

THE TRICORN

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

July, 1983

RUSSELL BAKER ON PROUST

At 3:37 in the afternoon of October 10 last, I read the final page of Marcel Proust's **Remembrance of Things Past**. I had started it 35 years earlier on a warm October night in 1947, and had read steadily for a year or two before realizing that I faced a monumental task.

By that time I had nearly finished Volume One, and with remarkable self-control had restrained myself from turning to the last page of Volume Seven to see how it turned out. It irked me, then, when one of the children, complaining that she hadn't see me for a year or two, took down Volume Seven, scanned the final pages and said, "What happens in the end is, there's this big party and everybody's gotten a lot older, so what about coming downstairs and watching the football game with me?"

"I can't sit in a drafty stadium and watch football," I explained. "I might catch cold and be delayed in getting on to Volume Two"

"You don't have to go to a stadium now that we have television," she said.

"What? They have perfected television while I was reading?"

"Now we watch football right in the parlor."

"I'd like to see that someday," I said, and resolved to, as soon as I finished **Remembrance of Things Past**. This was my New Year's resolution for 1950, but though I finished Volume One, I collapsed into deep sleep in April during a 35-page passage about clouds.

I was roused by two hairy brutes knocking down the door to my room. "If you want the money it's in my sock," I told them, "but please don't take my Proust."

"He doesn't recognize us," said one.

"We're your sons, Dad," said the other.

"You lie," I snarled. "My sons are sweet little boys in knee pants with cute cowlicks, while you are huge bearded brutes in jeans."

The bigger boy turned surly. "You'd better finish that Proust fast, old-timer, or you'll be as out-of-date as tail fins on a Chrysler."

On I plowed, reading steadily night and day, never resting, never sleeping.

One day an aging woman entered the room. "The movers are coming today. Do you want them to pack you in the van with the rest of your room?"

"I'm busy reading. Talk to my wife about those housekeeping details."

"I am your wife," she said.

Yes, it was 1976, but that was all right because I was 47 pages into Volume Three. "You should read this magnificent book sometimes," I urged my wife.

"I'll wait till they raise female life expectancy to 250 years," she said.

So my wife had turned into a cynic about literature, had she? What did I care, after all? I was approaching Volume Five. Albertine was sick and tired of Marcel's possessive ways and might leave him in another million words or two.

Then it was 1981. Time to embark on a crash program. I read through Volume Six like Patton roaring through France, and the momentum swept me through Volume Seven in a scant 10 months. As I finished on October 10 last, a gentle knock came at the door and two small children entered the room.

"My children are young again," I cried. "Proust was right. Time **can** be recaptured."

"I thought you'd like to join the party for your grandchildren," said the elderly woman, introducing herself as my wife. A party — why not? Proust was right. In the end there was this big party and everybody had gotten a lot older.

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Great Books Month – A Salute to Leaders

Applause, encomia, kudos, laudation, and more of the same will be heaped at the feet of Philadelphia area leaders in September during Great Books Month celebrations. Special festivities will honor the hitherto unsung question-posers who make possible the flourishing local Great Books program. In addition, individual groups will sponsor demonstration sessions, open house discussions, and area-wide mini-institutes, announced committee chairman Fran Jacobs.

A New Leadership Team for Philadelphia Council

President Aaron Heller heads the slate of officers elected last May. Others new to their positions are Sibyl Cohen, Vice-President; Sylvia Kasser, Financial Secretary; and Doris Auspos, Recording Secretary. Harold Moll and William McConeghey continue as Treasurer, and Corresponding Secretary, respectively. Sue Ross, chairman of the outstandingly successful Spring Institute last May, joins the Board of Directors. The other directors, hoary with years of service, need no mention.

Philadelphia Summer Program

To attract new participants and to avert withdrawal pains in group members, Philadelphia Council sponsored 3 special summer discussion sessions, offered at the center city John Wanamaker department store. Love poetry, both classical and contemporary, sparked the talk on July 6. Ibsen's **An Enemy of the People**, discussed next, brought to mind numerous recent parallels (Love Canal, Three Mile Island). Finally, the August 3 reading, Henry James' "The Beast in the Jungle," provided a most discussable tale.

FALL INSTITUTE

The Fall Institute Committee announces that the new spelling for relief is "Pocono Hershey." We will be moving from our cramped quarters at Shawnee to Pocono Hershey, which will allow us to take many more reservations. The committee is tremendously pleased at this as we have suffered with each of you who couldn't be accommodated these past two years. (We still suggest early registration to guarantee a place.)

