

THE TRICORN

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LONG ISLAND + PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

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For those who find Hegel a tough nut to crack, a distinguished professor of philosophy provides a metaphor to sink their teeth into:

Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
Was astonished that the bagel,
Tough and toxic little torus,
Could be such a tidbit for us.
But he knew the pestilential
Little doughnut was essential
To this grandest of all snacks:

First you take a sharpish axe,
Hold your bagel edgewise, tightly,
And then cleave it expeditely.
(Lost your thumb and need repair?
None but the brave deserve the fare!)
Open next the old ice-box.
Grab the cream cheese and the lox
And with lavish fingers spread
Lots of cheese and lovely red
Slices of good salmon belly
On the bagel. Even Shelley
Scarce could pen a fitting ode
To your Bagel a la Mode!
Finally, of course, you eat it,
And there's nothing that can beat it!*

As upon the things just stated
Georg Wilhelm ruminated,
Suddenly an inspiration
Sprouted from this cerebation:

"Ach, du lieber!" marveled Hegel.
"This *Entwicklung* of the bagel
Is, in fact, the paradigm

Of a total cosmic scheme!
Take it from your Uncle Freddy,
It's the Absolute, already!"

"Here's mine simplisch exegesis:
Spirit says, 'Let's make a Thesis.'
'Fiat Bagel!' first it ventures,
But the thing would bend your dentures.
So the Spirit's quitting baking
Und Antithesis is making.
'Fiat Lox mit Cheese!' it's saying,
But the combination's staying
In a kind of opposition
Which is not a real fruition.
So the Spirit says, 'Here, Georgie,
Taste this Bagel. It's an orgy!
Und the Synthesis, no question,
Will occur in your digestion.'
So I eat it right away,
And before someone could say
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
That delicious little Bagel,
Aufgehoben from the vortex
Of the stomach to the cortex,
Is becoming an Idea
That's a perfect panacea!
Other thinkers get in trouble
Drinking Schnapps und seeing double.
As for me, I never tipple;
I eat bagels und see triple.
Thesis und Antithesis
Giving yet a Synthesis:
That's the Open Sesame
To Absolute Philosophy!"

*If you've got an extra nickel,
Spend it on a stuckel pickle.

H. Lamar Crosby, Jr.

BOSTON NEWS

A Change in Coordinators

The Metropolitan Boston Great Books Council has a new Coordinator. Rae Auburn has taken over this position, succeeding Sylvia Soderberg, who served as Coordinator for the past six years. The Boston area now has more than 25 thriving discussion groups, many of whom owe their origin and success to Sylvia's perseverance and fortitude.

A Successful Transplant

A former Boston Council member has managed to export Great Books, in grand style, to Florida. I recently received a letter from Esta Cimo, who reports that she sat in on a Great Books discussion in Delray Beach, Florida, led by Irving Sanders, formerly of Newton, Massachusetts. Irving may be leading the largest ongoing group in the country: not only does the group have 50 members, but they meet every week, not twice a month as most groups do. Esta claims that nearly all of the 50 members were able to participate in a discussion of Aeschylus' **Prometheus Bound**, and also notes that Irving leads another weekly discussion group in Miami, 60 miles from Delray Beach.

Adam Finkel

Boston Spring Institute, 1982

Boston's newly formed Spring Institute Committee had its shakedown weekend last March in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. The 96 participants had mixed reactions to the facility ("What do you mean, my room's in the basement?"), but there was unanimous agreement that the spirit of the weekend was wonderful. The readings were T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," **Persuasion**, by Jane Austen, and Jean Anouilh's **Becket**.

Since the committee has now scored one for one, it would like to reveal its make-up and perhaps serve as a prototype for others:

The co-chairpersons are quite different people: one is a perennial jobseeker and poet, with a wealth of experience in organizing business conferences and cookouts. The other chairperson is one of Boston's best discussion leaders, with a flair for selecting discussable books, who has never planned anything more complex than a parent-teacher conference in her homeroom.

Garden clubs, school committees and laughter are the specialties of the next member. She is also an astute treasurer. Her solution to all non-financial problems was, "Let's put flowers on the dining room tables."

Joan Crawford is the idol of another committee member, who frequently dons a 1940's costume to attend social events. An incurable punster and expert counselor, this member draped carefully chosen, theme-related fabrics on the walls of the dining room for the Spring Weekend. Employees thought the management had finally spruced up the dreary facility.

The fifth committee member became quite disillusioned with the loosely structured organizational process and the frequent outbursts of laughter during meetings. He tried to give us an earthly anchor.

