

# THE TRICORN

NEWSLETTER published jointly by the BOSTON +  
LONG ISLAND + PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOYS COUNCILS

March, 1980

## Colby Goes To Sea

The annual Colby Summer Institute will celebrate its 25th year with its week at Colby College, August 10th. Twenty-five years is a silver anniversary -- and everyone knows how silver has zoomed in worth. So this year will be a Colby bonanza!

The cost is \$190 per person, which includes room, meals, books, as well as evening social events. A deposit of \$90 is required with your application. This is refundable, less the charge for books, if you cancel before July 1, 1980. Please advise how you want your name listed and if you prefer a leaderless group.

Since advance registrations are already three quarters of capacity, we suggest you make your reservation now. Deposits should be sent to the Colby Summer Institute Committee, c/o Isadore S. Wachs, 1822 Lewis Tower Bldg., 15th and Locust Sts. Philadelphia, Pa. 19102.

This year's discussion theme: Man and the Sea. Among the readings will be Typhoon, by Joseph Conrad; The Sea Around Us, by Rachel Carson; and The Argonautica. Since man's earliest history the sea has inspired some of our finest literature. Perhaps it's because of the awesome vastness of the seas; or their mystery; or their mixture of terror and beauty; or their source of our fantasies; or the wealth of life contained within them. Man and the sea have always had a strange relationship. If we are to discuss Man and Nature, then surely The Sea, because of its multitude of fascinations and its many influences on our lives, deserves its own special role for discussion.

As a modest preamble, Helene Kohn has chosen these couple of small selections, as an insight into some of the reflective thinking inspired by the sea-related literature:

### From Youth, by Joseph Conrad:

"This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea interpenetrate, so to speak -- the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea . . . . .

We were sitting round a mahogany table that reflected the bottle, the claret-glasses, and our faces as we leaned on our elbows. There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, Marlow, and myself . . . . . We all began life in the merchant service. Between the five of us there was the strong bond of the sea . . . . . Marlow (at least I think that is how he spelt his name) told the story, or rather the chronicle of a voyage:

"Yes, I have seen a little of the Eastern seas; but what I remember best is my first voyage there. You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something - and you can't. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little - not a thing in the world - not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600 - ton cargo of coal to its port of destination."

From Moby Dick, by Herman Melville:

"Call me Ishmael. Some years ago--never mind how long precisely--having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off--then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs--commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme down-town is the Battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Circumambulate the city of a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?--Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster - tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand--miles of them--leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues--north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue in the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Say, you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries--stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as every one knows, meditation and water are wedded for ever.



Why upon your first voyage as a passenger, did you yourself feel such a mystical vibration, when first told that you and your ship were now out of sight of land? Why did the old Persians hold the sea holy? Why did the Greeks give it a separate deity, and make him the own brother of Jove? Surely all this is not without meaning. And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all."

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### Socrates Revisited

A couple of issues ago the Tricorn published an extensive and provocative commentary on Socrates by author and Greek history/literature student I.F. Stone. It brought a volcanic response, pro and con, from Great Bookers. And the lava continues to flow. Here's a recently received comment from Ralph White:

The last two issues of Tricorn presenting reactions to I.F. Stone's perspective on Socrates were stimulating and intriguing. The comments of Mary Lauro and Emil Bix are prototypical of our discussion efforts in Great Books to explore and exchange ideas.

The presentation of Socrates on the one perspective as theoretician of the anti-democratic Bloody Thirty, and on the other as defender of non-political "philosophy" reveals perhaps another insight: *cosi e', se vi pare* -- it is so if you think so -- that objective truth does not exist; that reality is subjectively what one individual perceives it to be. This theme is undercurrent in many of the readings and discussions in "The Individual and Society." And while this concept will arouse the most passionate protests from partisans of all sides, perhaps -- just perhaps -- there IS no Ultimate Truth other than that there is NO Ultimate Truth.

And, to our amazement, our controversy was so eruptive that it even brought Socrates himself up from the grave to speak in his own behalf. One of our Great Bookers, understandably modest and requesting anonymity in assuming his Plato-like role, has Socrates voice his views on the matter as follows:

I have not changed much since I drank the hemlock. I never write, not even this letter, and I still prefer conversing with others to reading. But after a few centuries the people who are with me now tired of my questions and refused to discuss their thoughts. So I took to reading what other people had written about me. By doing so, I thought I might get to know myself a little better and maybe find out why things happened as they did. I could never understand why the aristocrats stopped me from teaching or why the democrats had me put to death. Neither of them had ever been interested in enlightening me, nor had they read any of Plato's accounts of my many conversations.

