

THE TRICORN

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

AUGUST, 1993

IS WACHS

Is Wachs read and led Great Books for most of his 96 years on earth. Surely he now sits at the ideal discussion table amid the ideal participants. To further the fantasy, we can picture him co-leading this Platonic group with the great Plato himself. Coincidentally, several amateur astronomers have recently reported the appearance of a faint new circular constellation on certain clear Wednesday nights. Could it be???

The Colby Committee, greatly missing their indispensable colleague, plans a triple memorial to Is: First, the Summer Institute, which he was so instrumental in founding, is to be renamed The Wachs Great Books Forum; next, a memorial service will be held at Colby; and last, an endowment fund in Is Wachs's name will be established to provide Colby scholarships.

At a directors's meeting of The Wachs Great Books Forum, Inc. on May 30, 1993, a motion was passed to establish an Is Wachs Memorial Endowment Fund under the auspices of the Forum. The directors, through their long and close association with Is, came to know that the Wachs Great Books Forum, named in his honor without his knowledge, and its principle activity, the Colby Summer Institute, were of the foremost concern to Is. They felt that the most meaningful tribute to his memory would be an endowment fund that would provide for the perpetuation and enhancement of the Institute in achieving the Forum's mission - to promote the discussion of great books, the exchange of ideas, and the bonding of participants in pursuing those interests.

Some people never die, and Is is one of those people. The Is Wachs Memorial Endowment Fund, established to accommodate the wishes and contributions of his many friends and admirers, will be tangible proof of the power of the ideals he so long and faithfully served. The principal contributed to the Endowment Fund will be preserved intact; only the interest it earns will be spent.

Checks made payable to: Is Wachs Memorial Endowment Fund

Should be sent to: The Wachs Great Books Forum, Inc.
680 Elton Street
Riverhead, NY 11901

(The Wachs Great Books Forum, Inc. has been determined by the Internal Revenue Service to be tax-exempt - so donations or bequests to it are deductible.)

BOSTON NEWS

New Groups

Our group coordinator, Mary Alice Stanton, has received a request from the librarian in Quincy for a Great Books discussion leader to head a group at the Norfolk Prison. Persons interested in making a commitment to lead or co-lead please contact Mary Alice at (617) 661-9517 for information.

In Reading, the Council on Aging is eager to start a Great Books discussion group. Anyone interested in leading, please contact Mary Alice Stanton. The Council is housed in a converted fire station, and the architect has retained the historic flavor of the building while creating bright, welcome space. On a perfect June day our Boston *Tricorn* correspondent arrived on some volunteer business. As she pulled up in front of the three open firehouse doorways, there, framed in the arches were a dozen senior citizens performing their graceful aerobic exercises, looking a little like slow-motion go-go dancers of the 60's. Perhaps we could combine a Great Books discussion with interpretive dance?

Leader Training

Jane Mudge will conduct a series of four Leader Training sessions at the main branch of the Thomas Crane Public Library in Quincy, beginning on September 29. Anyone interested in participating, please contact the Thomas Crane Library.

Other Happenings

The Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority (known affectionately as "The T") has selected a poem by Lisa Fay, a gifted poet and Great Books participant. Lisa's poem is prominently displayed on many of the rapid transit trains that transport millions of commuters daily. She has read her poems at our Colby Summer Institute, and they have appeared in many publications.

The Boston Council is engaged in reviewing and re-writing the by-laws. Proposed modifications will be presented at the annual meeting.

Registration at all overnight institutes is down (Poconos, Colby, Boston,) and committee members are curious and concerned about the reasons. Is it the cost, the overextended or retiring participants, the book selections? Peg Mahoney is conducting some informal research, and would appreciate hearing from any Great Bookers who did not register for the institutes that they usually have attended. Please drop a note (anonymously, if you wish) to Peg at 27 Woodedge Lane, Braintree, MA 02184.