Date: Friday, Saturday, Sunday October 28-30

Place: Pocono Hershey Resort, White Haven, PA

Theme: We The People: The Individual vs. the State

Readings: **Man vs. the State** by Milton Mayer

Civil Disobedience by Thoreau and **The Night Thoreau Spent In Jail**, a play by Lawrence and Lee

Darkness at Noon by Koestler

Total Cost: \$145 (double occupancy), Deposit with registration \$50

Mail to: Sylvia Perelman, 8214 Marion Road, Elkins Park, PA 19117

REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is deposit of
\$ _____ (\$50 per person)

made payable to
Fall Institute Committee

Names (please give the first name of **each** person)

(first) _____ (last) _____

(first) _____ (last) _____

Non-smoking
Group

Smoking
Group

No
Preference

Address (street) _____

(city) _____ (state) _____ (zip) _____

Telephone _____

Any special requests should accompany this application. They will be honored if possible.

Some Random Thoughts of a Colby Participant after Reading **The Life of the Mind** by Hannah Arendt

Fact Fantasy, Thought, Thinking, and Metaphor:

"All thought arises out of experience, but no experience yields any meaning or even coherence without undergoing the operations of imagining and thinking." Fact and fantasy are criteria of cognition. They are involved "with the desire to know and are in principle answerable by common-sense experience." They deal with truth and reasoning. The data are derived from appearance and include the problem of semblance. But the question raised by thinking is the question of meaning. Cognition and thinking are mutually exclusive, yet connected in the mind. There is a warfare between thought and common sense.

"Mental activities, invisible themselves and occupied with the invisible, become manifest only through speech." We have an urge to speak and communicate. This needs only sounds, signs, and gestures, but it is our mind that demands the complexity of grammar and syntax.

There is an unquestioned priority of vision for mental activities. Metaphor achieves the transition from the existential state of thinking to the existential state of appearances: not any metaphor which is a figure of speech, but the poetic metaphor of analogy. An example of this is a cup that is described as "the shield of Dionysius." The metaphor bridges the abyss between invisible mental activities and the world of appearances. "The metaphor provides thought with an intuition drawn from the world of appearances." Arendt subscribes to the Platonic doctrine of ideas: "As the craftsman's mental image directs his hand in fabrication and is the measurement of the object's success or failure, so all materially and sensorily given data in the world of appearances relate to and are evaluated according to an invisible pattern localized in the sky of ideas."

And Arendt's welcome insight into the ultimate purpose of metaphor: "Language, by lending itself to metaphorical usage, enables us to think, that is to have traffic with non-sensory matters, because it permits a carrying-over of our sense experiences. There are not two worlds because metaphor unites them.

We are here at Colby because we have the urge to speak, to know, and to find meaning. May your Dionysian cup be free of the grapes of wrath.

Aaron Heller

MOGEN ON MUSIC

Last April, at a meeting of the Philadelphia Leaders Club, Bostonian John Mogen spoke about possible ways of discussing music. This cross-cultural event, combining notes and words, New England and Pennsylvania, brought a profusion of local leaders to the home of Sibyl and Hank Cohen. The speaker, who is both an excellent musician and a highly regarded discussion leader, pointed out the difficulties in group discussion of music, only some of which can be overcome.

The Leaders Club continues to serve well its dual function — to provide social and instructional interaction for local leaders.



LONG ISLAND NEWS

Great Books at the Library Institute

Chuck Ferrara represented the Long Island Great Books Council at the annual Nassau/Suffolk Library Institute last May. He served on a panel entitled "How to Conduct Book Discussions: Selection, Participation and Publicity." His co-panelists were two librarians who conduct book discussions regularly. The session was attended by more than 100 librarians.

Chuck's reaction: "Based on the other presentations, comments and questions from the audience, the GB rules for participation and the GB approach to leading result in a more rewarding discussion. Leaders of less structured groups expressed the feeling that they just don't get as deeply into the books as we do."

L. I. One-Day Institute

The One-Day Institute at Welwyn last May 15 was sold out. Participants were enthusiastic about the successful day – good books, good leaders, beautiful setting. Next year's Institute, once again at Welwyn, will be on June 17.

Principals in Action – Murray Cohn

"Principals in Action," an article in the May 1983 issue of **Harper's**, cites Murray Cohn, principal of Louis D. Brandeis High School on Manhattan's Upper West Side, as the chief agent in the success of this ghetto school. Long-time Great Books participant Cohn insists on staff dedication, high standards for student conduct, praise for all successes, and cleanliness and order. As a result, much learning takes place, and attendance is less lamentable than at comparable schools. "The chief reason, it is generally agreed, for these modest successes in the face of apparently insuperable obstacles is the sixty-seven year-old principal of Brandeis, Murray Cohn, writes James Traub. The author of the article saw much to praise at Brandeis, but he left his rose-colored glasses at home. He mentions failures as well as advances: "But order is only a means to an educational end. Though Brandeis seems to be a triumph of common sense and decency over spurious doctrine and plain unreason, many of the students seem almost impervious to instruction. Even Cohn, who puts the best possible face on everything, concedes, 'You have to have a lot of fortitude to be here and do a good job of teaching.'"