Ah, Plato! Somehow I've always felt that I failed him as a teacher. He lived too much in my shadow and never really struck out on his own. But he did put it all down. Unknowingly he captured more of me and my method than my other students who founded "Socratic schools." Each took the part of my teachings he understood, disagreed with the others, and dogmatically claimed to be my successor. Didn't any of them see that it was never in me to create a system or bequeath a doctrine? Did they forget my questioning?

I read them all, but they taught me nothing about myself. Which was not the case with Aristophanes, that clever and witty man. He meant no harm, but his comic portrayal of me, as a sophist, mind you, set me up as THE PHILOSOPHER. I didn't realize it then, but, as a dramatist, he was only reflecting to the populace the opinion they already held of me. So when philosophy had to be tried, who else was there to list in the docket?

The only conclusion I can draw from all this reading is that I have been as much of an enigma to others as I have been to myself. What can be known of me are only the contradictory images which unfortunately owe more to poetry than philosophy. There is no "historical" Socrates, so how could there be a "political" Socrates? But that does not stop people from reading and writing things into me.

A doctor looks at me and sees an unusually strong digestive tract. An accountant sees a ledger of what is owned and what is owed. A Benedictine sees a God-fearing Christian. And I.F. Stone, he looks and sees a political conspirator, a philosopher bent on power.

Ah, well, I was never angry with those who accused or condemned me, nor am I angry with I.F. Stone. I can only say that I lived and died in a way that was consistent with my reasoning, my love for Athens and my obedience to her laws. My mission was to provoke thought, to question, to test, to refer man to himself for his answers. What could ever cause more controversy?

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#### Long Island News

One-Day Institute. The Long Island Council will hold its annual One-Day Institute on Sunday, June 1, at Welwyn Conference Center in Glen Cove, N.Y. This is a beautiful old Pratt estate with magnificent gardens and a spectacular view of Long Island Sound. The two readings will be: The World According To Garp, by John Irving, and the preface to Nigger of the Narcissus, by Joseph Conrad. The fee is \$12.50 per person and covers cost of books, lunch and refreshments. Here is a convenient registration form.

-----Detach-----

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send check or money order (\$12.50 per person) to Long Island Great Books Council, Institute, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, N.Y. 11050, by April 15.



Productive demonstration discussions. Four new Great Books groups were started in Suffolk County as a result of a successful mini-demonstration held in Commack last September. On Thursday, March 27, the Long Island Council will conduct another mini-demonstration at the Garden City Public Library from 8 to 10 P.M. Those interested in participating or in leading a group should call Helen Mascia (212-672-2487), or Jan Ojalvo (516-271-8899).

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Philadelphia News

In memory of Betty Eberlin, 1903 - 1979. When Betty Eberlin died last December 11, an unusual Great Books career came to an end. Her participation in one of the original 1947 groups changed her life. It led to Leader's Training and 30 years of leading groups in the Wilmington, Del., area. Her commitment to the program, however, was not limited to leading. It was a total commitment and won her the affectionate title of Mrs. Great Books.

She helped found the Great Books Committee in Wilmington and was its chairman for many years. At the height of the movement in the area she launched Junior Great Books in the Wilmington and New Castle county school systems. At one time she led 12 separate groups, both adult and junior.

Her theory of leading was simple: "Come with one question. After that, be prepared to deal with any emergency." And: "Take the group farther than what it wants or dares to go." Some said that Betty gave her life to Great Books. But in reality, Great Books became her life. She said there were three lifetime achievements of which she was most proud: her graduation from Barnard College, her family, and her Great Books experience.

In 1977, her 30th anniversary in Great Books, a dinner was given in her honor by the many bookies who had been associated with her inspirational guidance over the years. She had left an indelible mark on Wilmington's cultural life. A first-year classics group turned out to be her last hurrah. This was a desperate attempt on her part to keep the traditional readings alive. Virtually blind and barely able to distinguish the printed words, Betty was forced to rely on her disciplined mind and incredible memory, and during the last year she always managed to find just the right quote on just the right page. She will long remain unforgettable to all that knew her.

