

THE TRICORN

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

February, 1993

COLBY '93: SHALL I EVER KNOW?

"Can the truth be learned? With this question we shall begin." Kierkegaard's use of the definite article in this quotation from *The Philosophical Fragments* in no way diminishes the complexities of the quest. Through this work and *Genesis*, Plato's *Timaeus*, Eiseley's *The Immense Journey*, Hegel's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, and Broch's *The Death of Virgil* we will journey among differing conceptions of beginnings, of development, of relationships, of purpose, of process, of meaning, of mystery, of endings.

Yes, we'll be deeply engaged in old-fashioned Great Books mind stretching, as we grapple with the great ideas of great thinkers. "Can the truth be learned?" "Shall I ever know?" Surely the joy is in the seeking. Come to Colby this summer and join the other joyous seekers. (Further information on page 3).

Books Worth Discussing

It may be difficult to identify the great books that have not been officially canonized. But ignorance of these significant works effectively avoids dialog with those who are not like most of us (old, white, establishment.) I would like to share with you information about some of the works and authors I know about in my professional field, philosophy. There are dozens of names I could mention: old timers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Edmund Husserl, Maurice MerleauPonty, Ferdinand de Saussure, or contemporary philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty, Foucault, etc. These are men who have made lasting, seminal contributions to the history of ideas and are already part of the unofficial canon although unknown to Great Books.

Specific recommendations:

Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (210 pages). This is an easy-to-read book that significantly affected all the various scientific disciplines. It pyramided the term "paradigm" into academic "ordinary language."

Evelyn Fox Keller. *Gender and Science; A Feeling for the Organisms* (207 pages). Both of these books are readable, of reasonable length, and presume some familiarity with Kuhn's thesis. The first is a series of essays dealing with the history of science to show among other things the political dimensions of "objectivity." The second is both a biography of Barbara McClintock, "one of the most remarkable scientists who ever practiced genetic biology." and a history and philosophy of science.

Richard Rorty. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (198 pages). Although this may not be the best introduction to Rorty's ideas, I think it is useful for us because he uses Proust, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Nabokov and Orwell to provide a base to build on. Some of these we have read or could read in conjunction with this book.

John Rawls. *Theory of Justice* (587 pages). This one is long and complex to read. I am not particularly fond of it, but I cannot imagine dealing with any ethical issue without including Rawls' theories. I should probably include Alisdair MacIntyre's recent works in this class.

Michel Foucault. *History of Sexuality*. This man persuasively turns conventional ideas inside out. If you accept Mill's arguments against censorship, then you must hear what Foucault has to say. This may not be the best of his works to start with, but it is dynamite. I have read only the first of the three volumes, and I recommend it highly.

Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method* (498 pages). This is a difficult book, but probably one of the classics in the field of hermeneutics. It is quite long, but interesting and important.

There are some books outside my field that I have not only enjoyed, but consider classics. There is Solzhenitzin's *Gulag Archipelago*, any poetry by Anna Ahkmatova, and Nadia Mandelstam's *Memoirs*. There are other books that I want to read because I know they are important parts of our history. These include *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and works by W.E.B. DuBois.

These are just a few of the works I think we need to tackle if our program is to consider itself a living dialog of great ideas. If you have suggestions of other books that have already demonstrated their importance, I would like to know about them. I would like to read and discuss them, also.

Sibyl Cohen



LONG ISLAND NEWS

Spring Institute Theme: ~~THE~~ **GOOD** IN LIFE

The Readings:

THE ENCHIRIDION of EPICTETUS

"Is a little oil spilled or a little wine stolen? Say to yourself, "This is the price paid for peace and tranquility; and nothing is to be had for nothing."

THE FUR HAT by VLADIMIR VOINOVICH

The Writer's Union is giving out fur hats to its members, according to their importance - reindeer fawn for a foremost writer, marmot for a leading writer, and so on down the line.

With high expectations, Yefrim Rakhlin rushes to the director's office where he reads the painful truth written in red across his application, "Accept an order, fur hat, domestic tomcat, medium fluffy."

