from his sexual frustration in not having sex with Mary. Adding to this frustration was news that Mary’s family might move to Illinois. When Mary wrote to him about the possibility, Dusenbery rejected the letter saying, “I shall not answer her letter, that she may think herself neglected & banish all thoughts of me from her memory.” Yet the following month he was eager to see her. “I shall probably see her next vacation,” he wrote, “If so I tremble for her virtue.” His ambivalence toward Mary stemmed from the combined burdens of Mary’s possible move to Illinois and having to control his sexual urges out of respect for her chastity, when all he wanted to do was have sex with her.

Perhaps this situation worked best for Dusenbery. He could continue to socialize with eligible women of his class during vacations in his hometown and maintain sexual ties with local prostitutes in Chapel Hill at the same time. In other words, Dusenbery could indulge his desire to be a chivalrous knight on the one hand, and explore the wilderness of sin on the other. Dusenbery’s diary shows how this back-and-forth occurred. Moreover, writing also helped Dusenbery mitigate, psychologically at least, the sexual and social tensions that were manifested in his casual relationship with Mary. His writing—as well as his relationships—alternated between salacious and romantic and provided intellectual forms of expression for his conflicting attitudes about his responsibility toward women, his sexual desires, and his apprehensions about romantic intimacy.⁶¹

⁶¹ Dusenbery, 31 July, 12 September, 24 October 1841, Diary. See also Lindemann, “Introduction,” 19-20.

Dusenbery never found his “fair incognita.” He was graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1842 and continued his studies as a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania. He first practiced medicine in 1845 in his hometown of Lexington, but soon thereafter moved to Statesville, North Carolina to continue his career, where he penned the final entry in his diary. “I commenced the study of medicine on, I think, the last day of June 1842,” he reminisced, “& took the degree of MD. At the University of Pennsylvania on the 4th of April [18]45. I hung out my shingle in my native town of Lexington early in the month of June following. About the middle of Jan. [18]46 I went to Statesville.” He continued to correspond with “Miss Mary S.,” through 1848, and they became engaged for a short time in that year, but Mary ultimately broke off the engagement when she discovered that Dusenbery’s father opposed their marriage. After the engagement ended, Dusenbery copied some of his correspondence with her into the final pages of his journal. On 25 April 1848 she wrote, “I hope you do not think I have forgotten you—no I love you the same as ever but we can do nothing but love; I am compelled to send your notes back, but will you permit me to keep the ring—you may have mine & keep it while you live. Look at it often and think of Mary.” During the Civil War, Dusenbery was a surgeon in the Confederate army and, after having survived the war, he served as a member of the board of trustees for the University of North Carolina from 1874 to 1877. He died on February 24, 1886, never having married, and is buried in the Lexington City Cemetery in Lexington, North Carolina. We have no record of whether he returned the ring, or thought of Mary at all.⁶²

⁶² Dusenbery, undated, Diary. Emphasis in original. Daniel Lindsay Grant, ed., *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina, 1795-1924* (Durham, N.C.: Christian and King Printing Company, 1924), 175, 447; MS Census of 1850, N.C., Iredell County, Sch. 1, 481; MS Census of 1860, S.C., Marion County, Sch. 1, 131; MS Census of 1870, S.C., Marion County, Sch. 1, 92.

A Struggle for Restraint: William S. Mullins

The wilderness of sin that amused James Dusenbery caused others considerable grief, especially Dusenbery's classmate, William Mullins, the often ridiculed "hero of the Sham Duel." Unlike Dusenbery, who adopted biblical language to write his "roving desires" into being, Mullins used biblical language to create a chaste and sober life. Between 1840 and 1841, Mullins focused on sins of excess that were inimical to intellectual manhood, including drinking, swearing, as we have already seen, and masturbating. Mullins recorded in his diary several occasions on which he masturbated during his junior year at North Carolina. He masturbated regularly, it seems, and he described his habit as a "deadly vice" that he struggled to shake off." For instance, he sometimes described his habits in terms of pollution and filth. "Vile habits," he wrote held a "debasing" and "desperate grasp" on his hardened, "polluted heart."⁶³ Throughout the year he wrote vaguely of a "calamity" and "irremediable sin" that enslaved him to his passions. He viewed these vague vices as stumbling blocks to his maturation.

