

# THE TRICORN

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

August, 1992

## LOSE THE LEADER

The time has come for the leader to go. The mother of this interesting invention is necessity. For we have found over the years that leaders, like virgins, have become increasingly rare. The busy pace of our lives apart, another reason for the rarity of leaders has to do with the nature of the job as presented in the not-so-easy-to-follow instructions. The leader must master the text - yet is forbidden to interpret it. The leader must serve the author - but is forbidden to follow an agenda of salient topics in the reading. The leader must be all-wise-and-all-ignorant, a sort of idiot-savant producing miracles of insight and calculation which she (read she or he to save space) cannot explain but which must somehow be justifiable. She must be a mistress of group dynamics and psychology, a humorist of the first order, a gifted playwright and director/orchestrator, a philosopher marinated in wisdom, and a masochistic wonder of self-denial. And all the time as inscrutable as Charlie Chan - not easy for a round-eye. Not surprisingly, then, the supply of prospective leaders has become at best meagre, at worst exhausted, a Kalahari of candidates.

But what necessity imposes, philosophy and psychology propose. The presence of any leader, even if you call her a facilitator, an expediter, or a catalyst, gives the group an authority figure, no matter how you define the job. And given such, the group will not - cannot - finally develop the skills, the responsibility, the self-reliance, the self-regard that the Great Books program should develop. A leader is inevitably expected to do too much of the work the group should do: listening carefully and responding to what is said (keeping always in mind the text and the discussion's relevance to it), applying discipline to sort out disorder, controlling the unruly, suppressing the monopolizer, etc.

The difficulties of leading cannot obscure the fact that some individuals do lead well by the prescribed method, that leaders can and do create interest and excitement and that groups do generally make do, no matter how their leaders act. That is not the point. The point is that any leadership is finally inadequate for and even counterproductive to free and responsible group discussion. And so, to repeat, the time has come, of necessity and by principled commitment to individual self-realization and self-definition, to abandon the use of leaders in the Great Books program.

How shall that be done? In Boston, for several years now we have taken the concept of training the group. But we have been doing so with a continuing agenda and some success in doing so. Now we turn to a new concept: training the group as a self-directing, self-realizing entity. Ann and Walter Levison and John Mogan are our trainers. The key to a new era is based on the creation of a new instrument, "A Guide to Group Discussion of Great Books, based on methods developed by the Great Books Foundation, with inaugural readings." What used to be the Manual for Leaders now becomes an instrument for everybody. No more holy books in the inner sanctum, no more priests in the temple.

We have heard of groups that have, usually after years of led discussion, gradually evolved into leaderlessness. At the Colby Great Books Summer Institute a leaderless group has run successfully for years. Mention should be made that many participants want a leader. Well, learning to swim is sometimes difficult, to be sure. But little growth is possible staying on the shore. And we will certainly find that those people who, with kindly encouragement, take the plunge, will soon join the chorus in shouting, "Come on in, the water's fine!"

Gus Soderberg

## BARTLEBY IN SUBURBIA

Once upon a time, many mommies were available for volunteer work in the community. In those long-gone days, I gladly agreed to take Great Books leader training to start an eighth grade group in our middle school. All went well for the first month or so. Then we read Herman Melville's "Bartleby," a story I hadn't encountered before. Fascinated by this puzzling tale, I recounted it to my own three small children, to my great regret. The negativism of Melville's spectral copyist infected our household immediately. Just as Bartleby replies to his employer's reasonable requests with "I would prefer not to," I heard that rejoinder more and more frequently:

- "How about taking out the trash?"
- "I would prefer not to."
  
- "Time for bed: Let's go upstairs."
- "I would prefer not to."
  
- "Come on in now, and start your homework."
- "I would prefer not to."

This preference raced through the ranks, reaching even my sweet baby: on being urged to finish her beans, she pounded her fat fists on her high chair tray, shouting "Not to! Not to!" Order was restored only by fighting fire with fire, flame with flame. I met the children's refusals with preferences of my own: "Fine! Then I would prefer not to let you watch TV tonight," "OK, so I would prefer not to read you a story," and "Good!, then I would prefer not to have you help make the cookies." And so life gradually returned to its pre-Bartleby state.

My eighth grade discussion group wound up the year with Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. This tale, also, I brought home to my family, fearing no recurrence of the Bartleby fiasco. No nay-sayers in this story to set a poisonous example in our house. The very next day I received my first letter with the Black Spot.