The Date: June 13, 1992

The Place: An Estate on the North Shore of Long Island (Still to be determined)

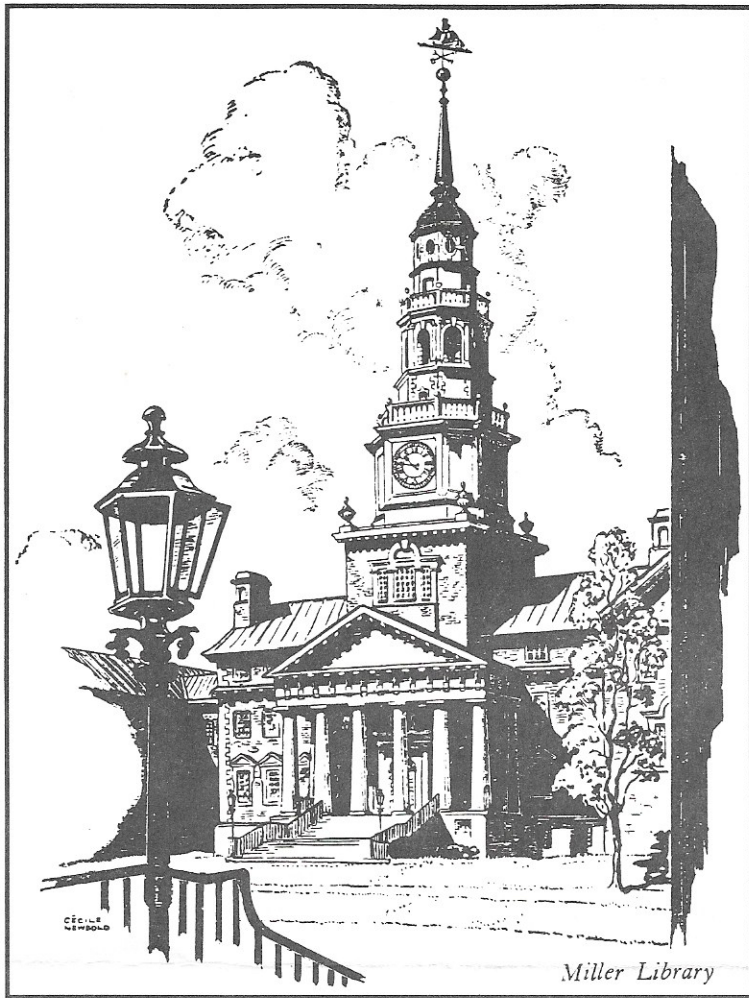
The Cost: \$22.00. Includes readings, travel directions, coffee at registration, lunch and post-discussion refreshments.

Mail to: Long Island Great Books Council, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, NY 11050.
(Please send before April 1, 1993)

Please reserve _____ places at the Long Island Institute at \$22.00 each, enclosed.

Name(s) _____

Address _____



Miller Library

COLBY COLLEGE CAMPUS

WHY DISCUSSION --

No matter the pleasure derived from the solitary reading of a stimulating work, a well led discussion of that very work will yield an almost immeasurable increase in enjoyment, insight, understanding -- even, possibly, wisdom. For how can I know what I think until I hear what I say and ponder the questions evoked?

SIDELIGHTS:

Swimming, boating, tennis, golf, summer theaters, warm hospitality of a staff who look forward to our return, and a clambake.

**SHALL I EVER KNOW?
1993 GREAT BOOKS
SUMMER INSTITUTE**

WHERE AND WHEN:

Colby College, Waterville, Maine -- August 8-14

THEME:

Can the truth be learned? -- Kierkegaard

READINGS:

- Genesis
- Plato, *Timaeus*
- Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*
- Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*
- Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*
- Broch, *The Death of Virgil*

"... I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but do you realize that what you heard is not what I meant?"

Alexander Botts
Saturday Evening Post -- from yore

ELIGIBILITY:

Any adult who desires to spend a relaxing week, which includes the reading and discussion of books.

COST:

\$396 which includes room, board and readings. Books, travel information and schedule of events will be sent upon receipt of deposit.

TRAVEL:

Your travel and accommodation needs can be assisted by: Campus Travel Service, Colby College, Roberts Union, Waterville, ME 04901, 1-800-627-7639.

JUNIOR PROGRAM:

Families with children between 4 and 14 are welcome. Costs are: \$270 for children 4-9; \$310 for children 10-14. Readings are:

YOUNGER JUNIORS:
Perrault, *Puss In Boots*
Aesop, *Fables*

OLDER JUNIORS:
Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*
Aesop, *Fables*

Inquiries: Contact Ginny Thurston, 508-456-3505.