Mullins knew that his impulses needed restraint if he were to arrive at manhood. So he prayed often for grace and wrote his prayers in his journal, demonstrating a strong commitment to evangelical moral discipline as a tool for self-formation. In reflecting on the "dissipation and shameful wickedness" of his first two and a half years at college, "the deliberate wickedness, repeated crimes, and knowing refusals to do right," he could not bear to "enumerate the countless daily violations of Gods most holy law." Instead, he

⁶³ Mullins, 13 June, 08 August, and 02 September 1841. Mullins's language fits the language of "self-pollution," or masturbation. See Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 222. On masturbation in men's diaries see Brian D. Carroll, "'I indulged my desire too freely': Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Sin of Self-Pollution in the Diary of Joseph Moody, 1720-1724," *William and Mary Quarterly* LX (January 2003), 158.

wrote a prayer: Oh! Lord!” he begged, “have mercy on me. Wicked as I have been, I am not too vile for the Saviour’s blood to cleanse me, and through the merits of that blood, I implore thee to subdue my heart and transform it. Oh! Holy Spirit, visit me and abide with me continually, and by thy agency, let me be numbered among the just made perfect.”⁶⁴ For God to subdue his heart, Mullins believed he had to write as if he were in direct dialogue with God. Yet he also believed he needed to do more than pray. He also believed he had to restrain his passions through devotional reading of Scripture and church attendance. He had to play an active role in his own moral improvement.

Devotional reading of scripture was a key religious practice in Mullins’s quest for restraint. He set nighttime aside for “solemn reflection” and private religious practices, which included reading the Bible before he “retire[d] to bed.” He hoped that this practice would “have a beneficial effect on my conduct, and will give a healthy, religious tone to all my thoughts and feelings.” Even though students were required to attend daily prayer services and weekly Bible recitations and worship services, Mullins needed more to fight vice and dissipation, to restrain his impulses.⁶⁵

This devotional life seemed to make it easy for Mullins to imagine his quest for restraint in epic proportions. Like the great men whom he praised for their strength and courage in responses to biography, Mullins too could win battles, achieve victory, and win the praise of others by distinguishing himself as sober, temperate, and virtuous. For instance, when writing about his plans for self-reformation Mullins described himself as a Christian soldier preparing for battle, “girding on the armour, destined to be my defence [sic] and support in life.” He promised to “direct every action” first to “the acquirement

⁶⁴ Mullins, 08 August 1841, Diary.

⁶⁵ Mullins, 07 March and 14 February 1841, Diary.

of an unalterable habit of perseverance” and second, “to the habit of close attention.” In other words, he vowed to use the mental skills of intellectual manhood, of the well-balanced mind, to right his conduct. But he did not stop there. He also promised to pursue “sound practical piety,” and “adopt” the Christian Religion “as the rule of my life, the charter of my hopes, the god of my life.” Devotion to Christ, he believed, would allow him to “bid defiance to all opposition.”⁶⁶

Notions of armor and defense, habit and persistence, labor and attention call to mind St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, in which a Christian’s battle is fought against the “world of darkness” and “the evil spirits in the regions above.” Victory over evil, Paul writes, requires a man to “put on the armor of God,” the “breastplate” of justice, the “helmet of salvation,” and the “sword of the spirit.” Mullins, who had been brought up in a strict Methodist church and who attended weekly Bible recitations at college, would have been very familiar with Paul’s exhortations for Christians to persevere against evil. This biblical language seemed to work for Mullins, who found empowerment in faith to overcome the most formidable vices in his own life—drinking, swearing, and his so-called deadly vice. In the spirit of Paul, Mullins donned Christian armor, and marched against youthful passions.⁶⁷

Church was another essential element of Mullins’s self-improvement plan. He viewed Sunday church services, albeit required, as sources for contemplation and personal growth. In fact, he vowed to make an effort to attend extra Sunday services, usually at the Chapel of the Cross, in order to forward his self-improvement scheme.

⁶⁶ Mullins, 08 January 1841, Diary.

⁶⁷ For the Pauline discourse on Christian soldiers, see Eph. 6: 10-17. See also Is. 11:5 and 59: 16-18; Wis. 5: 17-23; Phil. 3: 14; 1 Tm. 6:12; Heb. 12:1; Cor. 9:24. On martial Christianity in the Early Republic, see Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 234-5, 245, 317-18n45.