## PHILADELPHIA NEWS

### From Barbara to Betsy

The Philadelphia Great Books program has been continuously lucky in its choice of area coordinators. Several years ago, we had a formal salute to them all, remarking that each, in her own way, had put a special stamp on the position, while keeping up the splendid number of local groups. Now, once again, we say goodbye and hello to our departing and arriving coordinators. Barbara Duno has given us several years of devoted service. Despite her burgeoning personal responsibilities (work towards an advanced degree as well as library employment), she has kept us all toeing the mark. Great Books is most grateful to Barbara, and we hope she'll always be active in the program.

Taking over from Barbara is Betsy Galante, whose twenty years of active participation have made her well known. A lover of reading and of discussion, she has been a lively member of her group and part of any and all institutes. Bubbling Betsy is eager to dig in and make everything hum. She says, "Great Books opened horizons for me at a time when I was finished raising my children. It enlarged my mind and brought me wonderful friends." Now Ms. Galante is keen to give her energy to the program from which she has received so much.

### Leader Training

July 23 and 24 brought Sibyl Cohen to Long Beach Island for a special leader training course. She conducted another one-day training program in Logan Library in Philadelphia. Anyone interested in learning about becoming a leader can call Betsy Galante, 885-2595.

## A CONNIVING SALUTE TO TRICORN'S EDITOR/PUBLISHER

*NORMA OSER*

Thank you, Norma, for more things than we can remember to thank you for. TEN YEARS! For ten years now Norma has put up with us - late articles, spelling mistakes, strange grammar. Makes no difference. Norma always gets the Tricorn to press on time - always right, always well edited, always interesting. Somehow she brings out the best in us and sees that it gets into print.

So here's a loving salute to Norma, our editor, publisher, writer, coxer and cajoler. Without her Philly's bell wouldn't ring, New York would pay a syntax and Boston would be common.

You might ask why this is a conniving salute. Norma's too modest to let us run this paean to her. We connived with the printer to show her a different page for approval - then switched the copy.

Kudos, encomiums and thank yous to you, Norma, from all the bookies. (or is it thank youse?)

David and Sylvia Perelman and Pres Brown, co-conners

PHILADELPHIA'S  
22nd ANNUAL  
GREAT BOOKS

## FALL INSTITUTE WEEKEND asks WHO AM I?

"If I am not for myself, who will be?  
If I am only for myself, what am I?  
and if not now, when?"

*Hillel*



The Unexpected Universe  
-Loren Eisely

Cat's Eye  
-Margaret Atwood

The Old Man and The Sea  
-Ernest Hemingway

November 13 - 15, 1992

Pocono Manor, Mount Pocono, PA

**COST IS:** \$195 per person double occupancy, \$255 for 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 October 10.

**TO REGISTER:** Please send a deposit of \$95 per person for double occupancy and \$125 for single occupancy with your registration form to:

Sylvia Perelman  
8214 Marion Road  
Elkins Park, PA 19117

### REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is a deposit of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (\$95 per person double occupancy or \$125 per person single occupancy - if available) made payable to Fall Institute Committee.

| Names (please give the first and last name of each person) | Non-smoking group        | Smoking group            | No preference            |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (first) _____ (last) _____                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| (first) _____ (last) _____                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

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

(Optional) I would like to room with \_\_\_\_\_

## BOSTON NEWS

### A New President

Deirdre Skiffington has assumed the presidency of the Metropolitan Boston Great Books Council. Gus Soderberg resigned the office because of recent health problems, though he is now making a good recovery from his heart surgery.

### Fall One-Day Institute

Please save Saturday, October 24th for this ever-popular Boston activity. The book selections will soon be announced.

