

# THE TRICORN

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LONG ISLAND • PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

August, 1991

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## ONWARD AND . . . ?

What to read when a group finishes the five-year sequence of book sets published by the Great Books Foundation is a problem. It was a problem when the Foundation published nine years of sets.

The Foundation itself suggests that such a group repeat the five-year sequence. Much that is positive can be said to support that recommendation. First, groups change: members come and go, and only a few of the original participants may still be on hand at the end of five years. Second, if, as claimed, a single discussion cannot "cover" completely all the possible ideas in each reading—a most plausible assumption, as our experience shows—then a second or even a third discussion of the sets makes sense. Too, the skills a group develops over the years will enable it to profit greatly from a second time around. And finally, our lives change, our understanding and our values evolve, and we are not the same people who read all those books in the past. Just as we cannot step twice into the well-known river, we cannot read and discuss the same book twice. Time and the river flowing, and all that. With reading as with love, the first encounter glows with the special magic of discovery; later loves, though, are not less wonderful, just different, and may be even richer for experience. For when we love anew, we bring to each fresh love the experience of all that we have ever loved, and so it is with reading.

The Foundation also suggests that its three-year program, *An Introduction to Great Books*, intended for tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade high school students in the Junior G.B. Program, be pursued. But of course even if a group elects this program, it will eventually reach another end, and the problem is still there.

But what can be done if new readings are wanted? A major drawback to making one's own lists is the cost of books. Buying sixteen separate books could kill or at least maim the spirit of discussion. Especially if each book were to yield only a fairly short discussion piece. Accordingly, here are some suggestions to reduce the costs of readings and yet to maintain quality. The basic idea is to reduce the number of books to be bought.

1. Consider some "big" books that will divide into multiple sessions. Some examples: Plato's *Republic*, Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Most of these books are available quite inexpensively, so the cost per discussion becomes very low.
2. Find books that contain several sections that can be discussed separately, even over a period of several years. Some examples: The Viking Portable Library series (Portable Blake, Cervantes, Emerson, Jung, Milton, Nietzsche, Shaw, Swift, Thoreau, etc.) They generally cost \$9.95 each, and should be good for a number of discussion sessions each.

3. Pick a good anthology of great poetry, from which many poetry meetings can be planned. Anthologies of short stories and other specialized forms, as well as historical periods (e.g. Viking Portable Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance, Victorian Readers) are also well to consider. Beware, though, of the temptation to o.d. on fiction.

4. Choose readings from Shakespeare and the Bible, both fundamental to our Western culture. Assume that most people already own these books (or can easily borrow them) and don't plan to buy these selections.

In all of these cases, duplication of works already in the five-year sets should be avoided. However, when the Foundation selection is a very short part of a very long work, no real conflict need be of concern.

***Paperbound Books in Print***, a standard reference in libraries and bookstores, gives information about publishers and prices. A group order can be placed through a local bookstore, which may give a discount for volume, lowering costs further. (Shop around if possible for the best deal.)

So much for economizing and availability. What about ideas from which to choose? Assuming that the group will want to continue with great books, the best bibliography of the classics is that found in the Encyclopedia Britannica's set of *The Great Books of the Western World*, which most libraries have, (if only in the stacks). A new edition of the set is out, containing an additional five volumes of twentieth century authors who were not part of the first edition. Also, the reading lists for students at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, or its campus in Santa Fe, New Mexico, both of which offer Great Books based curricula, are given in their catalogues, available from their admissions offices.

The lists of readings done at Great Books Institutes at Colby College and other locations, printed in the August, 1990, and February, 1991 Tricorns, may also be suggestive, although some of the works are not clearly at the highest level. For some heartily recommended principles of list-making and the importance of proven quality in the Great Books program, see the February, 1990, Tricorn.

In creating a list, any listmaker will start with some assumptions, perhaps develop a theory, and probably seek a systemic rationale for the selections, rather than opt for serendipity in random choice. (Our natures crave coherence, order, and unity—even law. On the other hand, we bridle at, question, and even defy authority; as they say in New Hampshire, "Live Free or Die." Here is a great issue.) Anyhow, not enough space is available in this Tricorn to include the background for the lists that follow. We hope it will appear in the next issue. In the meantime, here is a draft proposal for a second five years of readings to follow the first, using the ideas offered earlier. These lists have quality, variety of form and content, some degree of relatedness, and should indeed satisfy all but the most picky or unenlightened, who will, no doubt, in the spirit of discussion, have something of interest to say.