CANCELLATIONS:

Your deposit will be refunded, less \$75, if you cancel before July 1, 1992. Refund for Juniors will be reduced \$25 to cover cost of readings.

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION

Mail to: Colby Summer Institute
P.O. Box V
Harvard, MA 01451-0560
(508) 456-3505

with a leader
I/We prefer a group
without a leader

Enclosed herewith is \$ _____ for registration of the following persons at Colby Institute

Please Print

 First Name _____ Last Name _____ Telephone No. _____
 Address _____
 Street, Apt/P.O. Box _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Deposit of \$100.00 required for each registrant; balance may be paid at any time prior to or at registration at the College.
 Make checks payable to Colby Summer Institute.
 If registering juniors, please provide names & ages on back.

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Books from Betsy

New groups ordering first year books should contact Coordinator Betsy Galante, 885-2595. Betsy also stocks some sets for years 2, 3, 4 and 5; new participants joining existing groups can get needed books more quickly from Betsy than from the Foundation in Chicago.

THEATRE PARTY

- Date:** Saturday, February 20, Matinee at 2:00 p.m.
- Place:** Temple University Theatre, 13th and Norris Streets, free parking on Diamond Street, east of 12th, adjacent to theatre.
- Cost:** \$12.00, including discussion and refreshments.
- Reservations:** Please send your check, payable to Phila. GB Council, to Fritzie Green, 2401 Pennsylvania Ave., Apt.10-B21, Phila. 19130
- Information:** (215) 978-7828.
- Play:** *Our Country's Good*, by Timberlake Wertenbaker. The hit of recent New York and London theatre seasons - a play about the other New World, Australia. It tells the true story of the first theatrical production in the Australian convict colony - by inmates and officers of The Royal Navy. *Our Country's Good* won the Olivier Award as London's best play of 1988.

WILMINGTON SPRING SEMINAR

The Great Books Council of Delaware will hold its Spring Seminar on Saturday, March 27 at the First Unitarian Church, 730 Halstead Road, Wilmington. The books to be discussed are two fascinating works on post-colonial political problems in Africa. \$24.00 includes delivered books and lunch. Please send checks payable to Great Books Council of Delaware to Cyra Gross, 101 Delview Drive, Wilmington, DE 19810. Information: (302) 475-3914.

PHILADELPHIA'S 34th ANNUAL SPRING SEMINAR

WATER WORKS

River tales: One of melancholy beauty, the other of hilarious adventure.

Norman Maclean's deservedly lauded *A River Runs Through It*

William Faulkner's tale of high times at high tide on the Mississippi, *Old Man*

From his opening sentence to his final "I am haunted by waters," Maclean brilliantly illumines the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" Faulkner examines the same moral query through the adventures of a clownish convict, a heroic fool adrift in a flood.

Bring your water wings to delightful, reachable Chestnut Hill Academy, 500 W. Willow Grove Avenue, just opposite the Philadelphia Cricket Club. Cost covers readings, feedings, meetings. Special consideration for financial hardship. We'll start with a koffee klatsch, break for a delicious lunch, and wind up with post-discussion refreshments.

Please send check for \$25.00 per person, payable to Phila. GB Council. Mail to Max Klayman, 2200 Tremont St., Apt. 206, Philadelphia, PA 19115. (215) 676-6369.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Philadelphia Council Offers New "6th Year Classics"

For some years past, several groups in our orbit have enjoyed readings at bulk order discounts. Those looking beyond the GB Foundation program currently available may wish to join, providing that:

- 1) Orders for complete sets only are received no later than March 30, 1993.
- 2) Prepayment in full for your entire group accompanies all orders.
- 3) No titles may be substituted unless forced by publishers' shortages.

Herewith the ironclad set:

Wordsworth: *Favorite Poems*

Abraham Lincoln: *Great Speeches*

Hilaire Belloc: *The Servile State*

Jack London: *White Fang*

Tolstoy: *The Kreutzer Sonata*

Burckhardt: *Reflections on History*

Walter Pater: *Marius the Epicurean*

Lafcadio Hearn: *Kwaidan* (17 tales)

Freud: *Future of an Illusion*

Burke: *A Vindication of Natural Society*

Hemingway: *To Have and to Have Not*

Goldsmith: *She Stoops to Conquer*

Richard von Mises: *Probability, Statistics and Truth*

Prepaid cost \$36 per set, payable to Eva Bix, 902 Harston Lane, Erdenheim, PA 19118, tel. 215-836-2049. Please make sure to pick up your books before your final Spring session. You may wish to add Shakespeare and/or bible readings of your choice, especially if you stretch this list over two years by interspersing your own selections. Some titles may also be discussed during consecutive meetings. Experience recommends your purchase of extra sets for eventual newcomers or better yet, persuading your library to do so.