## APRIL LEGACIES IN PLYMOUTH

### A Report on the Recent Boston Spring Institute

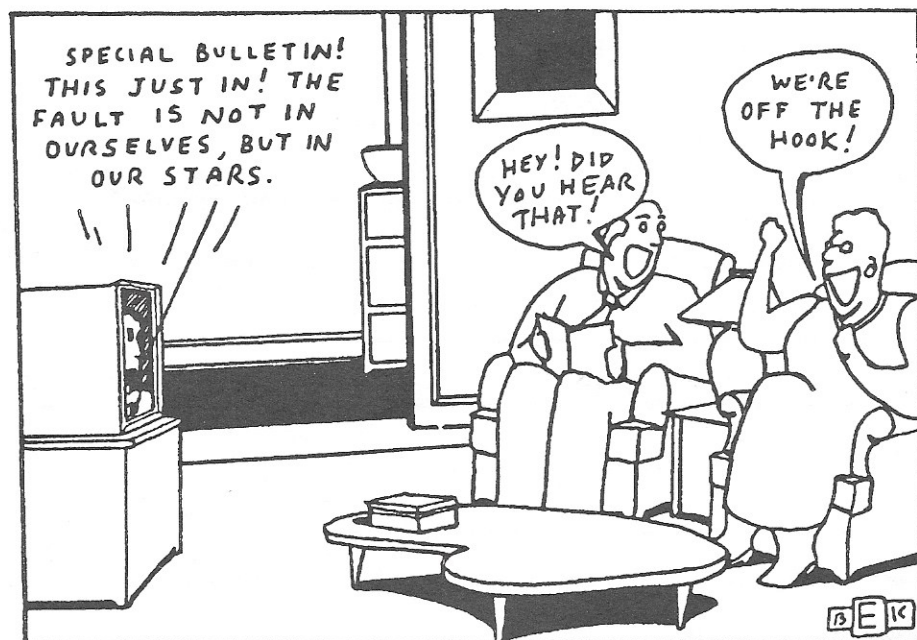
The unexpected opening instruction got us acquainted Friday evening: Each of us was to bequeath something to an unknown member of our group by writing it on a card; then the cards were shuffled and redistributed. Most of us bequeathed intangibles, such as serenity and self-appreciation. I, however, bequeathed a large collection of classical recordings. Someone else gave a 1979 Plymouth that needed advice from Public Radio's Tom and Ray.

Saturday morning we struggled with Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct*, a brilliant intellectual achievement. Later, Arthur Miller's play, *The Price*, helped us put some of our own more poignant memories into a new perspective, as the play's characters struggled with their legacies. After dinner we had a "Yankee Swap," which could be described as a festival of temporary legacies. I at first received fragrant bayberry candles, but someone with a higher number took them from me in exchange for a box of sipping straws. At some point, I briefly owned a copy of the 1930 Boston Social Register, but before I had perused beyond the Cabots and the Coolidges it was taken from me, eventually winding up with probably the only person in the room whose family was listed.

Sunday morning we relived the lives of *Oscar and Lucinda* (by Peter Carey), two of the most believable weirdos I've ever encountered, each of whom lived in the grip of obsessive and compulsive legacies that shattered their lives.

Bill Thurston

Next year's Spring Institute will again be in Plymouth on April 2-4, 1993. Put it on your 1993 calendar now. Flyers with complete information will be sent right after New Year's Day.



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Editor: Norma Oser 7933 Heather Rd., Elkins Park, PA 19117  
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## LONG ISLAND SPRING INSTITUTE BOOK REPORT

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The art of not reading is extremely important. It consists in our not taking up whatever happens to occupy the larger public.

Arthur Schopenhauer

(So who listens to Shopenhauer anymore?)

One of the readings for the LI Institute was the #1 National Best Seller, *You Just Don't Understand - Women and Men in Conversation*, by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D. Much of what Dr. Tannen, Ph.D., writes is relevant to Great Books discussions.

Let me paraphrase about interruptions:

- Interrupting is a conversational style. In some cultures it is a means of establishing rapport.
- Interrupting is a way of showing that you're highly involved in the conversation.
- The assumption that conversation is an activity in which only one voice should be heard at a time is an erroneous assumption.
- Silence is a lack of rapport. You don't want to risk it. When a man interrupts he does so to change the topic...to one that's more important.
- When a woman interrupts she is showing support by finishing statements for the speaker. This is called overlapping and is very helpful because it reflects understanding and cooperation.

Dr. Tannen, Ph.D., includes this joke that her father liked to tell (without any helpful overlapping, we can assume):

A woman sues her husband for divorce. When the judge asks her why she wants a divorce, she explains that her husband has not spoken to her in two years. The judge asks the husband, "Why haven't you spoken to your wife in two years?" He replies, "I didn't want to interrupt her."

Dr. Tannen, Ph.D., cites research to contradict the commonly held stereotype of women portrayed in this joke (with a daughter like that who needs a father?). There's more, but I don't want to ruin the story for you.