Gus Soderberg



## FIRST YEAR

*The Sayings of Confucius* (1 mtg.) NAL-M 4.50

Plato: *Protagoras* (1 mtg.) in *The Portable Plato* (with *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*) Viking 9.95

Aristotle: *The Nichomachean Ethics* (6 mtgs.) Oxford 4.95

*The Gospel According to Matthew* (1 mtg.) (*Bible*: New Testament)

Shakespeare: *Measure for Measure* (1 mtg.)

Keats: Poetry (1 mtg.) in *Immortal Poems of the English Language* Washington Square (Pocket Books) 5.95

Dostoevsky: *The Brothers Karamazov* (5 mtgs.) NAL-S 3.95

Cost: 29.30



## SECOND YEAR

*The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (3 mtgs.) NAL-M 4.95

*The Vision of Isaiah* (1 mtg.) (Bible: Old Testament)

Plato: *The Republic* (6 mtgs.) in *The Portable Plato*

Shakespeare: *Macbeth* (1 mtg.)

Pope: *The Rape of the Lock* (1 mtg.) in *Immortal Poems*

Thackery: *Vanity Fair* (4 mtgs.,) Oxford 4.95

Cost: 9.90

## THIRD YEAR

Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching* (1 mtg.) PC 3.95

*The Book of Proverbs* (1 mtg.) (Bible: Old Testament)

Aristotle: *The Politics* (6 mtgs.) PC 5.95

*The Koran* (5 mtgs.) PC 5.95

Shakespeare: *Henry V* (1 mtg.)

Dickens: *Great Expectations* (2 mtgs.) NAL-S 2.75

Cost: 18.60

## FOURTH YEAR

*The Upanishads* (1 mtg.) PC 3.95

John of the Cross: *The Dark Night of the Soul* (2 mtgs.) Image (Doubleday) 7.95

Cervantes: *Don Quixote* (5 mtgs.) PC 5.95

Shakespeare: *As You Like It* (1 mtg.)

De Tocqueville: *Democracy in America* (6 mtgs.) Perennial Lib. (Harper) 14.95

Whitman: Poetry (1 mtg.) in *Immortal Poems*

Cost: 32.80

## FIFTH YEAR

*The Bhagavad Gita* (1 mtg.) NAL-M 4.50

*The Song of Songs* (1 mtg.) (Bible: Old Testament)

Plato: *Phaedo* (1 mtg.) in *The Portable Plato*

Dante: *The Divine Comedy* (6 mtgs.) Vintage 8.95

Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet* (1 mtg.)

Donne, Blake, Hopkins: Poetry (1 mtg.) in *Immortal Poems*

Wm. James: *Varieties of Religious Experience* (5 mtgs.) Collier (Macmillan) 4.95

Cost: 18.40

(Abbreviations: NAL-M New American Library - Mentor; PC Penguin Classic NAL-S Signet)

Note: Total cost is \$109, without discount, or \$21.80 per year, The Foundation charges \$16.50 for first year, \$20 for the other four, averaging \$19.30 per year. *Introduction to Great Books sets* (3 years, 12 readings each) cost \$7.40 each.



# REFLECTIONS ON THE REMAINS OF A DAY

(two underlined books and luncheon leftovers)

by J. Greenblatt Whittier

LONG ISLAND SPRING INSTITUTE: *The Illusion of Truth*

--I thought it was supposed to be *The Truth of Illusion* -  
--It was, but Pearl Steinberg couldn't make it.

SCHOPENHAUER: *The Vanity of Existence*

--How do you feel about Time and Space?  
--It's Ideal.

--How does Schopenhauer define Time?  
--"Time is that in which all things pass away."  
--Is he saying life is a waste of time?  
--No, I think it's vice versa: time is a waste of life.

--What about Space? He doesn't define it.  
--He doesn't have to; it's where time takes place.

--He said there were two impulses that keep the theatre of life going: hunger and sex.  
--Don't forget boredom. That's important too.

--Listening to this discussion I can't help agreeing with his conclusion that "Human life must be some kind of mistake."  
--That wasn't his conclusion; it was his premise.  
--The way he writes, how can you tell?

--Not to change the subject, but did you know his first name was Arthur? It's not an outside source; the cover is part of the reading.

ISHIGURO: *The Remains of the Day*

--Do you agree that "...when you think of a great butler, he is bound, almost by definition, to be an Englishman?"  
--No, he could be Japanese. English or Japanese are the only great butlers.  
I cite Jeeves and Kato.

--He says "...dignity comes down to not removing one's clothes in public."  
--But that's not true dignity. True dignity can only come from not wearing clothes.

LUNCH: *Fireside Caterers*

--Fried or barbecued, it's still chicken:



## DELAWARE DELVES INTO MYTHOLOGY

The Summer Program of the Great Books Council of Delaware asks the question, "Does the myth work?" The First Unitarian Church, 730 Halstead Street in Sharply will be the scene of 3 discussions in June and July. Participants will explore the Merlin myth in Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave*, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur in Mary Renault's *The King Must Die*, and the myth of Cupid and Psyche in C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*. For further information, please call Cyra Gross, 302/475-3914. All are welcome.



