

**SAID WOODROW WILSON, “MY DEAR
WEST...”:
*REFLECTIONS ON A CENTURY OF THE
DEPARTMENTAL ORGANIZATION OF
KNOWLEDGE***

**The William Kelly Prentice Lecture
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W Robert Connor

For many years, the Prentice Library of the Department of Classics contained a big red ledger of such uninviting appearance that few of those who used that library ever opened it. One day, however, I browsed in it and found that it contained records of the earliest days of the Department of Classics, beginning with a note signed by the president of Princeton, Woodrow Wilson, asking Andrew Fleming West to chair the new department. It was dated just one hundred years ago, as I was reminded last summer when Bob Kaster, then the chair of the department, assiduous scholar that he is, rediscovered the big red ledger and reported that the centennial was

upon us. Indeed, it is this very day. And so, I have tried to put together a picture of that day just a century ago and of the events that followed it.

On December 2nd, 1903, the newly appointed president of Princeton University, T. Woodrow Wilson stood before the University faculty and announced, as the minutes of that faculty meeting report, that, acting under authority of the Board of Trustees, he had created certain Departments. This followed a faculty resolution along the same lines passed the preceding June.¹ Each of the departments created, the minutes indicate, were to comprise all instructors in several branches of study embraced within the general title or designation. “He also announced that he had appointed certain Heads of Departments, the appointments to hold for the present academic year.”

The duties were ones familiar to departmental chairs today, to call and preside over meetings, to speak for the Department in all administrative matters, including the appointment of faculty and the initiation or modification of courses of instruction, and so on. The Head was also “to

¹Arthur Link, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson, volume 14 (Princeton 1972) p. 473, hereafter “Link.”. For research in the Wilson papers and the archives at Princeton University I am greatly indebted to Robert Sobak of the Department of Classics. This lecture would not have been possible without his assistance.

effect joint counsel ...particularly with regard to the co-ordination of courses, changes in the course of study, and the distribution of duties among the several members of the Department.”²

The following day the Clerk of the Faculty, W. F. Magie, wrote Andrew Fleming West, Professor of Latin and Dean of the then nascent Graduate School:

Dear Sir: --

I have the honor to inform you that at the meeting of the University faculty, held December 2, 1903, you were appointed by the President Head of the Department of Classics. I enclose a copy of the paper in which the President defines the duties of the Head of a Department.

And just a week later, December 10th, at half past twelve o'clock, West convened his colleagues, Professors Packard, Winans, Westcott, Carter, Prentice and Robbins for the first meeting of the newly formed department.

Thus began a century of extraordinary events and extraordinary achievements in a department

² BRL Cf. Link p. 74.

whose centenary we celebrate today. There is, indeed, much to celebrate. Names such as David Magie, George Duckworth, and the person after whom this lecture is named, William Kelly Prentice, to mention only a few, attest the faculty's distinction. Graduates of this department have gone on to win recognition for their own scholarship and for their eminence in law, medicine, and other professions. Princeton graduates have an exceptional, perhaps unrivaled record in providing leadership in higher education, as the careers of James Armstrong, Hunter Rawlings, John D'Arms and of course, Robert Goheen, remind us.

The history of Princeton would be very different without this department, its faculty and its students. That history includes, of course, the controversy between "Andy" West and "Tommy" Wilson, as their mutual friends called them, over the location of the graduate college. The outcome, as is well known, was momentous both for Princeton and for the nation. Andy West still presides statuesquely in the main courtyard of the Graduate College whose creation he so coveted; Tommy Wilson went on to find other employment in Trenton and later in the District of Columbia.

Andrew Fleming West, however, was not the only person on the faculty to be appointed Head of a Princeton department in December 1903. Eleven such letters went out, and so, ten departments today share this centenary with us. Here is the honor roll: Philosophy (which then included Psychology), History and Politics, Art and Archaeology, Mathematics, English, Modern Languages, the Natural Sciences (Biology and Geology), Physics, Chemistry, Astronomy. Was this anything more than a bureaucratic shuffle, one might ask; the rearrangement of little boxes on an organizational chart? Instruction in Greek and Latin, after all, had been around since the foundation of the College of New Jersey in 1746. What difference did it make to organize that instruction in a departmental form? Let me break that question down into several sub questions. First, how did Wilson see Princeton's situation when he became President in 1902? Secondly, what did Wilson have in mind in organizing departments? And lastly, how well did it work?

