

THE TRICORN

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

August, 1981

Fear and Trembling

*The sun now angles downward, and southward.
The summer, that is, approaches its final fulfillment.
The forest is silent, no wind-stir, bird-note, or word.
It is time to meditate on what the season has meant.*

*But what is the meaningful language for such meditation?
What is a word but wind through the tube of the throat?
Who defines the relation between the word sun and the sun?
What word has glittered on whitecap? Or lured blossom out?*

*Walk deeper, foot soundless, into the forest.
Stop, breath bated. Look southward, and up, where high leaves
Against sun, in vernal translucence, yet translate the freshest
Young tint of the lost spring. Here now nothing grieves.*

*Can one, in fact, meditate in the heart, rapt and wordless?
Or find his own voice in the towering gust now from northward?
When boughs toss — is it in pain and madness,
Or joy? The gold leaf — is it whirled in anguish or ecstasy skyward?*

*Can the heart's meditation wake us from life's long sleep,
And instruct us how foolish and fond was all labor spent? —
Us who now know that only at death of ambition does the deep
Energy crack crust, spurt forth, leap*

From grottoes, dark — and from the caverned enchainment.

Robert Penn Warren

A poem for those at Colby probing the boundaries of "Communication," and for all the rest of us, alike enduring the limitations of language.

Our Man for All Seasons

We have in our midst at Colby the president of one of the nation's largest producers of electronic test equipment, a man who has spearheaded a five-fold increase in his company's sales over the eight years of his presidency, yet who brings to Great Books the firm belief that "the ultimate human motivation is affiliation with others," and that power and wealth are merely means toward this goal.

Bill Thurston, president of GenRad, Inc., of Concord, Massachusetts, first came to Colby in 1973, and has been back every year since. Though not the equal of Howard Hughes in wealth or eccentricity, he is reluctant to reveal his role in the "outside world" to his peers at Colby, to avoid being treated as an "idealized" participant who somehow brings a mystical perspective to the morning's discussion by virtue of his position.

Bill had envisioned Colby as a week of sunbathing and escape from the pressures of the business world, but found that the themes of his first two years there ("The World of Art" and "Shakespeare") drew him into the circle of dedicated readers. He cites as his most rewarding experiences at Colby those "magnificent moments" when a shy participant suddenly surprises the group with an elegantly articulated idea about the reading. Bill credits these experiences with strengthening his belief that the individual human mind is the source of ultimate value and good in the universe.

Since reading Teilhard de Chardin's **The Phenomenon of Man**, Bill has set out to develop a network of people to share ideas about the nature of the mind, and about the possibility of encouraging the "unified group mind" in present-day society. Great Books promotes this optimistic, non-competitive spirit, and Bill brings this attitude to his business as well as to Colby. He speaks with pride about the prevailing attitude at GenRad that the company's official policy is compliance with both the letter and the intent of federal regulations. Bill told me also that he considers his greatest asset as a chief executive his ability to find common ground for understanding even in the most intractable arguments between employees, by revealing that different preconceptions can often exaggerate the magnitude of the actual philosophical difference.

Bill is deeply involved also in the Massachusetts movement to cut personal taxes. As chairman of a committee of executives of high-tech companies, he proposed legislation to limit state spending based on this source. He believes that personal and corporate support for libraries and the arts can offset the reduction in government support that might follow from the recent state referendum to reduce property taxes, offered as a substitute to his proposal.

Currently, Bill is teaching himself to read music, to advance beyond his playing by ear of popular tunes. He is also, along with his interviewer, a strong advocate of exposing younger people to Colby, and says that the ease with which he and his wife Ginny introduced their daughter Chris (now a regular Colby participant), should dispel the anxiety other people may have about including their children in the experience.

If you question this unassuming and deeply thoughtful man about his company, he will more than likely talk instead about his growing optimism about the human condition, and plug a favorite book called **The Aquarian Conspiracy** about mankind's inexorable movement out of the Piscean Age of self-interest and into a new expression of reverence for human potential.

Adam Finkel

Long Island News

Thank You, Toby Lieberman: Toby is the only Long Island Great Booker to answer the group information questions in the last issue of the Tricorn. Now all the participants in her group are on the mailing list and receive the Tricorn and all other information. Where are the rest of the Long Island groups? Send reading lists and participants' addresses to: June Ferrara, 14 Bay Second St., Islip, NY, 11751.

A Special Seminar - "Has God Become Irrelevant in Today's World?" Jesse Plutzer, in cooperation with the Ladies Guild of the West End Temple, Neponsit, NY, plans a one-day seminar on this topic on Sunday, October 25. The two-book, one-lunch format includes discussions of Hans Kung's **Freud and the Problem of God**, and Archibald MacLeish's **J.B.** Cost is \$15.00. Contact Jesse Plutzer, 314 Beach 148 St., Neponsit, NY 11694, 212/634-1739.