Not a Great Book, but a fun reading to discuss in mixed company - with wives and husbands in different groups.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

"Only connect," says E.M. Fister in *Howard's End*. Help us connect with all of our Great Books people with whom we have lost connections or whose names have never reached us. Please send such names, addresses, and phone numbers to Betsy Galante, 885-2595.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I was appalled by John Chapin's recommendation to save money by copying 100-page excerpts from books. This is strictly a violation of "Fair Use." Under the copyright law "Fair Use" permits multiple copies for classroom discussion, provided the copying meets tests for brevity and spontaneity. Brevity is defined as follows:

Prose: either a complete article, story or essay of less than 2500 words, or an excerpt from any prose work of not more than 1000 words... Copying is prohibited when "used to create...anthologies or as a substitute for purchase..."

The practice of using "modern machine copying services" is illegal and it deprives publishers of revenue to which they are clearly entitled. The writer may be unaware that this constitutes theft and should not be advocated by a reputable organization such as ours. Several groups in the Philadelphia area enjoy discounts as high as 40% offered by paperback publishers of many of the excellent choices recommended by Mr. Chapin.

Eva Bix

To the Editor:

I find several problems in John Chapin's response (February 1992 Tricorn) to my suggested reading list for Years VI-X proposed in the August 1991 Tricorn: First, who would select the readings and according to what criteria? Next, you ignore the copyright laws in proposing massive duplicating, which would create a product extremely bulky and expensive, as well as illegal.

Gus Soderberg

To the Editor:

Your correspondent John Chapin offered some interesting changes for the reading list of years VI-X in last February's Tricorn, and it is good to see some disapproval of the standard readings usually offered. Here is my response:

1. Drop Plato and Aristotle. I agree, unless Aristotle's *Politics* is given a hearing. I would add Erasmus, Havelock Ellis, Santayana's *Reason in Science* or *Little Essays*, and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.
2. Drop Shakespeare? Deprive ourselves of the most glorious word music ever devised? Reading plays is often more satisfying than going to the theatre, to wit: the plays of Oscar Wilde, John Millington Synge, George Bernard Shaw, and Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*. And Mr. Chapin omits Tennessee Williams - our greatest American playwright.
3. I agree. Drop the entire program of mysticism and add some legends and fables with healthy heroes and heroines.
4. Yes, drop Dostoyevsky and his sick violence and embrace the artistic consciousness of Flaubert (*The Temptation of St. Anthony*), the genially ironic temper of Samuel Butler (*Life and Habit*), the finely written moral works of Maurice Maeterlinck, Mark Twain's *What Is Man?* or *A Connecticut Yankee*, Thackeray's *Rowena and Rebecca*, and one of the great novels of Anatole France.
5. I disagree. A calliope is not the medium for Bach; ergo, Mann, Kafka, Camus, Faulkner and Hemingway do not belong in Great Books. Their material is like current magazine articles, of interest for a time, and then forgotten. Melville will probably remain an historical curiosity. Of the eight listed by Chapin, Conrad is the only capable storyteller. America's great writers are essayists, rather than novelists.
6. I agree, except for Veblen and Marx. Let the dead past bury its odd creatures. Why not add Will Durant and the letters of Adams and Jefferson (unexpurgated ed., 1855)?
7. Yes. Also add Alexis Carrel and Thomas Huxley.

Why must our time be spent only in improvement exercises, so that literary masterpieces must be chopped up in a search for meaning, casting aside the beauty of the finely wrought text? What is it in the makeup of us Yankees that makes us reluctant to accept beauty in art? Why must we attempt to intellectualize the arts instead of enjoying their aesthetic gifts?

Mayo DuBasky

To the Editor:

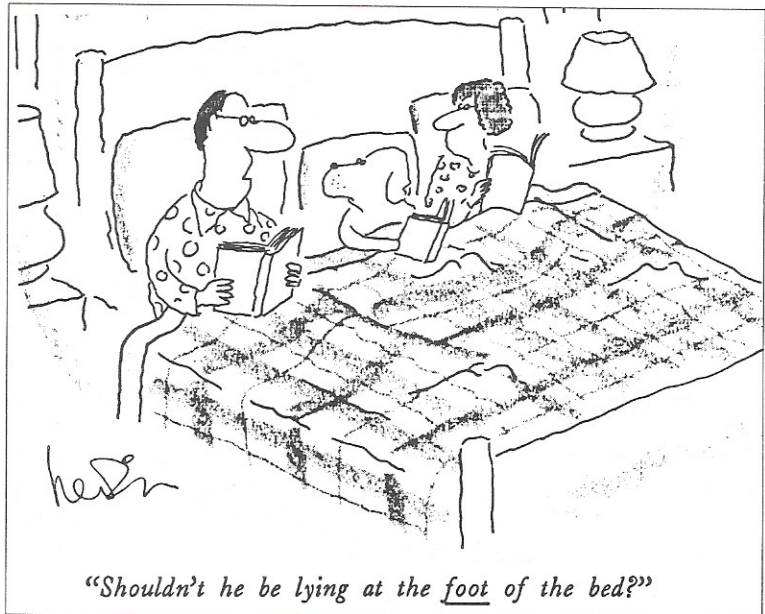
Herewith a few verses to honor  
my Great Books group:

Hail to that intrepid troop  
The Elmont Book Discussion Group  
Where each fortnightly session brings  
(Like Carroll's Cabbages and Kings)  
A richly celebrated brew  
To stimulate the chosen few.

For those with psychogenic aims  
There's Sigmund Freud, or Henry James;  
If poetry's your game, perhaps  
You'd rather read some other chaps  
Like Shakespeare (the immortal bard)  
Or even Peter Abelard.

But as for me I much prefer  
To read the words as they occur  
In simple sequence known as prose;  
(I'm weak on thinking, goodness knows!)

Howard Rowe



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## WILMINGTON SPRING INSTITUTE DATE:

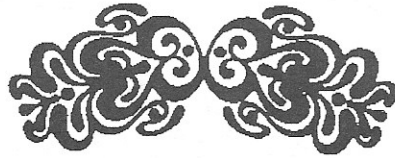
MARCH 27, 1993

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## WRITERS' RIGHTS

Writing has always exposed its practitioners to occupational hazards of the worst sort. From the most ancient of days, psychological blocks have sprung up to impede the writer's flow of ideas. The isolation needed for his work has driven many an author to drink, in an ever-failing effort to assuage his loneliness. Women members of the guild have had to deal with husbands hollering for their supper, and children wailing at their hems. These obstacles, though, seem minuscule next to the greatest hazard of all: starvation.

The average writer in America in 1992 earns less than \$9000 a year, starvation pay in anyone's scheme of things. Recently a number of wraiths of the writing fraternity banded together to draw attention to this desperate situation. They declared a "Writers Rights Day," during which they held a two-hour protest at Grand Central Terminal in New York City. A Declaration of Writers' Economic Rights was circulated for signatures. According to a report in the New York Times, the group addressed the difficulty in getting health insurance, as well as the need "to establish minimum standards for writers' contracts, including higher and more timely payments, making publishers assume or share the cost of libel insurance and giving writers a fair amount of time to return advances on canceled projects." Erica Jong, president of the Authors Guild, told those gathered at the terminal, "You read in the papers about the multi-million-dollar deals that a handful of writers are fortunate enough to get; you don't read about the canceled contracts, or the writers who worked 4 or 7 or 10 years only to have it orphaned when some fancy new Japanese or German conglomerate bought the publishing house and fired the editors who were the authors' only contact."



## Seeress in Our Midst

Everyone knows the word sibyl to mean seeress. From the right-side-up spelling of her first name on down, our own Sibyl Cohen fits the shoe. All of us know her as our trainer of discussion leaders. Most of us know her as past president of Council and tireless updater of our membership disks. Many of us know her as a university lecturer in philosophy, some as VP of a part-time professors' union. Others know Sibyl as the forceful advocate of woman's cause. Fewer know her as her grandchildren's bodyguard - yet she is all of these for starters. Well ahead, Sibyl's self-savvy floats on a bottomless pool of equanimity and charm.

How would our seeress shape a Great Books future? She can endure Mortimer Adler's comforting canon in our season-spanning readings of non-threatening, elitist literature. Yet she cries out for the programming of our periodic institutes to change radically; to challenge our vested belief system; to serve up newly significant ideas on racism, sexism, and critiques of scientific theory or of our sanctified tenets, to wit: medical, business, and legal ethics; even literary criticism.

Sibyl would have institutes ditch the fear of burdening readers with choices other than the tried and true. "How can we enlarge our audience," she asks, "if we have no product to sell?" Her fierce answer foresees a future draw of fresh faces, new groups, more leaders. In her view and ours, it's what institutes should be all about.

Emil Bix

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