Peg Mahoney, Boston Coordinator

The Literate Leader

When George Bush was asked to name a recently read book, he blushed and stammered. Our present president, whatever his shortcomings, is a mighty literate man. The Clintons brought their private library of 4500 books to the White House, where they found a pressing need for more shelving. And the books are not just for show: a Hot Springs friend reports that Clinton would read 4 or 5 books a week, frequently browsing and buying in local bookshops. It is reported that he rereads Marcus Aurelius's Meditations annually, a fitting favorite for our leader. Some of his foes see Machiavelli as his mentor, but they are apparently misinformed.



Editor: Norma Oser, 7933 Heather Rd., Elkins Park, PA 19117
Long Island Correspondent: June Ferarra, 14 Bay Second St., Islip, NY 11751
Boston Correspondent: Peg Mahoney, 27 Woodedge Lane, Braintree, MA 02184

LYING DOWN, SPEAKING UP

Everybody lies. And that's the truth.

We still enjoy the story of the cherry tree chopping, and a lot of us hold little George Washington up to our children as a paragon of honesty. The fact is, however, that some parents send their offspring into the real world with the caution, "Be sincere, even if you have to fake it."

Excuses for telling untruths are many, and many excuses are valid. No one in this imperfect world can be consistently honest. Those little white lies are what keep the terrestrial ball rolling. Simple flattery (you praise the appearance of a woman who looks a mess) and clever hypocrisy (you agree with someone who is a potential helper) are commonplace. The unethical melts under the warmth of the social and no harm is done. Polite conversation is full of deceit ("How nice to see you!") and standard letters end with archaisms ("Sincerely" or "Yours truly," not to mention "With love,"). It's all *quid pro quo* and who isn't a pro?

If we accept the prevalence of falseness, fakery and phoniness, we can relax and even have fun with the concept. I had a couple of memorable experiences in what could be called hoodwinking. One was at a wedding reception, where I knew no one except the relative who had to attend and needed a date. Feeling confidently anonymous, I joined the receiving line of the wedding party, all of whom were too absorbed in handshaking to notice me. Smiling broadly, I greeted one stranger after another, saying sweetly, "How do you do? I'm Shirley Temple." While I did get a couple of double-takes and a questioning eyebrow or two, the ritual proceeded without missing a beat. No one was harmed by the delusion; few knew or cared. And, my escort having disappeared in the throng, I was sporting.

The second incident also had to do with a reception line, this time a fast-moving one at a political convention. I was propelled through a rank of name-badged seekers who pumped hands to push personal ploys: plugged-in automatons with a glazed smile on each sweat-shined countenance. As I neared them, I heard a repetitious dialog:

-How are you?

-Fine, thank you.

-I'm so glad. Let me introduce you to (next big name.)

I thought, if they could act, so could I, even if it meant altering the script. And so, to each successive phony face I said,

-Fine, thank you, but my parakeet died this morning.

Either they didn't hear or they didn't believe what they heard. Responses were venal variations of "Glad to hear it!" as I was passed on to the next in line. I kept thinking of the ancient discovery (Aristotle's?) that there is no such thing as an honest politician.

Then I thought of Sir Walter Scott and the tangled web (No, that line is not from Shakespeare.) Scott's couplet could scare the likes of me, but for the counter-statement that there is no absolute truth. And that is absolutely true.

Claire Gerber

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Some random thoughts on the nature and evolution of Great Books in the past 35 years of my life-

The Gardner group, which I joined in the 1950's, had co-leaders: Ralph Bailey, a Unitarian minister, and Virginia Aldrich, a history teacher. They led us through some difficult unabridged readings. Then we gradually lost the leader as such. If someone like a book and was willing to lead the discussion, now more informal, we went along with it. We made up our own lists and lost touch with Chicago. We were from all walks of life, not all college graduates, but all were respected and made comfortable, free to express themselves. It was true adult education; it was our intellectual life. We grew and aged; some died; new generations joined us, and the group survived.