“For the poor, trembling sinner,” he wrote in his diary, “there is no better time to turn from the evil of his way.” At church, Mullins “felt sensations almost strangers to my breast, since I have been a member of college.” He wished that such feelings “were habitual residents” within him. “And though the immediate effect [of religion] may soon pass off,” he was grateful that “its traces remain[ed]” and allowed him “always [to] have a humble and a better heart.” Church, in other words, helped Mullins to renew his commitment to suppress his impulses by reminding him of the blessings of a Christian life. He noted in his diary, for example, that he benefited from hearing Professor William Mercer Green deliver a sermon on “the proper means to be pursued by one who desired the conversion of his soul.” Green taught that “prayer, diligent perusal of the Bible, and meditation” were the only “means by which an erring sinner might obtain pardon.” Mullins must have sat in the pew nodding during the entire sermon.⁶⁸

In many cases, Mullins, however neurotic, was ideal: he took to heart many of the lessons about middle-class morality that permeated formal and informal life at North Carolina. He recognized that the passionate impulses of youth, sexual or otherwise, did make a man. Instead, he wanted to strengthen his mind and morals. His system for moral self-formation fit perfectly into the expectations for middle-class evangelical manhood—he went to church, read the Bible prayed, stopped drinking—a plan for self-improvement that would have made any antebellum moral reformer proud. Mullins’s inward reflection and his calculus for self-improvement suggest that the rowdy, tempting wilderness of sin that comprised college life was not so forceful that he could not emerge from it a better person. Ultimately, Mullins earned a Master’s Degree from North

⁶⁸ Mullins, 07 February, 21 February, 18 July 1841, Diary.

Carolina and went on to become a railroad president and a member of the South Carolina General Assembly. Unlike Dusenbery, though, Mullins married in 1847. He and his wife, Sarah Hodges of Cumberland County, North Carolina, had four children—William, Edward, Mary, and Charles. For all those who sneered at college as a hotbed for illicit sex, drinking, fighting, indeed, all manner of vice, Mullins proved that young men could restrain their passions and mature.

Conclusion

College provided a new social and moral environment, for students had little parental guidance and many opportunities to fall prey to a seductive wilderness of sin. In this environment, students nevertheless managed to find private spaces for intellectual life and contemplation. They scrutinized themselves—their beliefs, feelings, and habits—as well as their classmates. In so doing, the most mundane or even the most salacious aspects of college life became educational. This informal curriculum, in many ways, was the most important aspect of young men's higher education because, through it, they attempted to make sense of their emerging identities, and they did so with very little adult mediation.

James Dusenbery, William Mullins, and their classmates at the University of North Carolina demonstrate that private literary enterprises played a larger role in young men's experiences with sex, intimacy, and coming-of-age in the antebellum South than historians have acknowledged. In this context, elite young men in the antebellum South differed little from youth in the North. Youth in the early republic occupied a tricky social world in which they learned about gender, sex, and intimacy in their daily social lives and enriched those educational experiences by writing about them in diaries.

Finally, to view coming of age as an intellectual process, as an extended education in sex and manhood, is to see also the broad meaning that education took on in the Old South through private reading and writing. Reading and writing enterprises, for literate southern youth, linked formal education, moral training, and socialization that occurred at home and within peer groups. Thus, an important dimension of a young man's education occurred in the intimate connections between private reading, writing, and thinking, on the one hand, and mapping a course through a seductive wilderness of sin, on the other.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Roger L. Geiger and Julie Ann Bubolz, "College As It Was in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in Geiger, ed., *The American College in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), 80-90. Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), esp. chap. 5.

CONCLUSION

In May 1861, North Carolina reluctantly joined the Confederacy. Early in the war, little seemed to have changed for students; they continued to study Latin, Greek, science, mathematics, and moral philosophy. Wayland's anti-slavery *Elements of Moral Science*, however, was no longer taught to seniors, and literary societies seemed far more interested in historical questions than current affairs. The realities of disunion and war would only heighten as the war raged on. By 1862, enrollments dropped significantly from nearly four hundred to fifty (later even fewer), as students decided to take up arms in defense of their homes and families, or were forced into service by the draft and conscription. Fifty-seven percent of students who attended the University between 1850 and 1862 fought in the war.¹ The students who remained, found college a "very dull and lonesome place," expensive due to poor enrollment, and scarcely able to provide students with food.² Yet the University never closed its doors during the war. Following the war and Reconstruction, however, dramatic changes occurred that forced the University to

¹ In all, North Carolina contributed more soldiers to the Confederate Army than any other southern state, including nearly one-fifth of all war conscripts. See James Leloudis, "Civil War and Reconstruction," *The First Century of the First State University, Documenting the American South*, http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/essay/unc_ess08.html (accessed 03 February 2010). On North Carolina and the secession crisis, see Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), chaps. 2-3. On the war and its effect on one reluctant Confederate from UNC, see William L. Barney, *The Making of a Confederate: Walter Lenoir's Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chaps. 1-2.

