

THE TRICORN

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

FEBRUARY, 1994

COLBY 1994: SOLITUDE

Solitude at Colby? - We'll See August 7-13!

People react differently to solitude. Some feel it to be a default condition when all efforts to be with others have temporarily failed. Others can't wait to enjoy the glorious peace and quiet. Whatever one's attitude, lots of solitude is a reality for most of us, and not only when sound asleep. So let's share ideas for better understanding and more rewarding uses of this universal human condition.

Some unattributed solitary thoughts:

Concert fires people to a certain fury of performance they can rarely reach alone - here is the use of society.

We begin with friendship, and all our youth is a reconnoitering and recruitment of the holy group they shall form for the salvation of our world. But so the remoter stars seem a nebula of united light, yet there is no group which a telescope will not resolve: and the dearest friends are separated by impassable gulfs.

Only when one is connected to one's own core is one connected to others, I am beginning to discover. And, for me, the core, the inner spring, can best be refound through solitude.

Conversation enriches the understanding, but solitude is the school of genius; and the uniformity of a work denotes the hand of a single artist.

The creative person's most significant moments are those in which he or she attains some new insight, or makes some new discovery; and those moments are chiefly, if not invariably, those in which he or she is alone.

Bill Thurston

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THE 38TH ANNUAL

WACHS GREAT BOOKS SUMMER INSTITUTE

at Colby College

AUGUST 7 THROUGH 13, 1994

A week of reading, discussion, fun, and friendship on the beautiful campus of Colby College in the hills of Waterville, Maine

This Year's Theme: **SOLITUDE**



The Readings: *Solitude*, by Anthony Storr
Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe
"Society and Solitude" and "The Transcendentalist," by Ralph Waldo Emerson
Gift from the Sea, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh
Centering (in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person), by M. C. Richards
Song of Myself, by Walt Whitman

What Is a Great Books Discussion?

A group of readers, sharing their understanding of a stimulating work of literature or philosophy in a well-conducted discussion, can reach a level of insight rarely achieved by those who read alone. Great Books is for people who love to think and talk about the world's great ideas, and whose greatest pleasure is to spend time with others who share that joy.

Cost: \$396 per person covers dormitory room (single or double), meals, discussions, and books, as well as swimming, tennis, a film, group social activities, the warm hospitality of the Colby staff, and a real Maine clam-bake on the shores of Belgrade Lake. Boating, golf, music, and summer theater are nearby.

Junior Program: Families with children between the ages of four and fourteen are welcome. The cost is \$270 for children four through nine and \$310 for children ten through fourteen. Juniors attend morning activities while adults are attending book discussions; junior book discussions take place on three afternoons. Evening supervision is available so that adults can attend social events. This year's readings are *Stone Soup* and the *Just So Stories* for younger juniors; *Robinson Crusoe*, *My Side of the Mountain*, and the *Just So Stories* for older juniors. For more information call Ginny Thurston, 508-456-3505.

Application and refunds: A \$100 deposit per person is required with application, \$25 of which is refundable for cancellations before July 1. For juniors, the refund is \$75. The balance is due at registration on August 7. Books and additional information will be sent upon receipt of deposit.

To the Editor:

Past Tricorn articles reported on or suggested modifications to the Great Books program as originally conceived, interspersed with an occasional anguished protest at any deviation from the rules of the game as promulgated by the revered founders. As non-purists, Bill and Lucille McConeghey's Springfield, PA group must count among the most fearlessly innovative. Herewith is an unapologetic report of a few of our meanderings from the straight and narrow:

Some years ago the group adopted the practice, under the leadership of a lawyer member, to devote one evening to a discussion of one or more of the Supreme Court decisions, using as text both the majority and minority opinions. This initiative gave rise to some lively discussion and was widely appreciated.

Another scheme we've pursued with some success (though this actually constitutes no great deviation from the norm) is to center our readings, for about half the year, around a single theme or subject. Thus we chose in one instance the French Revolution, reading selections from histories by Carlyle and Michelet, Edmund Burke's "Reflections," Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, and plays by Anouilh (*Poor Bitos*), Buchner (*Danton's Death*), and Schnitzler (*The Green Cockatoo*).

As a variation of the same idea, we set out to read the entire output of a single author, selecting for the purpose Jane Austen. This project met an untimely demise, however, with some participants protesting that three Austens back to back was quite enough already.

Nothing deterred, we next went much farther afield with what we termed an "art night." Member Terry Gordon, armed with one of those projectors that show two slides in tandem, presented for discussion contrasting pairs of paintings from different periods or styles. The evening, by all accounts, was an unqualified success.

Our latest foray we called "Movie Night." Members agreed to rent and watch the video *Rashomon* in preparation for a discussion. The choice of film, it turned out, was truly inspired, leading us ineluctably into Pirandellian speculations as to the nature of reality and the uncertain border between truth and fiction.

With respect to further experimentation we are keeping an open book, for in our experience an occasional change of diet adds spice to the menu. Those groups willing to view the original recipe as something less than sacrosanct might want to consider adding their own changes to the mix.