The first of these questions really contains the second, for Wilson saw three interrelated problems when he assumed the presidency. The undergraduate curriculum – and it was

undergraduate education that concerned him most - lacked coherence.³ As he put it, “The real difficulty... is that there is no course of study, because by a course of study, I mean a course laid out, a course measured, a course surveyed, a course determined...”⁴ There was nothing like a “major” or systematic series of steps by which a student could master a field. Only in 1905/6 were students required to declare a field of concentration at the beginning of their junior year. Before that, as Wilson wrote to the Board of Trustees on December 10th, 1903, the faculty is not “conveniently organized either for instruction or for business and the course of study has by mere incidental growth lost system.”⁵ “... The University has had a remarkable growth in the last thirty years [i.e. since McCosh came], but it has been a growth which has resulted, I dare say, ...in a miscellaneous enlargement rather than in a systematic development. It has consisted in a multiplication of courses which have in large part remained uncoordinated. The order of studies, the

³ There were only about three dozen bona fide graduate students at the time [Axtell p. 23]; their training was still largely a matter worked out between the student and a supervisor.

⁴ December 12th 1903 address to the Schoolmasters' Association of New York and Vicinity, Link p. 81

⁵ Link p. 71

sequence, their relation to one another, their groupings, their respective value: all these things need immediate attention.”⁶

Wilson also saw that the method of instruction throughout the university was inadequate. Students were either drilled like schoolboys or lectured to and then examined on the lectures. Neither method measured up, in Wilson’s view. He wanted instead that a student be set “independent tasks ... and [be] turned loose in the library... [then] he really finds out that he has a mind and that it is a pleasure to use it.”⁷ Under such circumstances students needed not lecturers or drill masters, but “superintendents and coaches ...companions of the men’s reading ...”⁸

Wilson also felt that there was no adequate structure through which the faculty could deal with these problems. Before December 2nd, 1903, little clusters of faculty, for example “the Latin men” to whom Wilson refers in one letter, apparently got together once in a while to figure out what would be offered and who would teach

⁶ Link p. 152. Rob Sobak has called my attention to a valuable Hamburg dissertation that deals with curricular changes up to 1896: The Story of Belles Lettres at Princeton: An Historical Investigation of the Expansion and Secularization of the Curriculum at the College of New Jersey ... by Gude (Hamburg 1964).

⁷ Schoolmasters’ talk December 12 1903, Link p. 92

⁸ Memorandum to the Board of Trustees, 21 October, 1902, Link p. 154.

it.⁹ “System” and “sequence” are central concepts in Wilson’s vision for Princeton, but such informal governance was unlikely to achieve it. In setting up the eleven departments he asked each departmental chair “to effect joint counsel... particularly with regard to the co-ordination of courses, [and] changes in the course of study ...” Wilson saw, I believe, that the first step to reform had to be a new organization of the faculty so that a true course of study could be designed and appropriate methods of instruction implemented.

What happened on December 2nd, 1903, then, was not a bureaucratic shuffle, but the essential first step to the creation of a new Princeton. And Princeton had a long way to go. Here’s what Wilson reported to the Trustees on the 21st of October, 1902, shortly after assuming the presidency.

It is only candid to say that [the University’s] position is, in many respects, critical.... There was a time when Harvard, Yale and Princeton was the list in everyone’s mouth when the leading colleges of the country were spoken of; but since the greater colleges were

⁹ Wilson’s letter of 29th April 1903, Link p. 434

transformed into universities Princeton has fallen out of the list. At least when academic men speak, and they must be the ultimate judge. ...Princeton has not kept pace with the others in university development, and that while she has lingered, other, newer, institutions, like Columbia, the Johns Hopkins, and the University of Chicago have pressed in ahead of her. [Link p. 157]

Wilson backed this up by pointing out the difference in the number of faculty members in various areas. In Biology Harvard had four, Columbia twenty, Princeton four; in History Harvard had fifteen, Yale ten, Princeton three; in Economics Harvard had thirteen, Yale eight, Princeton two. He then proceeded to advance his three major educational ideas – the restructuring of the university into departments, the development of coherent and systematic courses of study, and a transformation of the mode of instruction from lecture, drill and recitation to “a modified form of the English tutorial system”¹⁰ And then came the price tag: \$12.5 million, at a time when the endowments and “productive

¹⁰ Link p. 153

property” of the University totaled under \$4 million. The price tag included, to be sure, \$3 million for West’s pet project the Graduate College, “set up at the heart of Princeton”¹¹ and a School of Jurisprudence, alias a law school, and an “Electrical School”.