A passion for Great Books and a deep pleasure in each other's company, a capacity for work and for fun, these are the bonds that formed the Spring Institute Committee. Now in the process of selecting challenging readings for the 1983 weekend, and visiting inns in search of a new location, the committee has established a tentative date of April 8-10, 1983. Please reserve that weekend and come to Boston for a stimulating, surprise-filled institute. We might even offer a workshop on selecting suitable committee members.

Peg Mahoney

How Great Books Came To Harvard

I first met Elsie Brown on a fine May morning in 1960 at the Village Nursery School and Kindergarten, where she had just registered her dark-haired, bright-eyed little boy. As parents of kindergarteners will, we got to know one another as we shuttled our children to and from school the following year.

One day, Elsie reached into her handbag and pulled out a carefully folded article clipped years before. It was all about Great Books discussion groups and how to organize one in the local community. "Would you be interested in starting something like this?" she asked.

"How many others have you asked?" I queried, suspicious that the article had been brought out of hiding many times before, glanced at, and returned with a shake of the head. But the tall lady with the beautiful smile didn't answer. Her eyes danced, much as a fisherman's when he knows the trout has accepted the bait.

"Jeri Palamountain would be willing to work with us," she responded. Before I left the school parking lot, I had agreed to a date for an organizational meeting. I couldn't believe it. When had I said "Yes"? Great Books began in the fall of 1961 with a hard-working core of eight, and discussion became an integral part of our lives.

Our kindergarteners have grown up in the intervening years. During that time, of course, membership in the Harvard group has changed. New participants have replaced those who left because of job transfers or a need to pursue new interests. Elsie's interest and support, however, never flagged. She continued to be a trail-blazer for all of us. She was the first among us to attend a Boston One-Day Institute. When she learned that the Foundation trained leaders, she urged some of us to sign up for the course in Boston and took it herself.

This past winter, Elsie typed and duplicated many of the materials used at the Boston Spring Institute in Sturbridge. Ultimately, she was unable to attend the event for which she had worked so tirelessly, meticulously, and above all, cheerfully. Elsie died on Sunday, the second of May.

Long before she founded us, Elsie was an inveterate reader. As a child, she haunted the public library in whatever neighborhood she lived. Hospitalized for years as an adolescent, she devoured the meager library there and asked for more books. Reading through her lunch break wherever she worked, Elsie kept up with current fiction and magazine articles. One of the most recent to excite her interest was a report on brain research in **Scientific American**. Because ideas and reading were so much a part of her life, a memorial fund has been established in her name at the Harvard Public Library.

I count twenty-two years since that fateful meeting in a school parking lot, each one enriched by her friendship and the way of life she invited me to share.

Journey's done, little pilgrim. Safe home.

Carol L. Batchelder

Boston One-Day Institute

The Boston One-Day Institute is scheduled for Saturday, October 16, and will again be held on the campus of the Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Reading selections should be set by Colby time. For information, contact Eleanor Jensen at 617-267-7137.

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Farewell to Fran Jacobs

Each of the past Philadelphia Great Books Coordinators has stayed in her post about five years. Each has put her own unique talents to work in the job. Each, then, has moved on to another sort of work with renewed energy and newly honed skills in interpersonal relations. No burn-out cases here. Soon after the start of her stint, each of our coordinators has mastered all the minutiae of the post, and has made the machinery hum. Thus each announcement of imminent retirement has caused a shared sinking sensation among Philadelphia Great Bookers.

Once again, a five-year cycle has ended, and this time it is Fran Jacobs who is leaving. Fran's years as Coordinator have been outstanding. Her always upbeat attitude, her exceptional warmth, and her merry manner (yes, merry; she truly is) made all she did seem easy. We are glad to have had Fran's fine services.

Mary Ochs, New Philadelphia Coordinator

Mary asked for it, literally. Though she had never heard of Great Books, the "Volunteer for Great Books Needed" sign in Tredyffrin Library interested this avid reader immediately. They turned her down because she had never had leader training, so she signed up for the next training course, enabling her to start a new Tredyffrin group last fall. Mary enjoys her group enormously, and they have had a fine first year under her leadership. She particularly enjoys hearing the ideas of others. She also likes ensuring for each member a fair shake at participating.

Mary's pattern of volunteering continued last spring when Philadelphia found it would need a new coordinator. Once more, she literally asked for it. She saw the job as a further opportunity for her to improve communication and harmony among others. Mary says, "I will be a good listener. I hope that all will feel free to share with me the long-term motivation that has kept so many Great Bookers active members for decades. And of course I want to know of any problems so that I can help deal with them."

