

THE TRICORN

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BOBS COUNCILS

February, 1987

COLBY 1987

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” These famous opening words of *Anna Karenina*, always spoken sonorously, are neither more nor less true than any other aphorism. Tolstoy’s own unhappy family was surely unique, a circumstance that proves nothing and offers no basis for generalizing. But Tolstoy’s pronouncement doesn’t stand alone: family life has been explored by masters of literature since Aeschylus undertook his 3-play study of the house of Atreus. And the social sciences, of course, have examined the family, that basic social unit of our species, both globally and historically.

All of this focussing on the family has given us a great body of fascinating books in which to discover ourselves. What better theme for Colby this summer than “The Family”? The chosen books range widely in style and in approach to their subject, and should afford both splendid reading and equally splendid discussion. Here’s a sampler:

From anthropologist George Murdock’s *Culture and Society*:

The science of culture . . . should be among the first to minimize the importance of intelligence in human affairs. Comparatively little intelligence is needed to acquire a habit or folkway, none to preserve it.

From novelist Giovanni Verga’s *The House by the Medlar Tree*:

Old Master ‘Ntoni remembered many sayings and proverbs that he had learnt from his elders, because as he said, what the old folks said was always true. One of his sayings was: “You can’t sail a boat without a helmsman.” Another was: “You must learn to be sexton before you can be Pope.” . . . and he had many other sensible sayings as well. That was why the house by the medlar tree prospered.

From playwright Harold Pinter’s *The Homecoming*:

Lenny: Plug it, will you, you stupid sod, I’m trying to read the paper.

Max: Listen! I’ll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that!

From psychiatrist R.D. Laing's *Politics of the Family*:

Daughter's father dies—daughter conceives a son, *to replace* her father. The play's the thing. The actors come and go. As they die, others are born. The new-born enters the part vacated by the newly dead. The system perpetuates itself over generations; the young are introduced to the parts that the dead once played. Hence the drama continues.

The other readings are William Wordsworth's *Ode - Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, and E.M. Forster's fine novel *Howard's End*.

The Colby experience is felt by many as an immersion in extended family life. Summer 1987 will find many Colby participants returning to repeat that unique encounter. Why don't *you* join the Colby family the second week in August? The cost is \$285, with \$135 due with registration. Checks should be made payable to I.S. Wachs, Stephen Girard Bldg., 21 S. 12th St., 7th Suite, Phila., PA 19107.

BRIGADOON

Mercea Eliade, whose work on mythology we read many years ago at Colby, believes that the worlds of myth and legend lie outside time. Think of fairy stories. There are some lands of enchantment where time stands still; when you leave you're no older than you were when you went in, but your own world has long since passed away. In other magical worlds, time whirls by like the dollar meter on a gas pump. The children who went to Narnia, for instance, could never know in advance how many eons of time might have passed since their last visit: whole generations might have grown old and died and they themselves become the stuff of legend; or they might find fifty years gone by and their contemporaries, their comrades in adventure, aged and doddering, while they themselves had only spent a term at school.

Colby, too, has a time of its own. It is not continuous with time outside, but connects directly with other Colby weeks. Within twenty-four hours of driving onto the campus all of us are caught up in the enchantment; the year that intervened is gone; what happened last Colby year—"last week," we often say—happened only yesterday.

Maybe that's why we all talk with so much amazement at Colby about the passage of time, about the ailments we can't believe and the way time has tricked us—evidences of a reality we can't quite remember. Somewhere in the depths of our minds we know we're enchanted, and we're puzzled—but we can't wake up. The illusion is too deep.

Back in the real world we wake up, all right, though we may find ourselves shaking our heads for a few days to get the cobwebs out. Now it's Colby that becomes insubstantial, a dream. But if I'm awake now, where are you, with whom I dreamt—whom I dreamt—at Colby? And where am I, if not in your dream?

When the adventure of the Ring was nearly over and the Hobbits had returned to the Shire, Merry Brandybuck felt as if it had all been a dream that had slowly faded. But Frodo didn't agree. "Not to me," he said. "To me it feels more like falling asleep again."

Ann Levison
August 14, 1986

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LONG ISLAND NEWS

One-Day Institute

The Theme: "Intimate Strangers"

We had been terribly estranged from one another all the winter, yet could we not have become intimates again? Why could we not have come together and begun a new life? Only a few words, only a couple of days more—just that—and she would have understood everything!

from *The Gentle Maiden*

If we demand warm sunshine from the cloud-covered sun, we are simply demanding something impossible. While I am here with your brother I am trying to dispel this cloud for him. Before expecting warm sunshine from him it would be well for you to banish first the cloud that surrounds his head. Should you fail to do this, something unfortunate may befall your family.

from *The Wayfarer*

The Readings:

The Gentle Maiden - Fyodor Dostoyevsky

The Wayfarer - Natsume Soseki

The Place:

The Chelsea Manor House on the Muttontown Preserve, Muttontown, Long Island. (Norman architecture circled by a moat, in a woodland blending of formal topiary gardens and naturalistic landscapes.

The Date:

Sunday, June 7, 1987

The Cost:

\$17.00, which includes readings, coffee at registration, lunch, and post-discussion refreshments.