21st Annual Spring Seminar. The Philadelphia Great Books Council will hold its one-day Spring Seminar on Sunday, May 18, at the Parkway-Stevens School, 130 West Schoolhouse Lane, Philadelphia. "Unpopular Mechanics" will be the day's discussion theme. The challenging issue: Can economics bring about health, beauty and permanence -- as if people mattered? Or shall we become the captive of robotry and machines evolving a consciousness of their own? Two provocative readings focus on this discussion: Small Is Beautiful, by E.F. Schumacher; and Erewhon, by Samuel Butler. The fee is \$13 per person, which includes books, lunch and refreshments. Clip-out reservation form is below. For further information contact John Bowers (635-2815) or Cecelia Cooper (233-1964).

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Send check or money order (\$13 per person) payable to Philadelphia GB Council, to Harold Moll, 7657 Wyndale Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. 19151.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your GB leader, if any. \_\_\_\_\_

Wilmington joins Philadelphia Council. Three Wilmington people -- Dennis Scully, Doris Auspos and Cyra Gross -- become directors of the Philadelphia Board. Philadelphia boasts 53 active groups, plus two more coming on the scene. Wilmington lists seven groups, though that number can be a misleading indication of the vigor of the smaller area. Wilmington has recently expanded from a single group to seven through a sustained growth campaign. Wilmington workers distributed posters to libraries and bookstores, issued radio and newspaper publicity, and invited librarians to their meetings. Applying for grants from the Delaware Humanities Forum, they received money for books and publicity. Doris Auspos and Cyra Gross came to Philadelphia for leader training, returning to co-lead two groups. Philadelphia is inspired by this transfusion from its neighbors to the south.

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### Great Books Made Greater

Philadelphia's Emil Bix proposes that of all the influences that impose themselves upon our lives, language may be the greatest. He offers the following short essay on this proposal:

Knowledge, grasp of cause, interpretation of facts, insight, power to reason, exchange of ideas . . . Are our goals of lifelong liberal education served in full by these buzz-words of the Great Books discussion principle? I think not. And yet, as conscientious roundtable researchers, we work hard and long at wringing the last and least "hidden truths" from the world's greatest writings. We call our findings "the ideas". After peeling them out we go home pleased and proud to have pierced and pared the language that so often threatens to get in the way of our understanding. What have we missed? Nothing much, save the very essence of the reading experience.

~~Literary language is not an obstacle to be hurdled, nor a barrier to be breached; least of all, a jumble of words making for "difficult" reading. Language does not just describe the human condition for one's perception. It is that condition itself. Language is human existence, with no ifs or buts. It always conveys meanings or ideas, and not only to our intellectual grasp. Language transmits an intensive experience to our senses. When organized in satisfying form and order, the total experience of language becomes art that helps us understand and master life.~~

No one needs to be told that fiction, drama and poetry affect our senses, although Great Books discussions tend to slur over what contributes to the total experience of language. Can the same be said of science or philosophy? Can we respond emotionally? Do non-fiction writers use unimaginative, one-dimensional modes of expression -- or do they appeal to us with imagery, metaphor, symbol, irony, allusion, pace and pattern, or any other elements of good writing? The works of Aristotle and Kant, Galen and Galileo survive because of both what they say and how they say it. They make us feel that their ideas are felt deeply, and they are not merely reporting to us. Their value rides on the worth of the full experience they communicate.

Leaders and readers need to explore this added aspect. Involvement in the parts played by language can yield greater mileage of experiential response -- even from the shorter fiction foisted upon us lately in the guise of Great Books.



The ogre of controversy concerning the classics versus the non-classics as readings for Great Books discussions, rises again. But Philadelphia's Henry Cohen believes there may be a compromise. He offers the following:

The Great Books Foundation has taken the view that its new series -- the non-classical in contrast to the more traditional classical -- may very well serve as an effective way to involve more newcomers into the Great Books program. It feels that after having experienced the stimulation of the group learning experience which takes place in a Great Books program discussion, that the participants then may be willing to address themselves to the more difficult readings in the classic series.

Assuming the Foundation's premise to be correct, we might profitably explore ways to insure this desired goal. The obvious problem is that of motivating groups to make this transition. How can the new groups be encouraged to read the classical series? How can those groups who have started with the short fiction series move on to include the classical readings? This problem is important enough to warrant an exchange of ideas and techniques. I would like to suggest the following ways that the Great Books ideals might be reinstated:

- 1) Use the classics in demonstrations and mini-sessions.
- 2) Use the classics in the one-day and other institutes.
- 3) Apply effective motivations to use the classics in regular groups. For example, explaining that the additional effort involved is rewarded by the deeper understanding of the experience and discussion.

This may provide a springboard for further thought on the matter, and I'm sure that other Great Bookers can contribute further ideas. This has become an increasingly serious matter that needs to be aired in an open forum. We need your help, so tell us what you think.

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