We covered an enormous range of subjects and authors. Can we still call ourselves a Great Books group? We do. Are we not like the heretical Jungians departing from the orthodoxy of Freud? We have had our own Reformation, but we have not changed our name.

My own life has changed, as well as that of the group. I had already moved away from my Lutheran background to the Congregational church and to the Unitarian in the 1950's. Greater changes followed: return to college in the 1960's, the women's movement in the 1970's, travel, remarriage, new families, new worlds, new people, new ideas, as well as the best of the old. All the while I was involved in Great Books groups, often in more than one. In 1991 I attended the Colby Summer Institute. A great experience: Some day I would like to try the leaderless group there.

Approaching 70, I see life through changing lenses. The baby boomers are in the White house. I am a great-grandmother. I rejoice in the lively minds of the young people along with the seniors who have joined our Shrewsbury group.

Are we now ready for other changes? This is what I want to explore. Stephen Greenblatt and his "new historicism" says we cannot study a work without introducing its historical and political context. I support his theory. But strict Adlerian Great Books method forbids that. I believe we can continue in Great Books while still accepting the validity of other viewpoints. Also, my own reading habits have changed. I now like to lead a quiet life with leisure to read slowly and truly digest what I read, draw my own nourishment from the books. There are so many new authors to explore, libraries and bookstores to visit, places to travel, time with children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. But all in good time: unhurried, spontaneous, unrehearsed, and interspersed with solitude.

Finally, I would really like to know how others feel about the lives they have lived in Great Books. Does anyone else see things as I do?

Thelma LeBeaux

To the Editor:

In Gus Soderberg's contribution to the August 1992 Tricorn he said that group activity without a leader was being fostered by "a turn to a new concept: training the group as a self-directing, self-realizing entity." Is it really a new concept? Isn't every well-conducted session a lesson in how group discussion can proceed fruitfully? If the leader listens reflectively, insures relevance, invited elaboration, encourages participation by the less aggressive and discourages over-participation, hasn't the group had a lesson in how discussion works best?

Perhaps one of the reasons for dissatisfaction is that most novice leaders, and even some with considerable experience, tend to think that the most important requirement for leading is a supply of basic interpretive questions, each buttressed with a number of follow-ups. Such preparation is helpful, but there is considerable reason to doubt that it alone should be the pattern for the entire discussion. In the earliest editions of the G.B. Foundation's Guide for Leaders we are advised that "Usually with the exception of [the question] a leader uses to open a discussion

or a new issue, all others that a leader uses arise from the group's answers - unless the leader is abusing his role and holding the reins rigidly as he drives down the primrose path of a preconceived plan.." (p.30, Guide for Leaders, 2nd ed., 1955.) The last word of advice is "Have a well prepared plan (written or mental) and at the same time be willing to throw it out the window! If you discover that the group itself is shaping the direction and the issues, along lines you and your colleague had not polanned, don't be alarmed. If these issues and directions are *relevant to the text*, let them go." (p. 38) Isn't this "training the group as a self-directing, self-realizing entity"?

A later generation of Great Book Foundation personnel seem to think otherwise. In an advanced leader training session I learned "the mindless leader" applies to one who would "give its head" as advocated in the early training manuals. This, to me, seems not only heretical but very damaging, as it does to Gus. In leader training it is much easier to give lessons in the formulation of an agenda of questions than it is to prepare the trainee to respond to the problems he may face as the discussion proceeds. This undoubtedly accounts for the over-emphasis on the formulation of questions, and the consequent rarity of adherence to the last word of advice quoted above.

Aaron Bechtel

To the Editor:

After many years as a Great Books participant, I have evolved a method of preparing for discussions that may be of use to new members. My plan is straight out of Mortimer Adler, patron saint of Great Books. The first reading is accomplished quickly, breezing through rapidly, without getting hung up on what is difficult or words I don't know. I read it as I would a love letter - briskly and comprehensively.