It does rather take the breath away: it is as if Shirley Tighman today told the Board of “the immediate necessity of securing” a \$30 billion addition to its current inadequate endowment of—what is it now –10 billion?

So great changes were afoot and departmental reorganization was part of a much larger vision that Wilson had for the University. How well did Wilson’s plans work out? In general, clearly quite well. Departmental organization was a very powerful way of generating and transmitting knowledge, vastly superior to the lackadaisical patterns of the nineteenth century. But progress in Classics was not all one might have hoped. On April 30, 1904 Wilson wrote the letter from which I have taken the title for this lecture.

My dear West: --

Will you not be kind enough to call a meeting of your department at as early a date as

¹¹ p. 158

possible to consider and prepare a scheme of courses conformable to the new plan of study just adopted by the University Faculty? When the department has completed its scheme I should like the privilege of a conference with it to have the several elements of the scheme explained to me and to discuss with the members of the department the relationship of the different courses to each other. Of course the main feature of such a scheme, if it is to conform to the principles and plan of the new course of study, should be sequence and system: a natural development from course to course and as complete an inclusion of the field represented by the department as circumstances will permit.

With much regard,

Woodrow Wilson¹²

This, incidentally, is a new bit of Wilsoniana, not in Arthur Link's wonderfully comprehensive collection – a minor addition, but as we shall see, not without interest.

¹² BRL p. 11

The Big Red Ledger has no trace of a response from the department to Wilson's request, nor any indication that they ever explained to him the "several elements of the scheme". Did the assiduous Professor Edmund Robbins, diligent secretary of the new department, not bother to keep minutes of such a meeting? This is unlikely; the department, as best I can tell, never responded to Wilson's request.

What a lost opportunity! The President of the University, determined to make Princeton a great modern university, and backed by an affluent and generous board of trustees, wants to discuss the best way of introducing students to the field of Classics. Would any of us not help the President see that Classics is a field of great intellectual vitality, and one that, properly taught, could introduce students to cultures of incomparable richness, open doors to more recent literature and art, and provide them with a perspective on the history and politics of their own times? Would we not find a consensus about the best sequence and system to achieve these results and convey that consensus as persuasively as possible to the president?

The department's silence is all the more puzzling when one considers the vitality of the Classics at that moment, and what an opportunity it was to hitch Princeton's wagon to this ascendant star. The flow of new texts on papyrus, the Aristotelian treatise on the civic organization of Athens, to cite only one example, had recently begun. Young Wilamowitz was making his reputation analyzing that and other texts; the major collections of inscriptions were being published under the auspices of the Berlin Academy and others. In Cambridge in 1903 Jane Harrison published her Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion. The Cambridge School, which juxtaposed classical antiquity with the cultures studied by anthropologists, was off and running. Historical linguistics was opening up new perspectives on languages ancient and modern and on the mythologies and social practices with which these languages were so closely linked.

The leaders of the Princeton department knew well the vitality of contemporary European classical scholarship. West, on a grand tour paid for by the Board of Trustees, visited the great linguist Brugmann at Leipzig.¹³ On the same trip

¹³ West's letter to Wilson 29 November 1902

he turned up in Halle and stayed with William Kelly Prentice and Jesse Benedict Carter, both of whom earned their doctorates at that university, as did David Magie. While there he met Georg Wissowa, the man who revived and reconceptualized Pauly's old *Realencyclopaedie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. That monumental work had reached its sixth volume by 1903 and was proving indispensable for the study of the field. Despite recent adaptations, classicists are still dependent on this comprehensive collection of information about the ancient world, the individuals, the places, the institutions that made it what it was.