Honor and Memory Cards

Contributions to the Philadelphia Great Books Council, in honor or in memory of someone will be gladly received and graciously acknowledged. Please send such contributions, along with the necessary information to Bernard Wald, 2200 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Apt. 902S, Philadelphia, PA 19130. Phone (215) 564-0463.

Cryptogram Fans:

Our own Louise Moll has created *The Great Book of Cryptograms*, on the Spring, 1993 list of the Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10011. Louise is glowing over the quality of the illustrations, and reports that her publisher has already ordered a follow-up volume. Great Books cryptogrammers should especially enjoy Louise's puzzles, all taken from the works of great thinkers. Here's a sample. See page 7 for the solution:

QHPPHV QH M CHPPBH KC PJH EKIH RG ZRYV GVKHCI PJMC JKE HDJR.

LETTERS

To the Editor:

Theoretical questions on styles of leading and the dynamics of discussion pervade and invade the Great Books experience. They ought to, since we are concerned with quality, not quantity.

The essence of a discussion is a critical examination of the problems of the text, by a disciplined group led by an experienced leader. Interpretive questions at the deepest level will generally lead to a lively, inquiring, and energizing experience. The quality of leadership is in judging the appropriate times to aid the development of the discussion with new questions. Participant interaction, in terms of the text, is the goal. Acquisition of a patina of ideas over a series of meetings through the year is the great reward.

(Continued on last page)

BOSTON NEWS
Hail to the Great Books
Longevity Champ: Dartmouth, Mass.

In the Summer, 1992 issue of the Boston Council's *Dialogue*, Westminster, Mass. was cited as probably having the oldest extant Great Books Group in America, dating back to 1957. However, we have a new claimant to the title: the group in Dartmouth, Mass., just outside New Bedford. They go back to 1948, just one year after Adler and Hutchins started the Great Books Program. That's 45 years of continuing operation. Hail to the new national champ: Although some of the group's original members have retired the group continues to attract new people of all ages.

Boston Spring Institute

The Boston Great Books Spring Institute is a gathering of participants who enjoy discussing books and ideas with other thinking people. The only requirement for attendance at this annual Rite of Spring is a commitment to read the books beforehand. We will be returning to the Sheraton in historic Plymouth on April 2, 3, 4, 1993. Please join us!

The Readings:

Critique of Pure Reason (selections), by Immanuel Kant

Phaedra, by Jean Racine

Immortality, by Milan Kundera

The theme: **REASONS UNREQUITED**

The weekend costs \$190 per person, double occupancy, \$230 for the single occupancy. Price includes books, discussions, lodging, six meals, all gratuities, and social activities. Cost for commuters: \$50 for books, discussions, and all social activities.

Scholarships are available; please direct inquiries to Virginia Thurston at the address below.

To register, please send a deposit of \$90 per person double occupancy, or \$130 per person single occupancy, along with your registration form to:

Virginia Thurston
P.O. Box 545
Harvard, MA 01451

Make checks payable to the **Spring Institute Committee**. If you cancel by March 15, the deposit, less charge for books and mailing, will be refunded.

Name _____

Address: Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Number of reservations _____ Amount enclosed _____

Roommate preference _____

SPECIAL REQUESTS SHOULD ACCOMPANY THIS FORM; THEY WILL BE HONORED IF POSSIBLE.

Please list additional reservations on the back of this form.





NO TOPLESS GROUPS

Though Gus Soderberg tells me he didn't intend to convey the impression, in his article in the last Tricorn, that the Boston Great Books Council is fixing to go leaderless, many people have unaccountably drawn that conclusion from what he wrote. It's a puzzlement.

Here's what we're really up to in Boston. Walter Levison, John Mogan, and I—and Irene Strang has recently joined us—are a committee in charge of leader training and development. Our first project was to train a bunch of people to do group training. The great practical advantage of group training is that you don't have to provide a leader when a new group is formed. The group learns to lead itself - but not leaderlessly - leaders emerge from the training process.