## BOSTON NEWS

### *Regional Counselors - A Good Idea*

Four long-term members of the Board of Directors of the Metro Boston Great Books Council have been appointed regional counselors for discussion groups. Connie Lawson, Diedre Skiffington, Carroll Ann Bottino and Bill Shea will respond to requests for advice or assistance in selecting books, recruiting leaders, and publicizing group activities. The Council hopes its new liaison program will develop and maintain closer ties between its central body and its member groups.

### *Fall Institute*

Plans for this annual event are not yet complete, but the place (the Wellesley Hills Unitarian Church) and the tentative date (October 19) have been set. Further information will be available later this summer.



## ROAD READING

You roll down the road, absorbed by a mellifluous voice reading *Pride and Prejudice*. Can you then claim with reasonable accuracy that you have read Jane Austen's masterwork? Do you use books on tape to replace or to supplement the reading experience? Is listening to taped literature a variant of the old formula (man plus book equals reading) or a completely different event?

However you see it, "audio publishing" is a huge success. Most major publishers now provide books on tape cassettes. Six years ago, Random House listed twelve titles on tape; today it offers 300.

As a child, you probably loved being read to. If your parents were good storytellers, they added the color and feeling that ink alone can't convey. Children who are denied this experience miss a great deal. Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, goes so far as to declare that *hearing* fairy tales is an essential part of developing a positive and hopeful view of one's place in the world.

For many book lovers, the volume itself is always necessary. Such people love the feel, the look, the smell of the book they plan to read in silent comfort. Those readers experience an automatic lifting of the heart each time they enter a bookstore or park on the library lot. For them, there is no substitute for reading. They mark their books, establishing a dialogue with the writer. They reread compelling or puzzling passages. They periodically reread many favorite books. One prominent current school of criticism believes the reader's experience to be co-equal in importance to that of the author. Is this hard-core reader indomitably resistant to the tape-makers? Not necessarily. Many who thought they would never buy books on tape have been seduced by public radio's "Selected Shorts", programs of readings of fine stories by fine actors.

Listening to literature can be quite delightful. The only cloud in the bright blue taped-books-sky is the fear that listening to books could one day replace nearly all real reading. Is this a realistic possibility? In this service economy unseen others (human, mechanical, or electronic) cook our food, make our mathematical calculations, remember for us what we need to know. Already many more of us prefer learning what's happening outside our doors from the 11 o'clock news instead of the newspaper. Will the real readers become an ever-shrinking group, regarded as hopelessly addicted to linear print? Many newspapers have already gone belly-up; will book publishers be joining them?

## IT'S A GREAT (BOOKS) LIFE



Let me share my enthusiasm about Continuing Education, a capital idea, and, thus, capitalized. I take one or two courses each semester at Stockton College, and I am usually the "other" in a classroom full of students the ages of my grandchildren.

I think back to when, after World War II, the G.I. Bill entitled military service people to continue their schooling. "College age" came to include those in their twenties and thirties. From that era has come a new appreciation of learning among a mix of high school graduates and the more mature.

When I was "just" a housewife, raising a batch of children, there was no college nearby. Even the high school was a long drive. I had no idea of studying beyond reading for Great Books discussions.

Then, when I was in my fifties, this state college loomed like a ship of tools for learning almost anything that interested me. As it came into focus, I saw an overwhelming cargo of choices. Ecologically oriented, I was tempted by science courses. Alternatives beckoned, too, (music, philosophy, languages, even a semester of foreign films and one on witchcraft), but I opted for literature.

That 1971 term was so stimulating that subsequently I pursued a variety of subjects, some for credit, some not. I could choose whatever course or professor, or combination of both, appealed to me. Who could ask for more?

At first, the challenge was more than academic. Mine was usually the only gray head, a cause for self-consciousness. But our common interest was a great leveler and my classmates were as ready to hear my viewpoints as I was to hear theirs. Called by my first name, I evolved into an accepted member of the group. Such continues to be the pattern. I have found that professors like having a disparity of ages to address. Senior citizens are welcome, they tell me.

When working for credits, I share student pressures. Will my term paper be done on time? Can I finish the exam? But it's all uniquely satisfying, quite unlike my undergraduate days when social life was a constant distraction. Now my prime advantage is the added enjoyment of watching the inexperienced minds around me absorbing education, to whatever degree.