There was, then, an immense opportunity for the department to capture some of this intellectual excitement and construct a curriculum that would convey to its students the vitality and significance not only of the texts they studied but of the cultures that produced them. Models were at hand that could be adapted to an American setting. At Johns Hopkins Basil Gildersleeve had already shown the way; at Oxford a decade or two earlier Benjamin Jowett, the master of Balliol, had created a setting where future scholars and leaders

sharpened their minds and honed their skills through the study of the ancient world? He showed that the Classics were a way of responding to modernity not a way of running away from it.

Why should Princeton not be for America what Balliol was for England? Both Wilson and West knew British Classics well, but took different things away from that knowledge, Wilson, the kernel of his idea of precepts; West the fancy of transplanting Oxbridge Gothic onto a tranquil height in western Princeton.

For the classics at Princeton this was Opportunity Lost! But forget these foreign models, and the apparent failure to respond to Wilson's request for the privilege of a meeting. The Big Red Ledger is silent on another point. There is no sign that its members ever stepped back from what had been going on for a century and a half, and asked what a classical education would mean in this new century. What did their students really need now, and what part of those needs could a classical education address?

Think what those young men graduating from Princeton in the years following 1904 were about to face and what they would experience if they lived out their appointed three score years and ten:

two world wars, the spread of vicious ideologies, Fascism and Marxism, the great depression, the transformation of the relationship between American democracy and its citizens under the younger Roosevelt, prohibition, the repeal of prohibition, the League of Nations, the failure of the League of Nations, the holocaust, suffrage for women, the emerging hegemony of the United States in international affairs, scientific and technological change that would take your breath away, the atomic bomb, deep structural changes in the arts, the economy, social mores, and, indeed, in our understanding of what it is to be human.

To be sure, very little of this could have been foreseen in 1904. But that's just the point. If you are going to live in a time of rapid and unpredictable change you need flexibility of mind, sustenance of spirit, imagination, analytical and expressive skills, clear values, and some historical perspective. And for some students there is simply no better way to obtain these survival skills than a rigorous and well conceived classical education.

The Department met a few days after receiving Wilson's letter, on May 4th, 1904. The

minutes show that after discussing the course of study in Latin and Greek, it adopted a scheme in which all B.A. freshman did Livy and Latin composition in the first term along with some Xenophon, Lysias and Demosthenes in Greek; then trudged on in the second term to Roman Comedy, Cicero's Letters and what was called "Roman History", probably selections from historical authors. In Greek it was Homer's Odyssey and Herodotus. Next year it was Tacitus, Pliny, Suetonius in Latin, with Aristophanes and Euripides in Greek; then Horace and Catullus, counterbalanced by Lucian.

This was all, for the first two years, that the new department adopted. The method of instruction in these courses was still quite similar to that described by Henry Fairfield Osborn in his recollections of Princeton in the 1870's:

The curriculum of Freshman and Sophomore years ... was deliberately chosen to smother any love of learning or any enthusiasm for the classics... The method of instruction in Greek and Latin was... "Drill, tarriers, drill"; six days a week in Latin, six days in Greek. We were all convinced that the Greeks and Romans were the most tiresome people in all human

history, and we longed to break the bonds of languages so thoroughly dead as they were then taught.¹⁴

After two years of this, most students had had it. Let's do the numbers. In 1904/5 the new department budgeted for twelve divisions of freshman Latin, 48 hours, and seven or eight divisions of freshman Greek each term. That is at least 110 instructional hours a year. In the junior year, that is, once the students were released from the requirement, all that was needed was three hours in each language, each term. From 110 hours to 12! The senior, to be sure, had, at long last, an elective. They could choose Literary Criticism (that is, Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Quintilian) with Dean West, or Virgil with Professor Carter. Some years later Edmund Wilson, '16, said of his friend Bill Mackie:

He and I and one other were, I think, the only people in our class who cared enough about reading the classics to continue with Greek and Latin beyond the early requirements¹⁵

¹⁴ "The Humorous Side of College Life" *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, March 18, 1925, p. 39

¹⁵ Edmund Wilson, *A Prelude* (NY, Farrar, Straus and Giroux) p. 83

It is hard, then, to argue that the new department got off to a very good start. And if one asks why, the answer, I am afraid, must be in part, the lack of foresighted leadership, or to name names, Andrew Fleming West. I don't think that's the whole story but the head of the new department could be rather arrogant. The other Wilson, Edmund Wilson, liked the dry humor of "Livy" Westcott, and he clearly respected Prentice of whom he wrote:

"...he was good looking, elegant, slim, intellectually distinguished. His advanced courses in Greek literature ...were among the best in Princeton ..."¹⁶

But West was another story. He writes:

Against Andrew West I had a very strong prejudice. ... [My father] would tell me of West's rapacity in sitting at the death beds of millionaires, in order to get bequests for his projects for Princeton. And this prejudice was increased by my contacts with him. He was one of those tiresome snob humanists who put on airs about Greek and Latin and always are ramming them down people's throats. It was a feature of the Horace and Catullus course,

¹⁶ E. Wilson, Prelude p. 94

compulsory in sophomore year, that West should appear about once a month and take all the sections together in one of the big lecture rooms. He would have himself hauled down from the Graduate School in a kind of open hack, in which one would see his great round paunch protruding above his long thin legs, as if it were a watermelon resting on his lap. He would then address the class in an arrogantly patronizing tone. He would pick out some name at random and make the student stand up and attempt to translate an ode. When he had made a fool of this student by interrupting him and holding up to ridicule the ineptitudes of his rendering, he would announce, “Now I’ll give you an example of one of the art of translation.” What followed would be something almost equally awkward. He would stumble, try word after word and never arrive at any very great felicity. We would all be extremely glad when he got back in his hack and departed.¹⁷

Is this characterization of West just Edmund Wilson’s prejudice? I don’t think so. He is known,

¹⁷ Prelude pp. 76 f.

for example, to have blocked the appointment of Frederick Jackson Turner, the great historian of the American frontier, because Turner was a Unitarian.¹⁸

West's arrogance may account for some of what we find, or rather don't find in the Big Red Ledger. West might well have thought that his department was under no obligation to come up with some "sequence and system" that would please Wilson. Who did he think he was, the president of the United States? West and his colleagues knew how to drill Latin and Greek into the heads of recalcitrant undergraduates. They had been doing it for years. There was no need for more "sequence and system": just "Drill, tarriers, drill!"

But was something else not also at work -- the old battle between ancients and moderns? When President McCosh came in 1868, his stated goal had been modernization, but he was quite willing to let antiquity dominate education for the first two undergraduate years. And so things remained until Wilson. But with the new president chairing the

¹⁸ James Axtell, Princeton Library Chronicle

Committee on the Course of Study the handwriting was on the wall, and it was not in an ancient language. The University faculty approved, on April 16 1904, a new degree, the Litt. B, Bachelor of Letters, open to students who entered without Greek and subsequently concentrated in philosophical, political, literary or other humanistic studies”.¹⁹Candidates for the Bachelor of Science degree were already admitted without Greek and these students were by 1904, more numerous than those aspiring to be Bachelors of Arts.

So here it was, the newfangled modern world. Light bulbs and Departments of Electricity, the Wright brothers flapping their wings down in North Carolina; Greek falling by the wayside, a president eager to advance, as he put it, the study of “philosophy, the great modern literatures, history, politics, jurisprudence, economics – the studies which, outside the field of the sciences, contain the thought of the modern world”²⁰ Faced with a rising tide of modernity, it might be best to retreat behind the dikes and wait for the tide to turn.

¹⁹ Link, p. 253

²⁰ Wilson's memo of October 21, 1902, Link. 153

It was all this, I suspect, and one thing more. The secure preeminence of Greek and Latin was the educational equivalent of the later Hawley Smoot tariff. It protected special interests, quite effectively, but it came with a price. It smothered imagination and killed innovation. Teaching a captive audience year after year removed the necessity of responding to students' changing needs and interests. It stifled the imagination, both of student and teacher. In this case it made it extremely difficult for the department to imagine a genuine response to Wilson's call for system and sequence.

Indulge me, then, with a little counterfactual history. Try to picture a meeting such as Wilson requested, based on what we know about the characters involved. Presiding there in the seminar room in East Pyne is the Giger Professor of Latin, Dean Andrew Fleming West, Ph.D., LL.D., D. Litt, Oxon. etc. ("Here's to Andy, Andy West -- 63 inches around the vest" the seniors sang of him), a man whose vast knowledge of Latinity apparently did not extend to the prepositional phrase *honoris causa*, which should have been appended to the letters Ph.D., to indicate that the degree was an honorary one,

conferred by McCosh when he called West from the headmastership of the Morris Academy and appointed him to the Princeton faculty.