L.I. Annual Meeting

On Friday, October 21, at 7:30 P.M., The Long Island Council will hold its annual meeting at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library. A reading will be distributed and discussed after the transaction of Great Books business, and refreshments will be served.

On a Sunday

Rose Eder, a participant in the Long Island group led by Rose Ermidis, has written a poetic description of what happens on Great Books Sundays. Her poem ends with thoughts common to us all:

The discussion is ended,
We've talked ourselves out,
At last comprehended
What this book's about.

We now say adieu;
There are still a few
Little thoughts in my head
I'll think of in bed
And wish I had said.

NEWS FROM DELAWARE

Leaping and Bounding

The Fifth Annual Spring Institute of the Great Books Council of Delaware was a resounding success. There were 80 participants, an astonishing doubling of last year's registration, and nine times that of the original Institute. Chairman Georgia Lane, assisted by Joan Hember, planned the day.

New Officers

Elected in May were President Cyra Gross, Corresponding Secretary and Recording Secretary Ed Fisher, Treasurer Ken Scherer, Publicity Chairman Syd Kimmelman, and Coordinator-in-training Reidun Painter. The office of vice-president is still to be filled.

Piquing Public Interest

It has been the experience of the Delaware Council that demonstrations are no longer drawing the number of people they once did. Attempting something new, Gerry Munko directed a publicity project in community fairs at two shopping malls. Volunteers manned the table where books were on display and flyers were available. Many strollers showed an interest in learning about Great Books.

Summer Readings

Years ago, the late Betty Eberlin started a summer program in Wilmington. The program was open to anyone, and participants were encouraged to attend as many or as few sessions as they wished. This summer the program will be expanded into the Newark area in an effort to create interest in Great Books there. Cyra Gross and Barbara Johnson are in charge. The readings will be:

Death of a Salesman: Arthur Miller

"Middlebrow": Virginia Woolf, and "Dissertation on Roast Pig": Charles Lamb

Selected Sonnets: William Shakespeare

The Optimist's Daughter: Eudora Welty

An Idea Whose Time Has Certainly Come

All Delaware groups will read **1984** by George Orwell at their first sessions in 1984.

Roll Over, Socrates

In their recent ad, BCD Associates headlined The Socratic Method of Interactive Instruction. The copy below stated, "Socrates was no dummy. He knew that back-and-forth interaction between teacher and student speeded up learning. At BCD Associates we've taken his theory and coupled it with microcomputer technology, by means of a versatile interface called the BCD 400 System. A system that combines an Apple II computer and an industrial VTR into an amazing teaching tool that allows individual, self-paced instruction.

GB LEADER ORGANIZES WEST END TEMPLE INSTITUTE

Jesse Plutzer invites Great Books participants to join the West End Temple, Rockaway Park, NY seminar on Sunday, October 23. "Between Faith and Reason — Is There a Middle Ground?" is the theme of the day. Books to be discussed are Abraham H. Maslow's **Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences** and George Bernard Shaw's **Saint Joan**. Cost (including lunch): \$16:00. Contact Jesse Plutzer, 314 Beach 148 St., Rockaway Park, New York, NY 11694, 634-1739.

FLATLAND – A PROVOCATIVE DISCUSSION PIECE

... at times my spirit was too strong for me, and I gave vent to dangerous utterances. Already I was considered heterodox if not treasonable, and I was keenly alive to the danger of my position; nevertheless I could not at times refrain from bursting out into suspicious or half-seditious utterances

This classic tale can be greatly enjoyed by all who are sufficiently young in mind to suspend disbelief in order to acquire knowledge. Though written in the 1880's by an English classicist and theologian who was also a headmaster and teacher, this exciting story is as much a fast-paced sci-fi experience and Alice In Wonderland adventure as it is a brilliant lesson in mathematical dimensionality. Moreover, though the author said his purpose was merely to instruct readers in mathematics, he exceeded this goal: perceptive readers cannot avoid becoming aware of a concomitant story, a parallel thread woven into the narrative which describes in detail a closed society whose leaders afflicted their people with strangulating rules. At the time **Flatland** was written many humanist authors – Zola, Gorki, Dickens – were challenging the inequities in European societies.

The story was written for the curious, for those who question the status quo, who need to explore new ideas. It is a journey through a two-dimensional physical world with an expedition into three-dimensional space. The narrator is a sensitive, intelligent Flatlander who describes the great adventure in learning that altered entirely his former concepts of life, society, space, and the universe. We learn the price he had to pay for forbidden knowledge.