Mail to: Long Island Great Books Council, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, NY 11050.
Please send before April 1, 1987.

Please reserve _____ places at the Long Island Institute at \$17.00 each, enclosed.

Name (s) _____

Address _____

A Call to the Cullers

If you want your name *dropped* from the mailing list, please send it, along with your address, and group affiliation (if any) to: Sibyl Cohen, 1812 Penn Center House, 1900 J.F.K. Boulevard, Phila., PA 19103.

BOSTON NEWS

The Material World

The Boston Council's one-day institute, held last November 1, was one of the best ever. Not because the meetings were held on the beautiful Tufts College campus on a lovely fall day, nor because it was wonderful as always to spend time sharing thoughts and exchanging news with friends, nor because the lunch was unusually good, although all those things were true—but because the books were terrific. They were *The Cloud of Unknowing*, by an anonymous fourteenth-century English pastor, and Loren Eiseley's *The Immense Journey*, two books that resonate and contrast with one another in complex and unpredictable ways.

The Cloud of Unknowing is a sort of manual for would-be “contemplatives,” a book whose message is, among other things, that to find God one must block out the entire created world. Eiseley, on the other hand, is irresistibly drawn to the created world and inextricably a part of it: he exalts creation with every word he writes and with every scientific question that captures his interest. The insight of the weekend for this reader, at least—the readjustment in outlook that the best Great Books symposia produce—is that it is not necessary to transcend the material, to convince oneself that the world and the body are gross and evil, in order to find God, as the Christian mystics, the Puritans, the Buddhists do in their various ways. On the contrary, one can as easily find God in the fullest ecstatic sense by understanding the wonder, the diversity, the infinite variety of the created world, as do, say, Annie Dillard or Henry Thoreau—or Loren Eiseley.

Ann Levison

Boston Spring Institute Weekend

The Boston Spring Institute Committee, after months of intensive reading, has chosen the books for the April 10-12 weekend. The theme is “Taming the Past,” and the books are three exceptional novels: *Free Fall*, by William Golding; *The Fifth Son*, by Elie Weisel; and *Fiela's Child*, by Dalene Matthee. The price of the weekend, which will take place at the Plymouth Sheraton in historic Plymouth, Mass., will be \$175 per person double occupancy.

To register: Fill out and mail tear-off with \$90 deposit per person before March 9. Cancellations before March 23 will bring refund less cost of books and mailing. Send this form and check (payable to Spring Institute Committee) to: Virginia Thurston, P.O. Box 299, Harvard, MA 01451.

Name (s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Roommate Preference _____

Great Books Marks the Constitution Bicentennial

In a year in which the chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States has resigned his position to devote full time to preparations for celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of the adoption of our Constitution, it might be appropriate for Great Books discussion groups to consider some way of marking the bicentennial anniversary.

The Great Books Foundation's series of readings published in 1955 included four of the Federalist Papers and the Constitution of the United States for one session, and the edition of 1966 included eight of the Papers alone. During late 1787 and early 1788 there were eighty-five Papers in all, written by Hamilton, Madison, and Jay under the common name of "Publius." To me, it seems very fitting as part of the bicentennial celebration to use the entire series of eighty-five for discussion over a period of several months.

After their return from Colby last fall, Nancy and Bruce Brown, members of the Norristown, Pennsylvania area Great Books group, organized another group with that program. We have been meeting on the campus of the Sperry Corporation in Blue Bell. In the first four of our semi-monthly sessions we have taken up the first twenty-nine of the Papers. If the remainder provide as much discussable material as these have, we will devote eight or ten more sessions to them, and finally to the Constitution itself. We are using the New American Library edition, 1961, which includes all of the Papers.

An appropriate sequel to the Papers might be the study by Louis Fisher of the "perennial conflict between constitutional principles and short-run political objectives, as well as the struggle between the two political branches of government, the executive and the legislative," which he called *The Constitution between Friends* (NY, St. Martin's Press, 1978).

Aaron Bechtel

Socrates to The Rescue



The New York Times

Mortimer J. Adler

other suggestions for improving public education, the manifesto called for eliminating vocational programs. Free copies of *The Paideia Bulletin* are available. Write to Paideia Proposals, 101 East Ontario Street, Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60611.

At the age of 83, Mortimer J. Adler, co-founder of the Great Books Program, continues to make news in the world of ideas. His latest: "The Wednesday Revolution." This plan for improving the public schools calls for teachers to engage in Socratic dialog with their students for only three hours every Wednesday morning. The books discussed would be stories, rather than textbooks. Students would be encouraged not to "guess" the "right" answers in their teachers' minds, but to think together to work out their own ideas and theories. Teachers would help students to express their ideas more correctly.

The "Wednesday Revolution" grew out of the Paideia group of twenty-two educators who first met in 1980 under the eegis of Dr. Adler to write an educational manifesto: "The Paideia Proposal." ("Paideia" is a Greek word meaning "bringing up a child.") Among

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

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We'll match our Is against any nonagenarian around. Or any septuagenarian, for that matter. Our man is as full of life and as full of fight as ever. The spark that ignited the Philadelphia Great Books conflagration still glows, still throws off both heat and light. We join the hundreds who wish Is well as he begins his tenth decade. Though he lacks a patriarchal beard, we acknowledge him in that role, as well as that of dear friend. May he always keep his enthusiasm, his idealism, and his warmth of heart.