So there sits Dr. West with his colleagues around the table. Enter the tall, austere McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Politics, and President of the University, T. Woodrow Wilson, Ph.D., earned at Johns Hopkins. West rises; he's at his most affable; not a trace of the intimidation he used on his sophomore victims. He could be all charm when he wanted to be -- why, he could talk the search committee at M.I.T., of all places, into offering him the presidency, or convince a President of the United States into retiring to Princeton and persuade a Congress that the suitable memorial for Grover Cleveland was a faux Oxbridge tower appended to West's graduate college, the sort of man who could talk a Procter or a Wyman into adding a bequest for that college into their wills, and to name him Executor. With a smile, he rises, "Welcome, Tommy. Do sit down and let us tell you about our new course of study. Lots of good Latin and Greek authors in the freshman and sophomore years, a brand new pro-seminar for the juniors on the history of Roman literature. That

will be taught by Carter, fresh back from Halle, and, yes, an elective for the seniors – they can choose Virgil or the Literary Critics that I myself shall drill into them.”

“But, my dear West,” says the visitor, who had practiced law for some years and knew how to cross examine. “there is just one thing I do not quite see. Please help me understand. Do the Greek courses have anything to do with the Latin courses? Is there any coherence in what the students study? And please explain to me how one course leads to another? And what is the system behind your scheme?”

And so on, question by question. Once the cross examination was over, the succinct summing up: “I do not find, my dear West, that these courses amount to a true sequence nor can I see in it a natural development from course to course...”

That is counterfactual history, forbidden, I believe, in Dickinson Hall. However, it does underline the main point for us. When challenged to come up with a genuine course sequence, the department produced a jumble of courses with no clear statement of rationale, and indeed, no apparent rhyme or reason. There was no system,

no sequence, and Wilson would have seen that in a split second.

Faced with that prospect, the department stonewalled. It was late in the academic year. They could conveniently let Wilson's request slide over the summer and hope he would forget about it in the fall. So, why did the department not invite Wilson and explain to him the "natural development from course to course" in their scheme? Because there was no such development, no system, no sequence in it.

There is, however, another chapter to this story. The department did meet with President Wilson, but not until almost two years later. The meeting was not to explain the course of study in Classics. Instead, as Professor Robbins puts it, rather acidly, in his minutes of the meeting:

President Wilson explained to the Department the Preceptorial System. There were present Dean West, Professors Winans, Westcott, and Robbins. The Department was authorized by President Wilson to proceed to choose and nominate candidates for Preceptorial appointments in Classics.²¹

²¹ BRL

By the end of that academic year the Department had recommended 11 such preceptors, plus two new instructors. They all accepted, including Charles Rufus Morey, later famed as an art historian, and Duane Reed Stewart, and David Magie. The next fall the senior faculty of six was joined by thirteen new and relatively young men, from Wisconsin, Baylor, Williams, Michigan, Cornell, Washington University, the University of California, and a few from Princeton –but none from Harvard or Yale.

The long term effect of this change in the department is another story, and I do not know enough of it to tell it properly. But from that group of “preceptor guys” came the future leadership of the department.

By the mid 1930’s things had changed significantly. I’m sure the opening of the Institute for Advanced Study in 1932 made a great difference, eventually bringing scholars such as Ben Meritt, Homer and Dorothy Thompson, Harold Cherniss and a steady stream of visitors to Princeton. I can remember, in the late 1950’s walking out to the Institute through the snow for a class with Ben Meritt, glad that Dean West had

triumphed and with remarkable foresight had located his graduate college en route to the Institute.

By 1936 when Bob Goheen arrived at Princeton, he was able to take a course in Greek Literature in Translation with Whitney Jennings Oates, the man who, more than any other brought the humanities alive for Bob and for many of his contemporaries. “Mike” Oates, as everyone called him, was instrumental in founding the Council of the Humanities and the Special Program which gave students enrolled in it a broad exposure to European literature and thought, and the opportunity to range widely in their course selections during their senior year.