At the second reading I go more slowly and ruminatively. I mark passages, underline paragraphs, sentences and words. I write question marks at puzzling places. Then I jot down key words on the blank back pages, with page references.

After this second reading, I go over the underlined passages, key words and questions, often discovering more page references to important words. It helps if I can let some time elapse between reading and going over the notes; it seems to help in the germination of my thoughts. My method seems like work, but it evolves into pleasure.

Charles Brown



LONG ISLAND NEWS

June One-Day Institute

The LI One-Day Institute, ~~THE~~ **BAD** GOOD IN LIFE, proved to be prophetic. The good news was that we were once again oversubscribed. The bad was that we had to turn down so many applications because of the limit that Nassau County puts on the facilities. Sorry!

New Groups

Two First Year groups that were never announced in the *Tricorn* are continuing on with the second year.

The Longwood Public Library Group, Middle Island, was formed following a council-organized demonstration session and is led by Ed Schneider. (For more information call Suzanne Johnson at the Library, (515) 924-6400.)

The Rockville Center Public Library Group was organized and is being led by Bernie Mann, a lapsed Great Bookie who returned to the program after his retirement. (For information call Bernie at (516) 536-5139.)

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Emil Bix

Many of us count our Great Books membership in decades rather than single years. Naturally enough, we are crossing the border between middle age and old age. As the years roll on, we find ourselves saying sad good-byes to more and more friends. While wanting to avoid filling the Tricorn with obituaries, some deaths must be noted. One most noteworthy member, Emil Bix, made his presence widely felt. Though not big in stature, Emil's large mind and deep voice broadcast his ideas far beyond his physical sphere. Emil served as one of the first presidents of the Philadelphia Great Books Council, and in his many years of membership, he performed any number of tasks willingly and well. His presence was exceptionally vivid; hence his absence more keenly felt. His many friends regret not being able to mark his 50 years of American citizenship, for which he had planned a splendid celebration.

PHILADELPHIA'S 23rd ANNUAL GREAT BOOKS FALL INSTITUTE WEEKEND

November 12, 13, 14, 1993

STORYTELLERS

Pocono Manor

The Odyssey..... Homer
The Storyteller..... Mario Vargas Llosa
Sonnets to Orpheus..... Rainer Maria Rilke

There are only two or three human stories and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.Willa Cather

Cost is: \$200 per person double occupancy, \$260 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 9.

To Register: Please send a deposit of \$100 per person for double occupancy and \$130 for single occupancy with your registration form to:

Sylvia Perelman
8214 Marion Rd.
Elkins Park, PA 19117

REGISTRATION FORM

Enclosed is a deposit of _____ (\$100 per person double occupancy or \$130 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)_____	[]	[]	[]
(first)_____ (last)_____	[]	[]	[]

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 _____.

Philadelphia Council Doings

New President: Eva Bix. New Board Members: Barry Bernstein, Sylvia Charleston, Louise Moll, Cleirath Partin, Marney Hague. New group: Yeadon Library (September.)

New publicity planned: Demonstration discussions in local Barnes & Noble and Borders bookstores.

THE BOOK OF MY ENEMY HAS BEEN REMAINDERED

The book of my enemy has been remaindered
And I am pleased.
In vast quantities it has been remaindered.
Like a vanload of counterfeit that has been seized
And sits in piles in a police warehouse,
My enemy's much-praised effort sits in piles
In the kind of bookshop where remaindering occurs.
Great, square stacks of rejected books and, between
them, aisles
One passes down reflecting on life's vanities,
Pausing to remember all those thoughtful reviews
Lavished to no avail upon one's enemy's book -
For behold, here is that book
Among those ranks and banks of duds,
These ponderous and seemingly irreducible cairns
Of complete stiffs.