This reader's reaction to the mathematical enlightenment provided in **Flatland** might not have been as pure as the author would have wished, since my first response was to the sociological and philosophical components of the story. Too often society is disoriented by new concepts and therefore rejects irregularities as being incompatible with the preservation of "security." Our narrator tells us of a Pointland being whose world is comprised only of himself; though locked in total isolation, he believes his existence is blissful! On the other hand, our narrator acquaints us with a highly developed intellect, his teacher the Sphere. We learn that such a one can himself be lacking in receptivity as shown when the narrator suggests to the Sphere that there might be other dimensions in addition to that third dimension which the Sphere had revealed. Such a possibility is instantly denied by the teacher.

Flatland provides insight on multi-levels of existence. Mathematics, scientific dimensionality, spatial concepts, and human nature are explored in this marvellously original tale. The story flashes us a signal that ultimately survival is not possible for any society, educational institution, government, or dimension where the sharing of knowledge is forbidden.

Norma S. Tentindo

BOSTON OCTOBER INSTITUTE

On Saturday, October 22, The Boston Great Books Council will hold its annual one-day institute at Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Books will be selected soon, and further information will be forthcoming. The Boston Council has made a firm commitment to underwrite expenses, so that a delightful day can be offered to participants at a nominal cost.

The Boston weekend institute last spring was most successful, and Council plans to repeat most of the pleasing aspects, including the lovely Gloucester setting.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

The Guide for Meaningful Discussion for Colby participants mentions "rules suggested by the Great Books Foundation." Recent issues of The Tricorn show disagreement about these rules. Mr. Lewin's letter in the March issue offers another method, and I can't resist the invitation to comment.

During 30 years of teaching, my weekly planbook listed pages "covered" in reading. But this was only in the planbook. Children and real people don't operate that way: there is the reader who skips page 13 because it is unlucky; or the one who has pages 25 and 26 stuck together, and doesn't notice it. If nobody in the group finds the important idea on page 36, how long do we wait until the leader tells us? When we finish the book, have we done any better than a class where a teacher shares his expertise with us? What about the pleasures of a discussion set off by a provocative question? What we have read comes alive as ideas are sent back and forth. We are eager to talk, using our text as it relates to the discussion, and not page by page. We may not "cover" the book, but we have had two hours of relating a book and twenty minds. When it works, we see why it's called a great book.

Irving M. Rosenwasser

Ed. note:

For those who want to "cover" a book, the following directions may be helpful: first, cut a grocery bag so that it opens flat; next, center your open book on the sheet of paper; then trim paper so that is a 2-inch border all around book, etc.

Dear Editor:

Readers of The Tricorn may be interested to learn about what has thus far proved to be a highly successful series of discussions conducted by me as leader of the Great Books group of the Manhasset, L. I. Public Library.

We have just concluded the fourth of a program of seven sessions on Mortimer Adler's book, **Six Great Ideas** using tapes of the programs seen on public TV at the end of last year. Those who saw these weekly programs will recall that they were filmings of seminars conducted by Dr. Adler at Aspen Institute. They included, in addition to the discussions by the seminar participants, colloquies between Dr. Adler and Bill Moyers, producer of the series. I was able to secure tapes of the one-hour programs, and obtained permission to show them without charge, since we are a non-profit group.

Using the book as text (as did Dr. Adler's seminar participants), our group views the one-hour tape and then spends one hour in discussion, challenging and probing Adler's premises and conclusions as well as his group's responses. The "six great ideas" — Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Liberty, Equality, Justice — naturally fall into two groups of closely related concepts. Therefore, after our discussion of the first three, we devoted the fourth session to a recap discussion without a tape, of ideas discussed up to that point. To assure maximum individual participation, registration was kept to fifteen.

Carl Heyel

Enclosed Please Find

The inclusion in this mailing of the current Philadelphia Group Directory should aid Philadelphia members in directing friends to nearby groups. Presently inactive members also can discover available group options.

NEW YORK RENAISSANCE

Last spring, New York Times staffer Frances Grandy wrote a piece about her visit to the mid-Manhattan Great Books group led by Rachel Leon. The article, with large pictures of Rachel and participant Arthur Mokin, appeared in a special education supplement to the Sunday edition. The public response was astonishing. The group secretary fielded hundreds of phone calls from New Yorkers who wanted to learn more about Great Books. Members of the 20-year group rose to the challenge. Delighted by the possibility of expanding the program, they formed a committee to guide the development of what might become a true renaissance of the greatly shrunken New York program. Mary Lauro, Lee Pintel, Sylvia Gaskin, and Marilyn Apelson are among those working to develop new groups and new leaders. These long-time enthusiasts see the securing of meeting space as their most serious immediate problem. They feel, though, that their twenty years of critical thinking will help them invent needed solutions.

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