Students could now start Greek at Princeton and make such rapid progress in it that they could sit around the seminar table with Denys Page, the Regius Professor at Oxford, as Bob Goheen did in his junior year. The department’s vigor at that time was due, I believe, in no small part to the “preceptor guy”, then chair of the department, Duane Reed Stuart, whom Bob Goheen remembers “as the archetypal gentleman scholar able to encompass it all. In retrospect, I learned

much from each of them, under whom I studied, but was especially swayed by Mike Oates.”²²

During the Second World War it became evident that human freedom, democracy, and war were precisely the issues with which the ancient Greeks were struggling. Jim O’Donnell told me that in the 70’s when he was an undergraduate enrolled in one of the Humanities courses, the by now very senior Mike Oates came into the course and explained to them “We introduced this course in the Second World War so our students would know what we were fighting for.”

After that war things changed even more. Jim Armstrong, one of my teachers who later became President of Middlebury College remembers:

New, younger faculty filled with enthusiasm, who were seeing the need, nay, the imperative, of opening the literature, history and values of Classical civilization to a larger audience. ...Mike [Oates] taught a course in Roman satire which was based in Horace and Juvenal but which was much wider in its reach about the nature of satire in Roman and later times; Francis [Godolphin] taught a marvelous course in Aristophanes which

²² email of November 2003

enlarged our view of Athenian society and the nature of dramatic comedy then and subsequently.²³

I knew these “young faculty, filled with enthusiasm” only in their later years, and haven’t tried to fill in this part of the department’s history, but let me report one bit of oral tradition. At Princeton, as elsewhere, English departments were slow to incorporate literary modernism into their curricula. Browning and Swinburne were the end of the line. It was Francis Godolphin who brought Pound and Eliot, and Yeats too, into the curriculum through his course in the classical tradition.

“I tell the tale that I heard told”. Whether that story is true or not, it reminds me that these men, Oates, Godolphin, Bob Murray, Sam Atkins, my teacher John Fine, and of course President Bob Goheen, paved the way for what happened at Princeton in the 1980’s and 1990’s -- by any measure a period of remarkable intellectual vitality within the department and vigorous interaction with colleagues in history, philosophy, religion, art and archaeology, comparative

²³ Ibid.

literature, Hellenic Studies, the Program in Human Values. I remember the 1980's at Princeton as a period of intense intellectual excitement, and for me, even at my advanced age, scholarly growth.

That brings me to the final, and briefest, section of this talk. I have no crystal ball and I am a great skeptic about anyone's ability to predict the future. My hunch is that departmental structures will not find it as easy to advance and transmit knowledge in the twenty first century as they did in the twentieth, unless they find ways, as this department seems to, to connect with a very wide range of specialties and approaches.

Let me not speculate along those lines but end with a modest proposal. It still rankles that in the spring of 1904 the department made no effort to respond to Wilson's request for a meeting, and failed, if I am not too severe, in that perpetual task upon which we shall all be judged – the linking of our scholarship to the needs of our students.

But if I sound judgmental, I recognize that we classicists work on a different time scale than other people. A beautiful piece of sculpture turns up and we may have difficulty determining whether it is classical work of the fifth century

before our era, or something from the classicizing movements in Rome five hundred years later. Or a papyrus turns up, and we ask “Is it a Hellenistic treatise from the third century ante or learned Roman work from the second century post?” We’ll argue, but what’s a century or two among friends?

So my suggestion is this: that the members of the department take some time off. They teach hard and are as productive as a bevy of rabbits. Step back and think out what that nexus is today between scholarship of uncompromising excellence and the needs of this generation of students. While they’re doing that, let the ever diplomatic Ronnie Hanley, on whom the department so greatly depends, call Shirley Tilghman’s office. “We received a request from the President a while ago, asking for a meeting so the department could explain the “sequence and system” of its work. We’re sorry to be a little slow in responding but could we now schedule a time for the president to come over to East Pyne? The department would like to talk about the best way to provide the class entering in ’04 with a classical education for the new century, the staffing and curricula changes, and the resources it will take to

do things right. What would fit into the President's schedule?"

With that suggestion, ladies and gentlemen, I will conclude, but ask you to join with me in expressing congratulations for what this department has achieved in the past century and can achieve in the next.

Revised April 2, 2004