² Preston H. Sessoms to Penelope E. White, August 28, 1862, Jonathan Jacocks Papers #372, SHC. For another account of the wartime university, see Henry Armand London, Jr., Diary, Folder 2, Vol. 1, Henry Armand London Papers #868-z, SHC.

close in 1871. When it re-opened in 1875, the University's leaders, many of whom had been students during the antebellum period, including Kemp Plummer Battle, wanted to point the University—its curriculum especially—in a new direction. They advocated abandoning the classics and replacing them with mathematics, science and engineering; this would be the surest way to create a practical and useful new form of schooling for a New South.³ Yet, these seemingly new values were values that students such as Kemp Battle had begun to explore as students. The old university, in fact, was an embryo of the new.

Between 1795 and 1861 young men came to the University of North Carolina—the first state university to open its doors to students and one of the largest universities in the country—to learn to become men of the republic. They described the goal of higher education as “intellectual manhood,” a lofty ideal, characterized by mental strength, erudition, eloquence, and virtue, and achieved through self-discipline, industry, perseverance, and sobriety. Embodied in one's character and demonstrated through confident, smart, and moral leadership, “intellectual manhood” was an ideal that promised to distinguish educated men as society's natural leaders. This was more than an education in being southern gentlemen; higher education at North Carolina was an education in American manhood. As students moved between dormitories and lecture halls, debating society libraries, chapels, and even local brothels, they incorporated values conventionally associated with northern middle-class society—industry, temperance, and discipline—into youth culture and into the southern gentry's traditional honor-bound, rugged worldview. The resulting elite male culture favored intellectualism,

³ Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina, Volume Two: From 1868 to 1912* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1912), 71-73.

bourgeois values, and both national and regional belonging.

Learning to become men of the republic occurred in a variety of spaces and, most often, in the nexus between informal, extra, and formal curricula. Students viewed learning as most nineteenth-century Americans saw it: a liberal arts program designed to facilitate mental and moral improvement of youth. They learned from ancient authors, scientific and mathematical works, moral philosophy, and their private reading of history, biography, and even novels that character was the bedrock of civil society and individual greatness. Although the pangs of youth and maturation, distance from home, and the prevalence of collegiate vice and dissipation threatened to impede young men's development, many students contemplated these new problems and looked for ways to overcome them. Moreover, formal education at the University was especially geared to help youth develop as men by emphasizing a culture of mental and moral improvement that strengthened young men's abilities to resist rowdiness. Courses in ancient languages, science, mathematics, rhetoric, and moral philosophy, for example, aimed to diminish the natural passions of youth by balancing students' mental faculties, or powers to reason, to judge, and to emote. The end goal of this education was a disciplined mind, stored with time-honored knowledge about man, the natural world, and God, and directed by a sound moral conscience.

This education, significantly, was a conservative approach to knowledge and, in turn, manhood. The aim was to instill in students a self-knowledge rooted in virtue and wisdom in order to create just and upright leaders. The editors of the *North Carolina University Magazine* put it best in 1852, when they wrote that students did not go to college "to alter the great current of human affairs," or "to put forth any new and grand

theories of morals, law, religion or politics.” Nor did they wish to “to cause a revolution in society” as educated leaders. Instead, they merely expected to learn how to cultivate “that vigor and confidence of mind so necessary in the great battle of life that we all must fight.”⁴ Although students may have been humble, even realistic, in their goals, they nevertheless looked to great leaders in science, law, and morality for inspiration. One expression of student ambition was each literary society’s portrait collections. Icons of great North Carolina leaders reminded them that they attended college to develop “vigor and confidence of mind” and perhaps, one day, become distinguished as men of the American republic. Another was students’ reading of history and biography, where great men’s virtues and vices were on display for emulation or for warning, urging students to pursue knowledge and virtue, fame and distinction.

The cultural practices of students at the University of North Carolina were rooted in national and even transatlantic styles of self-fashioning. Historians have written extensively on middle-class formation in Europe and the northeast during this period. They have demonstrated, in particular, that important cultural processes of reading and writing allowed individuals to cultivate personal identities that reflected the values prescribed in families, schools, and churches. In Europe and New England, for instance, these processes revolved around economic and social changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization, including the separation of work and residence, manufacturing, and changes in cultural hierarchies that accompanied these spatial realignments.⁵ Although North Carolina students were economic elites in a largely

⁴ “Salutatory,” *North Carolina University Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 6. (Aug., 1852): 225.