Great Booker Publishes Novel - Joe Cowley, long-time Long Island Great Books leader and participant, has a first novel, **The Chrysanthemum Garden**, appearing in summer bookstore displays. Simon and Schuster describes his book as ". . . a novel about two people, so real, so authentic, so totally realized that as we watch them fall in love we feel we are finally being permitted to enter the magic kingdom of the human heart."

Boston News

A Successful Spring Seminar - Despite a relatively small turnout— about 80 people attended the Boston Council's spring weekend in Lenox, Massachusetts— the April event was one of Boston's most satisfying and challenging in a long time. The theme "Men and Women" revealed a much more inclusive slice of human behavior than just sex differences. E.O. Wilson's book, **On Human Nature**, postulates that cultural, behavioral, gender, and even racial differences are genetically based and are developed through a process of cultural evolution. Even altruism and the need for religious belief, Wilson submits, can be traced to genetic predisposition and shown to be beneficial to the survival of the species. But Wilson is not a thorough determinist: he believes that if such predispositions, especially those of gender and race, are accepted and understood, they can be modified to maximize equality for all men and women.

Elaine Morgan's **The Descent of Woman** undertakes to explain human evolution in a new way. Morgan suggests that during the Pliocene era, a time of drought, early humanoids took to the water, where they spent their days in the shallows and their nights on the shore, causing them to develop certain physical modifications — hairlessness, upright stance, overhanging brows — characteristic of homo sapiens. With humor and compelling logic, she argues that many of these characteristics evolved through the female; only later, when humans returned to the land and man became the "Mighty Hunter" did the male become the primary vehicle of evolution. Morgan traces human aggressiveness (primarily male) to the effects of the ages in the water, and knits up all these threads in several final chapters of practical feminism.

Randall Jarrell's poem, "Woman," is emotional, visually evocative, ambiguous. The discussions were exciting, sometimes even impassioned. The socializing, the being together, were as always entirely satisfying. The setting was every bit as lovely as anticipated; many of us hiked through the Audubon sactuary on Saturday afternoon, observing beaver dams, birds, and spring wildflowers.

Philadelphia News

New Site for Pocono Weekend - Shawnee Inn at Shawnee on the Delaware is the new location for the eleventh Pocono Weekend, which will be on Oct. 30, 31, and Nov. 1, 1981. The theme will be **On Courage**, and the following books will be discussed.

The Myth of Sisyphus - Albert Camus

Surfacing - Margaret Atwood

Luther - John Osborne

Please note the following:

The price is \$125.00 per person, double and triple occupancy only.

Please send \$45.00 per person with registration.

Deposit less cost of books will be refunded if cancellation is received by Oct. 1, 1981.

Send registration with deposit to: Sylvia Perelman, 8214 Marion Rd., Elkins Park, PA 19117.

1981-82 Officers - Harold Moll continues as treasurer, and Rita Heller as recording secretary, while President Marty Weiss, Vice President Aaron Heller, and Corresponding Secretary Bill McConeghey are new to their offices. Fran Jacobs remains as Philadelphia Coordinator, and Barbara Sielaff as New Jersey Coordinator.

Wilmington Officers - President: Doris Auspos, Vice President: Cyra Gross, Treasurer and Recording Secretary: Pat Turk, Corresponding Secretary and Address Chairman: Mary Schick, Coordinator and Book Inventory Chairman: Dennis Scully, Leader Training Chairman: Barry Bernstein, Publicity Chairman: Eileen Woolard, Seminar Chairman: Pat Turk.

The Wilmington Spring Seminar tentatively scheduled for March 28, 1982, will discuss Thomas More's **Utopia**, and William Godling's **Lord of the Flies**.

Out-Of-Towners Pack Spring Seminar - 178 Philadelphians and out-of-town guests had an exhilarating Spring Seminar weekend last May. On Saturday night, Sibyl and Hank Cohen crammed their home with partying Great Bookers for the last time before moving to a downtown apartment. Then on Sunday, Chestnut Hill College provided the perfect facilities for a seminar which was exceptionally smooth, thanks to co-chairmen Ceil Cooper and Mae Shipiro. And as always Hellers, Bixes, and Kassers volunteered for the donkey and detail work.

Leaders Club - The Philadelphia Leaders Club plans equal amounts of edification and fun for September 12, when the group will meet at Sylvia and David Perelman's. Topic: "How to Discuss a Film."

Letters on Leading

We were delighted to learn that The Tricorn has at least five serious readers. That is the number of responses to the March issue request for letters expressing your views on leading styles. If the ideas below sound tocsins in **your** head, send us a letter for the next round.

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The style of leading that delights me is that of the dilettante. This word, derived from the Italian verb *dilettare*, "to take delight in," refers to the person who delights in something. I especially take delight in discussions when the myths and symbols of the ages are given free interpretation; I delight in those moments when new and free ideas flame from the initial spark.