We are delighted to have Mary starting out with such enthusiasm. She has plans for the September Mini-Institutes well under way. She and GB Month Chairman Is Wachs are distributing the where-and-when information.

To reach Mary, write to her at 3 Poole Place, Wayne, PA 19087, or call her at 687-5218.

Philadelphia Spring Seminar

Local leaders, Council members, and out-of-town guests gathered at the new home of Eva and Emil Bix for a fine night-before-the-Seminar party last May. The following morning, the party-goers joined a gratifyingly large group of participants at Chestnut Hill College to discuss Paul Tillich's **Love, Power and Justice** and Walker Percy's **Love in the Ruins**. These selections elicited a great range of emotional responses; the enraptured and the enraged all seemed to find the books provocative. Chairman Ceil Cooper and Co-Chairman Sue Ross provided the nearly flawless sort of organization that participants have come to take for granted.

Fall Institute Weekend

Shawnee Inn at Shawnee on the Delaware is the location once more for the twelfth annual Pocono weekend, which will be October 29-31, 1982. The theme is **Enchantment**, and the following literature will be discussed:

Equus - Peter Shaffer
Grendel - John Gardner
A Tree Talking to Orpheus - Denise Levertov

The \$135.00 per person price includes meals (Friday dinner through Sunday lunch), lodging (double occupancy only), books, entertainment, and tips.

The deposit of \$50.00 per person is refundable (minus book cost) till September 23, 1982.

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

Lorna Feeley, Founding Boston GB Member

Lorna Feeley died suddenly on Tuesday, April 27, shortly before her seventy-third birthday. A founding member of the Metropolitan Boston Great Books Council and of the Colby Great Books Institute Committee, Lorna was for many years an important contributor to the Great Books program.

Lorna was a modest person, too modest to value fully herself and her contributions. But her passion for the Great Books process and its results was limitless and ardent. In the discussion of great books, she found realized the truths expressed by Martin Buber (**I and Thou, Between Man and Man**): that one is chiefly defined by one's relationships with others, and that such relationships by their directness and candor may enable the individual to transcend his solitude and selfishness. She believed these truths and lived by them.

In her retirement, Lorna reached out to help others, resolved as always to be useful and active in giving. She volunteered at the Museum of Fine Arts to join a team which entertained in nursing homes by showing and talking about art. She was active in the Back Bay Aging Concerns Committee. And she had begun this year to tutor children in the Boston schools.

Though Lorna had more than enough enthusiasm, energy, courage, and generosity to do all these things, her loyalty lay chiefly with Great Books and those friends of many years with whom and by whom she defined herself. They will miss her greatly; they have lost a dear friend, of many virtues and a loving heart.

Gus Soderberg

LONG ISLAND NEWS

Long Island Council Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the L. I. Council will be held at 8:00 P.M. on Friday, October 22 at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library on Old Country Road. The brief business meeting will be followed by a discussion of short Zen stories and excerpts from the **Tao Te Ching** which will be distributed at the meeting. Meeting notices with more details will be sent to all discussion leaders.

An Interview with Irving M. Rosenwasser, Who Didn't Listen to the Questions

Interviewer: I. M. Rosenwasser, recently retired teacher and behavior problem with The New York City School System, can be seen at Colby regularly, where he serves as a master of ceremonies at The Wachs Works and in a leaderless group.

Rosenwasser: I came to Great Books naturally, as my father used to grate on my mother's nerves. As a child, I was an avid reader. When Avid stopped publishing, I read anything, and was the first kid on the block to know that our ketchup was "free from benzoate of soda." In those days, children read better, as schools taught reading by phonics. The teacher showed us "gh," and we then knew "tough," "through," and "ghost." While other kids were playing marbles and learning dirty words, I read. My parnets were proud of their son, the reader. They were not even upset when I stole some letters from the Pony Express man; I was reading *Ivanhoe* at the time, and used them to make a coat of mail.

My reading paid off later, when I almost made Phi Beta Kappa. I lacked only grades and a bit of character. But I got something better at college: I met my wife, Clara. When we were wed, we decided that books were more important than babies, but in those days sex manuals weren't explicit and we never found out hcw to obtain such a result. Books have been an important part of our lives. Instead of a headache, Clara always has a book to finish.

People keep stopping me on the street to ask which author influenced me most. This is hard to answer, as I can't pronounce Aeschylus, Nietzsche, Poincare, or Montaigne. At various times, different books have been more influential. The night before I went into the army (WWII), I read Thucydides carefully. Unfortunately, the general staff never listened to my suggestions about archers and javelins. Also, I never got to a battlefield, not having the fare for an ocean voyage.