⁵ Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth-Century France* (University Park, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Christina de Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867*; Rodney Hessinger,

agricultural society based on slavery, and few of these socioeconomic changes occurred in their communities, they nevertheless participated in this national and transatlantic embourgeoisement as well. Communication and transportation developments in the 1820s and 30s allowed for the dissemination of print, ideas, and values throughout the republic, including the rural South. These changes were augmented by the spread of evangelicalism in the Old South, which gave institutional shape to mainstream middle-class values.⁶

At North Carolina, these changes influenced students' identity formation in a number of ways. Romantic attitudes about youth as a voyage of life, for example, influenced their notions of self-hood and inspired them to cultivate inner lives that reflected the values portrayed in Thomas Cole's famous *Voyage of Life*—perseverance, self-restraint, and moral virtue. Moreover, throughout the antebellum period, young southern elites practiced many literary and aesthetic cultural rites and rituals that facilitate self-fashioning through moral reading and writing exercises.⁷ These students also became members of local branches of the Sons of Temperance and many distributed Bibles for the American Bible Society. All of these examples point to deep connections between southern elites and a national, transatlantic middle-class.

Viewing students' development as men in this broader national and transatlantic context of embourgeoisement reveals important new aspects of southern culture,

Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang), 1978.

⁶ On the convergence of gentility and evangelical values in southerners' notions of manhood, see Causey Evelyn D. Causey, "The Character of a Gentleman: Deportment, Piety, and Morality in Southern Colleges and Universities, 1820-1860," Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2006.

⁷ See Augst, *Clerk's Tale* in particular.

especially southern honor. Typically, historians have explored honor culture among southern youth in its social contexts and often in the ways in which they rebuked challenges to their honor violently. Of course this culture was not altogether absent at North Carolina. William Mullins's experience as the "hero of the Sham Duel" illustrates vividly the ways in which dishonesty unmanned a student. Yet Mullins and his classmates were privately reflective about the ways in which they demonstrated their honor, and collectively they even questioned the morality of dueling, a central ritual of traditional southern honor culture, in many weekly debates in each decade of the antebellum period. In the case of Mullins and his classmates, southern honor and bourgeois self-fashioning were complementary; they used values such as restraint, sobriety, and temperance to cultivate characters that were more honorable.

Students' social lives in intellectual forums reinforced these private emotional struggles to develop personal honor. In classrooms and in literary societies in particular, students played an active role in explaining to one another that knowledge and virtue brought honor to groups and individuals. And, like William Mullins and his classmates, they advocated industry, diligence, perseverance, and temperance as ways to cultivate that honor. In these groups, too, students told one another that demonstrating knowledge and virtue in eloquent and persuasive oratory and debate brought honor to an individual. Learning about this honor culture included more than reading sincerity in expressions and gestures, as many historians have persuasively shown; reading literature was another important path to honor. As we have seen, reading was an important cultural practice of manhood, but often made more so because of the imperative that men maintain intellectual and moral autonomy and authority. In exercising proper judgment in

selecting reading material, students had an opportunity also to cultivate honorable intellectual personas.

Young men's development at college also reveals how knowledge and culture were diffused in the Old South among individuals who, by virtue of age, were very ordinary. Recently, historians such as Michael O'Brien, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Eugene Genovese have convincingly demonstrated the ways in which southern intellectual life was rooted in broad, transatlantic trends, underscoring especially what some might call high intellectual culture.⁸ In other words, their works deal with notable institutions, intellectuals, authors, and texts in the southern context, but they do not explore the ways in which everyday southerners engaged with and received books, ideas, and erudition. College youth such as James Dusenbery, William Mullins, Edmund Covington, and Thomas Miles Garrett and all of their classmates, whose thoughts remain for historical analysis only by virtue of their status as students, show how ordinary young men engaged with high intellectual culture. Again, the case of reading is instructive. Students derived their attitudes about a variety of aspects of manhood from the works they read: virtue and friendship from ancients such as Xenophon, Cicero, and Horace; literary taste and rhetorical style from Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Hugh Blair, James Beattie; benevolence and chastity from nineteenth-century moralists such as Francis Wayland and John Todd; temperance, sobriety, perseverance, heroism, and patriotism, and even chivalry from history, biography, and novels. Students' diary literature demonstrates the ways in which they drew from these works to discipline their

⁸ Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

minds, select proper reading, and instruct one another about how to go about reading in a manly way as well.