The book of my enemy has been remaindered
And I rejoice.
It has gone with bowed head like defeated legion
Beneath the yoke.
What avail him now his awards and prizes,
The praise expended upon his meticulous technique,
His individual new voice?
Knocked into the middle of next week
His brainchild now consorts with the bad guys,
The sinkers, clinkers, dogs and dregs,
The Edsels of the world of movable type,
The bummers that no amount of hype could shift,
The unbudgeable turkeys.

Yea, his slim volume with its understated wrapper
Bathes in the glare of the brightly jacketed "Hitler's
War Machine,"
His unmistakably individual new voice
Shares the same scrapyard with a forlorn skyscraper
Of "The Kung-Fu Cookbook,"
His honesty, proclaimed by himself and believed in by
others,
His renowned abhorrence of all posturing and pre-
tense,
Is there with "Pertwee's Promenades and Pierrots -
One Hundred Years of Seaside Entertainment,"
And (oh, this above all) his sensibility,
His sensibility and its hairlike filaments,
His delicate, quivering sensibility is now as one
with "Barbara Windsor's Book of Boobs."

Soon now a book of mine could be remaindered also,
Though not to the monumental extent
In which the chastisement of remaindering has been
meted out
To the book of my enemy,
Since in the case of my own book it will be due
To a miscalculated print run, a marketing
error -
Nothing to do with merit.
But just supposing that such an event should hold
Some slight element of sadness, it will be offset
By the memory of this sweet moment.
Chill the champagne and polish the crystal goblets!
The book of my enemy has been remaindered
And I am glad.

Clive James

NOBODY EVER READS THE SAME BOOK TWICE

Robertson Davies urges us to turn, and turn again, to the great books we first encountered in our youth, in this excerpt from a talk included in "The Tanner Lectures on Human Values: Volume 13, 1992," edited by Grethe B. Peterson (University of Utah.)

"The great sin... is to assume that something that has been read once has been read forever. As a very simple example I mention Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. People are expected to read it during their university years. But you are mistaken if you think you read Thackeray's book then; you read a lesser book of your own. It should be read again when you are 36, which is the age of Thackeray when he wrote it. It should be read for a third time when you are 56, 66, 76, in order to see how Thackeray's irony stands up to your own experience in life. Perhaps you will not read every page in these later years, but you really should take another look at a great book, in order to find out how great it is, or how great it has remained, to you. You see, Thackeray was an artist, and artists deserve this kind of careful observation. We must not gobble their work, like chocolates, or olives, or anchovies, and think we know it forever. Nobody ever reads the same book twice.

WOMAN'S SWAY

Spotting the home of Leah Blumenthal at election time meant plowing through her quiet street's most garish barricade. The lioness' share of lawn signs, wall signs, window signs, buttons, badges and bumper stickers roared the names of women contenders for public office. Some may have had little more than the gender "W" going for them. Yet most won out to prove that you can always tell Leah, but you can't tell her much.

Leah is an educator on several fronts. She has just ended some twenty-five years of teaching Philadelphia Public School pupils. Her career was topped by a lengthy stint heading a "transition class" for immature first-graders. For better or worse, Leah's West Germantown twang went on the wane soon after she broke away from that bunch.

Teacher, doer and mother of three, Leah shares husband Bob's goals. Not the least of these is Great Books, where she's again lighting up the learners' path. To wit, she heads up Council's new groups training team, also picks and preps Pocono Fall Institute discussion leaders. These chores top those of Council member, custodian of Council's own monster computer and veteran group leader as the Colby summer sessions.

Now for the crowning glory of Leah's latest calling: chair of peer counseling at the Montgomery County Women's Center. Here the twenty or more movers and shakers who report to her help other women make tough decisions about their very lives. Much of the guidance is given over the phone, since the greatest need of many sufferers is someone who will listen. Who is to say that this latest insight does not stem from Leah's Great Books grounding?

Emil Bix



Great Books
14 Bay Second St.
Islip, NY 11751