Each class seems to be a microcosm of the world. Some students are there willingly, others only for credits; some eager to participate, others unprepared. The diversity ranges from avid learner to yawning skeptic to daydreamer. I observe a few food junkies: restless, a hand or foot never still, candy and soda on the arm rest. I note with despair those who doze, their need for sleep overpowering (and their parents paying). I notice scrupulous note takers, whose fear of missing a detail that might appear on a quiz reminds me of my own past. I listen to brash arguments and nervous laughter. I hear, too, moments of comprehension and relaxed laughter.

I see rapport in teacher-student exchanges. Classroom atmosphere differs with the mood of the group, or the time of the moon, or the professor's state of mind. Humor or lack of it has much effect.

Dress is casual, with well-worn jeans the norm, and skirts a rarity. Old ladies are a rarity, too, and I hope more will find nearby colleges and share the wealth. Last term I took Linguistics. Then it was Bible as Literature. Next will be entomology. Education is forever.

*Claire Gerber*



# PHILADELPHIA NEWS

## A New Approach to Leading

Would you love to take leader training, but hesitate because you're uncertain about committing the preparation time necessary for leading all of the discussions for your group? Take note, then, of a growing movement toward shared leading. In many groups, two, three, four or more trained leaders take turns, thus lightening the load for all. Check out this possibility in your own group. You may find that you've cleared away all possible objections to your registering for our two-session leader training course. Then call Leader Trainer Sibyl Cohen at 568-9827, or Coordinator Barbara Duno, at 527-1632.

### *The Changing (Partial) of the Guard*

Philadelphia Great Books has a new president, Sylvia Perelman, and a new vice president, Eva Bix. Olga Wallace is newly installed as recording secretary. Sylvia Kasser continues as treasurer, Bill McConeghey as corresponding secretary, and Barbara Duno as coordinator.

### *Philadelphia's 21st Annual Great Books*

### FALL INSTITUTE WEEKEND

*presents*

### UPROOTED: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

#### **Hunger of Memory:**

The Americanization of Richard Rodriguez:

Richard Rodriguez

#### **FOB:**

A three-character play—

the arrived, the not so newly arrived, and the newly arrived:

David Henry Hwang

#### **In the Skin of a Lion:**

A tapestry woven from the lives of Canada's construction workers:

Michael Ondaatje

*November 15-17, 1991*

*Pocono Manor, Mount Pocono, PA*

**COST:** \$190 per person, double occupancy, \$250 per single occupancy. Price includes meals, lodging, books, entertainment, and tips.

**CANCELLATION:** Your deposit less a charge for books and mailing will be refunded if notice is postmarked no later than Oct. 2.

**TO REGISTER:** Please send a deposit of \$90 per person for double occupancy and \$120 for single occupancy with your registration form to:

Sylvia Perelman  
8214 Marion Road  
Elkins Park, PA 19117

## REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is a deposit of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$90 per person double occupancy *or* \$120 per person single occupancy — if available) made payable to Fall Institute Committee.

Name (Please give the first and last name of each person

Non-smoking

Smoking

No

group

group

preference

(first) \_\_\_\_\_ (last) \_\_\_\_\_

(first) \_\_\_\_\_ (last) \_\_\_\_\_

Address (street) \_\_\_\_\_

(city) \_\_\_\_\_ (state) \_\_\_\_\_ (zip) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Special requests should accompany this form. They will be honored if possible.

I would like to room with \_\_\_\_\_

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## Greater Book Sale

Give your GB group a second chance to delight in a discussion of our Spring Institute's hit number! *Staying On* by Paul Scott may be bought in modest group quantities at our wholesale cost of \$2.25 per copy, by calling Eva Bix at 215-836-5534. Act now, enjoy later!

### *Tangled Titles*

"Do you have *The Madwoman of Ohio*?" inquired a customer. It takes more than that to stump the proprietors of the Drama Bookshop in New York. After only the briefest of pauses, they put a copy of *The Madwoman of Chaillot* in the hands of their confused customer. Since that day, fifteen years ago, the Drama Bookshop has kept a list of muddled requests. Here are some favorites:

*Two Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

*The Night the Rose Spent in Jail*

*The Doctor Inside Himself*

*Andrew Cleves and the Lion*

*Miss Alliance*

*She Stops the Concorde*

*Bucket by Anouilh*

*Such a Perversity in Chicago*

*A Phoenix That's All Too Frequent*

*Anne of a Thousand Clowns*

*If the Morning Comes for Electra*

*Lou Garrick Did Not Die of Cancer*

*Once Upon a Catholic*

*The Aspirin Papers*

*Lou Grant Didn't Die of Cancer*

*The Crystal Zoo (Glass Menagerie?)*

*The Road Runner Stumbles*

*Waiting for Lefty Godot*

*A View from the River by Arthur Miller*

*A Phoenix Too Fragrant*

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