Students' engagement with texts in classrooms, their collection, treatment, and reading of books in literary society libraries, and their reader responses prove that young men incorporated ideas and values in their everyday life and that the process of doing so held special meaning to them as they learned to fashion manly lives. Even in the most unpredictable situations—as James Dusenbery wrote about visiting prostitutes in the woods and about his desires to have sex with Mary S.—we see that students drew from texts and literature, albeit sometimes of a humorous bent, in moments of reflection. Dusenbery's literary world was rooted in Biblical language, English poetry and fiction about chivalry just as much as it was rooted in youth culture at college. Moreover, his commonplace book, and those of his classmates, too, demonstrates that Horace, Cicero, Sir Walter Scott, and Byron existed alongside popular American ballads and folk songs in students' literary imaginations.

Another hallmark of this student culture—and of the manhood to which they aspired—was free thought and discourse. Their weekly debates reveal how students used many of the lessons presented to them in the curriculum to understand the world around them. In particular, students' debates about slavery and Indian removal show that students did not close their minds to contentious issues but wrestled with them in ways that intellectual historians of the region have not considered. This free aspect of student thought and expression, moreover, demonstrates that southern institutions of higher education did not lose sight of Enlightenment liberalism, as Clemont Eaton suggested in *Freedom of Thought in the Old South*. Instead, students held tight to many values of a

free society, including freedom of speech and expression. These findings enrich our understanding of southern education more broadly, showing that it was not stagnant or backward looking but in tune with a dynamic American society and its needs.

At the same time as students incorporated seemingly un-southern values and expressions into their lives, they also developed identities that reinforced class and gender hierarchies that characterized the Old South. While young men appropriated and articulated middle-class values, they were conscious of the fact that they were doing so in order to become superior members of society. In the passage with which this dissertation began, for example, Charles Alexander reminded his classmates in 1827 that common people look up to educated men. Another student explained later, in 1852, that men of superior intellect alone gained admiration. Education clearly distinguished students as elites in their state, nation, and (they hoped) the world. Like the great poet of Rome's golden age, Horace, students wished to create monuments for themselves more enduring than bronze.⁹ In this way, perhaps they differed little from the James Henry Hammonds of the world, who believed men lived, in part, for immortal fame.¹⁰

This education in greatness and distinction also taught young men to view themselves as naturally superior to women. Young men established all of these points, implicitly, in their debates. Learning to exercise rhetoric in debates served a larger social purpose of regulating, as well as diffusing information, and setting the tones of debate.

⁹ "The love of distinction is the gentle gale which first sets in motion the mental ship & then wafts it continually onwards to glory & renown. Such incentives causes [sic] the student to exert himself, his mind is enlarged & strengthened, he gradually with his 'blushing honours thick upon him,' & may exclaim with justice 'Exegi monumentum aere perennius [I have erected a monument more lasting than bronze].'" Samuel H. Walkup, Oration, 30 April 1840, Senior and Junior Orations, NCC. Horace *Odes* III, 30: 1.

¹⁰ See Stephen W. Berry, II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12-13; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

The public sphere that students created in this culture mirrored the one that they viewed in society—it was distinctively gendered. Students’ legitimacy as educated men and citizens was determined by their ability to regulate communication in the public sphere, and they created rituals of debating in their literary society each week, all the great questions that they believed it was their duty to answer. In so doing, students delineated the ideal questions and participants of public debate. The good of society, they suggested week after week, was in the hands of the select few.¹¹ Their greatness, then, could only come from service to the republic, in raising and solving the questions that promoted, as moral philosophers and evangelical morality required, the common good.

In all, students yearned to become great men of the republic, and college provided them with the opportunities and resources to do so. By reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, students believed that they were taking part in a larger American and transatlantic elite culture that valued intellectual and moral development. In the process, they drew from southern traditions as well as from broader middle-class traditions. To view collegians only in terms of their rowdy, “boys will be boys” experiences of pranks, fights, duels, and other unseemly behavior only underscores one aspect of their complicated world. But a deeper analysis of southern students’ moral and intellectual development as young men reveals that region was not the main lens through which young men imagined who they were and who they wished to become. The preceding pages have argued, instead, that maturity—manhood—rather than sectional loyalty, may have been the most salient concern of young men in the antebellum period.

¹¹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, 1-2.

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