More recently, other authors have affected me greatly. I have found that writers like Martin Buber have fewer side effects than sleeping pills and work more efficiently. I discovered Buber's work at Colby. I'm always asked about these summer sessions on the subway. As soon as I get the Colby books, I look through them. In the old days, a worm could be found in an apple, but printers don't use dangerous pesticides, so who knows what might be found in a book? I read the Colby books without worrying about passages I don't understand; In my group there will be 19 people anxious to explain. In order to save time, they will do it simultaneously. Some newer participants are not always happy about our devotion to the text rather than to extraneous matters. Some will ask when the book was written, pointing out that if it was before Reagan, the author might not know that you get prosperity by taking from those who have little and giving to those who have more. But we always enjoy our discusssions. We have had good arguments about what Plato wore under his toga, and whether the Samsas would have used Raid, if it had been invented.

To me, the book is the important thing! To read something that I might have ignored, were it not assigned, and to struggle with complex ideas and then to hear other folks' views is most exciting. Clara and I are truly grateful to Great Books.

Forgetting for a moment the timelessness of these works — it is 1982. Ostensibly sane people discuss nucear weapons and have the power to use them. The computer society is erasing our personalities. Great Books discussions provide not only sanity, but a place where you and your opinions are thought important enough for you to feel really human.

I also give typing lessons. Please bring one finger.

How Knowledgeable Must a Leader Be?

Some new leaders express the feeling that it is presumptuous of them to suppose that they are qualified to lead discussions on works which they themselves do not understand. Who among experienced leaders has not had this feeling? It is he that I would label presumptuous!

It does not seem to me that competent leadership requires that the leader know more about **anything** (even about leading) than all of his participants. The leader need not feel at a disadvantage in the presence of participants who have a better understanding of the work than he does. If he leads effectively, the insights of each participant will be shared with the leader as well as with the group as a whole. When a leader requests clarification of something in the text as though he really does not understand – and gets it – he is doing the group a service, whether or not he could have supplied the clarification himself.

A caricature of the position I am assuming is offered by those who assert that the competent leader need not have read the book at all. With this view I have no sympathy. It is undeniably true that experience may make it possible for a leader who has not read the book to provide some of the guiding functions of a “moderator.” He can open the discussion with some question suggested by the book’s title, perhaps, or with the risky general approach, “What is the author trying to do in this work?” He can ensure that no one talks too much, that no two talk at the same time, that the shy participant is drawn in, perhaps even that a contributor clarify, elaborate, justify. He can discourage argument over questions of fact or definition, discourage quibbles over pronunciation or grammatical usage, and discourage appeals to authorities outside of the common reading. He will **not**, however, know whether discussion is relevant to the content of the reading. He will **not** be able to distinguish which issues are central and which peripheral. Accordingly, he can hardly “lead,” in the sense of suggesting by his questions a fruitful direction for the course of the discussion. He will not be able to recognize opportunities for transition from one to another of the basic issues raised, or for influencing intelligently the amount of attention given by the group to various issues. He could hardly expect to know when a participant is doing justice to the author’s views. In brief, if the leader has not read the book, he may be able to function as a non-participating chairman, but he certainly cannot be an effective leader.

The leader must, of course, study the reading. It is true, too, that the better he feels that he understands the author, the greater his confidence is likely to be, in his ability to assist others in deepening their understanding. Nevertheless, even though he does not feel confident that he has mastered the material and achieved substantial understanding of the author, he can provide valuable guidance – true “leadership” – to the participants, in their common search for increased insight.

Aaron Bechtel

From Philadelphia’s Henry Thoreau Group

Mel Miles, Co-Leader of the Henry Thoreau Great Books Group, with Harold Moll as Leader, reports that their members held a fund-raising event to enable the group to send a contribution to Jaakof Riz, a Yiddish scholar who operates The Holocaust Museum in Philadelphia.

Mel himself was doubly honored on July 11 at the Chapel of the Four Chaplains, when he received a special Legion of Honor award from Dr. Walter White for his interfaith work as leader of the Carlo De Filippis Mandolin and Guitar Society, as well as The Raoul Wallenberg Operation Truth Award.

Great Books Discussion Defined

From Wilmington, Walter Eberlin sends for the uninitiated a one-sentence explanation of the mental activity of a Great Books participant:

A processing skill of symbolic reasoning, sustained by the interfacilitation of an intricate hierarchy of substrata factors that have been mobilized as a psychological working system and pressed into service in accordance with the purpose of the reader.

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