The King and the Corpse, Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil, by Heinrich Zimmer, is a collection of short stories that have survived the ages. The preface to these tales, entitled "The Dilettante Among the Symbols," says much of interest to the imaginative discussion leader:

... for true symbols have something illimitable about them. They are inexhaustible in their suggestive and instructive power... The meanings have to be constantly reread, understood afresh... No systematist who greatly valued his reputation would willingly throw himself open to the risk of the adventure. It must, therefore, remain to the reckless dilettante... The moment we abandon this dilettante attitude towards the images of folklore and myth and begin to feel certain about their proper interpretation we deprive ourselves of the quickening contact, the demonic and inspiring assault that is the effect of their intrinsic virtue.

My delight would be to make dilettantes of us all.

Aaron Heiler

The great ideas in Great Books are too important to be left solely to the astuteness of the members of the group. When my members don't see an important idea (and they don't see plenty), I have one of them read the particular sentence or paragraph and then I ask the group what's significant about it. If they spend more than one minute without getting the point, I cannot, I will not, let it pass. I state the point, but in the form of a question. With that prodding, one or two will come forth with some credible insight and lo, a new horizon has opened.

A Great Books group cannot be permitted not to rise above an elementary level. Push, shove, be a little rough on occasion; when the session is over there will be no resentment. On the contrary, there will be a feeling of exhilaration even among the more phlegmatic minds when a new concept has been perceived.

Edward A. Lewin

From Chuck Ferrara's recent article in **The English Journal**, "The Joys of Leading a Discussion": Leading a discussion... is a most difficult and demanding process. It involves people as well as ideas; it is social as well as intellectual, and a balance must be maintained between the two. The discussion leader must learn to listen... This equal concern for people and ideas is the leader's dilemma. It cannot be solved as a problem; it can be resolved only by the recognition that the situation is a dynamic one, and the leader must provide the equilibrium.

Having led, been led, and (most happily), like healthier gasoline, been unleaded (or leaderless), we feel free to answer your request for comments of this subject.

We feel that by sticking only to the assigned text, we all come as equals to the discussion. We read, knowing that anything springing out of the words is as valid as what may jump into our fellow reader's head. We do not wait for the "critic" or "expert" to tell us what to get out of a book. That it takes a while to get this feeling of individual worth shows how unused we are to such a situation. Walking out of a supermarket when the price or service is bad, or reporting a headache to our mate, are two of the few other chances in our world to have a bit of individual power. A little essay could here be written (you should be thankful that laziness prevents it) about our society that makes folks feel that learning takes place only when "authorities" feed us facts and opinions.

Questions are an important part of Great Books. A good question can lead to a discussion with the leader goint to sleep, except for noticing items being sneaked in from left field. Is it wrong if a provocative question keeps an exciting investigation to only a tiny part of a book? Related to this is the need to avoid a summary, as well as the need to end with more questions than we had when we came in.

Leaders, as well as many people, are human. How do we prevent questions which are already answered in the asker's mind? How can we stop a leader from asking all the 73 questions typed in her notes? This is not the place to speak on behalf of a leaderless group, but we have found that the self-discipline in such a group is amazing. Perhaps the old-fashioned rules we advocate not only promote the individual's worth in his own mind but allow him to see that all of us are important. Might even encourage us to listen to our fellows.

Clara and Irving Rosenwasser

And last, a letter was passed on to us from a participant who just changed groups because her old group "is drifting in the direction of bringing in outside sources and citing them to inform the group of the content of the reading and the meaning. One member of the group lectures when he is the discussion leader. Some of the members who attended the leadership training classes, as we did, don't seem to realize what is killing the discussions."

Announcements

The Institute for Retired Professionals, an auxiliary of The New School for Social Research, has a Great Books group meeting in New York City that might interest some of our readers. They can contact leader Edward A. Lewin at The Institute for Retired Professionals, 66 West 12th St., New York, NY.

Is Anybody There? Signals are being beamed outward from Philadelphia to unknown Great Books councils around the country. If such life indeed exists, help us make contact. We have received the Houston council's newsletter, which announced six well-established groups meeting for discussions and social events. Also, minutes of the Executive Committee of the San Francisco Bay Area have drifted in, discussing special events ranging from the simplicity of a demonstration session to the **grand luxe** of a seven-day barge trip through Burgundy. The anonymous secretary recorded the long-delayed adjournment: "We were so exhausted after this meeting that on adjournment we could only muster a Corporal's guard at the well across the street." Drop Norma Oser a line if you know of other active councils.

Emersonian Advice for Our New Great Books Year

(From an address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society on "The American Scholar" by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Cambridge, August 31, 1837.)

I greet you on the recommencement of our literary year . . .

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they - let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bears me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakespearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must - when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining - we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree, looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden, with the most modern joy - with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all ~~time~~ from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, also lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

... there is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world. We then see, what is always true, that as the seer's hour of vision is short and rare among heavy days and months, so is its record, perchance, the least part of his volume. The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, only the least part - only the authentic utterances of the oracle - all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakespeare's . . .

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