A Special Invitation to the Locals

Philadelphia area Great Books members! Come to our open March meeting! Learn how we operate! Share kudos and complaints! We want to know you, to learn your feelings about Great Books! Grab a friend from your group and come! We will meet on Sunday, March 15 from 2:30-4:30 p.m. at the Christ Church community room, 20 N. American St. (2nd & Market Sts.) in Center City.

Philadelphia's 28th Annual Spring Seminar

England's Richard III, relegated to eternal infamy by William Shakespeare. Richard Crookback, poisonous spider spinning webs to entrap his enemies, murdering his little nephews. Great literature does immortalize, so Shakespeare's Richard is our Richard, unless we have also read Josephine Tey's historical thriller, *The Daughter of Time*, in which her detective delves into the long-buried skulduggery of Richard's day, rather than his own. His investigation deposes Shakespeare's royal monster, replacing him with a far different monarch. Of course the books of English mystery-writer Tey offer more than the requisite thrills and chills: she writes beautifully about three-dimensional human beings.

At the 28th Annual Spring Seminar on Sunday, May 17, we will dispute the contrary views of Shakespeare and Tey as we examine the evidence on Richard III. We'll convene at 10:00 a.m. for tea and crumpets, break for lunch between the two discussions, and conclude with a stirrup cup at 4:00 p.m. The \$19.50 fee is all-inclusive. For further information, call Fran Jacobs, 482-1367. The place: Germantown Academy, on Morris Rd., in Fort Washington, PA.

Please enclose check for \$19.50 per person, payable to Phila. GB Council. Mail to Harold Moll, 7657 Wyndale Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19151.

Name (s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Total Amount \$ _____ for _____ registrations @19.50 each.

Ninth Annual Spring Seminar in Wilmington

The Great Books Council of Delaware invites its members and its friends from all over to join in a Focus on Fantasy on Saturday, March 28. This Ninth Annual Spring Seminar will take place at Archmere Academy, Philadelphia Pike, in Wilmington. The readings, Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, offer first, a brilliant examination of the meaning and importance of fairy tales, and second, a new look at the most enduring fantasy of modern times. Psychologist Bettelheim finds fairy tales not merely desirable, but *necessary* in the lives of young children, and fantasist Tolkien creates a world which adults as well as children enter and explore with joy.

The seminar is dedicated to the memory of Doris Auspos, much loved local Great Books leader who died last year. Doris herself was the first to see the exciting possibilities in a seminar on fantasy, one of the many subjects that interested her deeply.

The schedule for the day starts at 9:30 a.m. with registration and refreshments, includes the two discussions, separated by lunch, and concludes with more refreshments from 3:00-4:00 p.m. The \$19.00 charge is all-inclusive. Please register by March 1 by sending your check (payable to GB Council of Delaware) to Helen Dawson, 760 Corner Ketch Road, Newark, DE 19711. For further information, call (302) 239-7807.

Philadelphia Sponsors 9th Annual Spring Theatre Festival

The newly renovated McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey, will draw Great Bookers and their friends on Sunday, April 5 at 2:00 p.m. The play: *Don't Trifle with Love*, by Alfred de Musset, translated and directed by Nagle Jackson. This is one of the great French romances, filled with wit and gaiety, darkened with psychological insights and intrigue. Alfred de Musset is second only to Moliere in frequency of performance by France's esteemed Comedie Francaise and this play is a perennial favorite. Inspired by Shakespearean romantic comedy, this play celebrates the course of true love and ends with the famous surprise ending that shocked Paris in the 1800's. . . and still does.

Refreshments and post-play discussion will be at East Pyne Hall. For those wishing transportation, a "Wine and Cheese" bus will leave from center city at 10:30 a.m., \$12 round trip. Call 568-2288 or 569-1696 for reservations. Interesting sights and good restaurants abound for those who choose to spend the day in historic Princeton.

Tickets are available through Great Books below box office prices. Seats are \$16, or \$18 for the first few rows. Please send checks, payable to Philadelphia GB Council, to Sylvia Kasser, 1919 Chestnut St., Apt. 503, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

A Letter to the Editor

Dear Norma,

The enclosed quote of Elizabeth Hardwick appeared in the New York *Times* Sunday Book Review section last summer. I believe all of us "Great Bookies" have experienced some of this "moral illumination" throughout the years. Perhaps you will share this quote with others via The Tricorn.

Marilyn Apelson

As I have grown older I see myself as fortunate in many ways. It is fortunate to have had all my life this passion for studying and enjoying literature and for trying to add a bit to it as interestingly as I can. This passion has given me much joy, it has given me friends who care for the same things, it has given me employment, escape from boredom, everything. The great gift is the passion for reading. It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind. It is a moral illumination.



Great Books
14 Bay Second St.
Islip, NY 11751