Conventional leader training wasn't working out well in Boston; a few people would sign up when it was offered, which wasn't often, but when the course was complete, the graduates were rarely willing to actually lead a group. What they did instead was become very good participants - if they could find a group.

In group training, everyone who signs up for a newly formed Great Books group is trained in the principles of leading so they can all take turns. Of course, in practice that rarely happens. Usually two to six people emerge in a new group who are willing to lead and are good at it. But in the meantime, all the participants have learned what leading is about, which makes them understand more fully what Great Books is about, and which not incidentally demystifies leading—always a plus. The group training process emphasizes the responsibilities of participants. As we all know, the leader doesn't bear sole responsibility for the success of a discussion. Traditionally, participants are responsible for having read, for having thought about the book, for taking the leader's question seriously, for following the rules. But they are responsible also for reminding each other when they get off the subject, talk too long, become argumentative, or bring in outside authority.

The method we use to train new groups was invented a dozen or so years ago by John, me, and Carol Batchelder, using four readings: the *Declaration*, Plato's *Meno*, Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and Tennyson's "Ulysses." The Declaration is handed out at the first meeting; the participants read it; and after a brief introduction to Great Books, the group trainer leads a truncated discussion. The trainer then gives a short lecture on question formation- basic questions and follow-ups—factual, interpretive and evaluative questions—and talks a little about the questions used in the discussion of the Declaration. In each of the following sessions, a few participants come prepared to lead for ten minutes or so; if possible, everyone should have a shot at it by the end of the four sessions. Everyone's efforts get critiqued and discussed.

In the three other sessions, we talk about leading expository and aesthetic works; about group dynamics; about the ground rules of Great Books and mostly and always about question formation and preparation, always emphasizing that most of the preparation a leader does is never used, because the goal is to get the group to take the reins of the discussion. And that inevitably leads to consideration of the ultimate imponderable: what is a leader, anyhow? A facilitator, is what we think. Someone who is willing to take ultimate responsibility for the discussion if that turns out to be necessary. Someone, mostly, who has read the book three times and has arrived at some notion of the issues in it.

Ann Levison

Boston Great Books Theatre Party

Sunday, February 14, 3:00 PM — New Repertory Theatre, Newton Highlands, MA

ARMS AND THE MAN—Shaw's romantic, witty, irreverent, anti-romantic comedy deals with the glorification of war, manhood, heroism and love. \$18.50 includes wine-and-cheese reception and discussion. Order tickets from Mildred Siegel, 56 Marshall St., Brookline, MA 02146. Phone: 617/731-4829.

CRYPTOGRAM SOLUTION

Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

LETTERS (continued from the fifth page)

The notion of a sustained discussion stimulated by the one ideal question is unrealistic. When a leader abandons the group to non-stop exchanges, the discussion becomes circular and trivial, unless a participant takes on the role of the leader. The compassionate "facilitator" is another fiction to minimize the leader. The "ideal" question and the "facilitator" imply a fear of elitism. Good leading is mighty hard work. Ultimately, a leader's style is honed by experience, and the reward is an enhancement of the ego. The reward of a good discussion is illumination.

Aaron Heller

To the Editor:

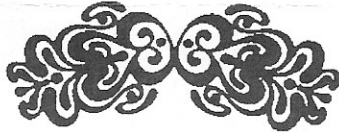
After several years as co-leader of a Great Books group, I was delighted to learn of the Colby Great Books Summer Institutes, and attended with a great pleasure in 1990 and 1991. I was very disappointed in the 1992 readings and did not attend.

Various editorial comments in the Tricorn, as well as letters, add to the disappointment. Calls for a "different voice," dumping Mortimer Adler's "comforting" (?) canon, "challenging our vested belief system," changing discussion groups to leaderless free-for-alls all add up to something that is not a Great Books program, as it is commonly understood. Instead, the Great Books "future" spoken of in the August 1992 newsletter sounds like a "politically correct" agenda. Personally, I find that there is no shortage of such, even in my small northern New York town. There are many special groups, all rushing to deal with "contemporary issues."

For me, the discussion of the ideas in the standard great books provides a more fascinating approach to all the current hot topics, which are but a passing phase of those ideas of enduring interest which we recognize in the great thinkers of the past.

If you think you need a new product to enlarge your audience, well, go ahead, but count me out. And for the sake of accuracy and truthfulness in advertising, don't call it a Great Books Program.

Anne Mitchell



Great Books
14 Bay Second St.
Islip, NY 11751