Horace Breece

Mail Application to: Colby Summer Institute, P.O. Box V, Harvard, MA 01451-0560

(508-456-3505)

APPLICATION

(Make checks payable to Colby Summer Institute)

Please Print

Name(s) _____
Last Name First Name

_____ Last Name First Name

Address _____
Street, Apt. #, P.O. Box

_____ Street, Apt. #, P.O. Box

City State Zip Phone

City State Zip Phone

Notes and comment (Please list juniors' ages as of August 1994): _____

_____ Prefer leaderless group

THE QUESTIONER

(reflections on a Pocono weekend)

These are the people who talk in small groups.

When the questioner comes to them, they sit facing each other in a circle, the questioner a part of the circle. The center of the circle is the book.

Before the questioner asks the first question, the talkers take turns reading to each other the rules their culture holds sacred, rules essential to their survival - *to read the book, to talk about the book, to listen to each other*. If they did not do this, the pages would not turn and the sun would no longer rise in the sky.

The questioners are not themselves talkers but the bringers of talk. They are the guardians of the book and carriers of the tradition of talk. They come to the groups to ask questions about what the book says, about what the book means, and how it speaks to their manner of living.

Questioners come and go; the books change. The world is less friendly to their culture, but the people who talk in small groups, though fewer in number, survive. They survive by coming together, by looking at each other when they talk. They believe that by doing this, the pages will continue to turn and the sun continue to rise.

That, anyway, is what I have learned.

Charles Ferrara

FRANK ALBERTI

Great Bookers will remember Frank Alberti, who attended the New England Council's one-day institutes and spring weekends, as well as Pocono weekends. He was a member of the Harvard, MA discussion group. Frank died in October after a 10-year bout with leukemia. Frank was a scientist, a professor of engineering at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, but what he brought to Great Books discussions wasn't hard knowledge from the world of concrete things; he brought a unique spirituality and an idiosyncratic point of view based on both his Catholic faith and on what he had learned from his illness about how to live his life.

At Frank's funeral, his pastor recalled how he used to range around the Sunday School corridors with a book in his hand, challenging people to discuss with him the ideas he loved. Those of us who had known him in Great Books chuckled in recognition. He was the same everywhere, it seems.

Peg Mahoney

To the Editor:

Included in the August 1993 Tricorn is a caption "Women's Way," which aroused my interest. In years past I was included in the Great Books group which met in Perkasio, PA. I also attended a seminar several years ago at Germantown Academy. Presently my movements are restricted, due to arthritis. I live in an apartment complex where regrettably there are few readers who parallel Great Books participants. Approaching 80 years, my friends are scattered or are no longer available. From time to time I would so enjoy discussing books with someone who loves reading and is discriminating in so doing.

Mary E. Mattson

1290 Allentown Road, Apt. 171, Lansdale, PA 19446

WILMINGTON SPRING SEMINAR

Slavery and Freedom. . . Through the Eyes of Others and Ourselves

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* are the books; the First Unitarian Church, 730 Halstead Street, Wilmington is the place; Saturday, March 19 is the date; \$24.00 is the fee. For lunch, books, and a great day, please send registration checks made out to the GB Council of Delaware to Cyra Gross, 101 Delview Drive, Wilmington, DE 19810. Phone: 302/475-3914.

NEW ENGLAND GREAT BOOKS SPRING INSTITUTE

Sheraton Inn
180 Water Street
Plymouth, Massachusetts
April 15-17, 1994

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

WAYS OF SEEING - John Berger

FIFTH BUSINESS - Robertson Davies

AN ORDINARY EVENING IN NEW HAVEN - Wallace Stevens

The Sheraton Inn is located on the ocean in the historic town of Plymouth. Enjoy the amenities of the Inn and the companionship of friends, old and new. Best of all, savor the joy of discussion with others who love great books and great ideas.

The cost of the weekend is \$198 per person, double occupancy, \$268 per person, single occupancy. Prices include books, discussions, and all social activities, as well as lodging, six meals and gratuities. Commuters may also sign up for meals; price information will be sent with commuters' books. A fund is available to pay part of the cost for those who would otherwise not be able to attend. For information, write Ginny Thurston at the address below, or call her at (508) 456-3505.

To Register, mail the form below with a deposit of \$100 per person for double occupancy or \$150 per person for single occupancy, or the \$55 fee for commuters to:

Virginia Thurston
P.O. Box 545
Harvard, MA 01451-0545

Make checks payable to the Spring Institute Committee. If you cancel by March 25, your deposit, less the cost of books and mailing, will be refunded.

REGISTRATION

Name (s) _____

Address _____

Street

P.O. Box or Apt#

City

State

Zip

Telephone () _____ Single Occupancy _____ Double Occupancy _____ Commuter _____

Number of Reservations _____ Roommate preference _____

Amount Enclosed \$ _____ Please list additional reservations on the back of this form.

Notes, comments, special requests _____

To the Editor:

In 1993 membership and the number of groups in some areas continued their decade long decline, yet the evidence of concern as expressed in bold, imaginative action is nowhere to be seen. While there are external causes for this decline, known well to us, the internal neglect of the problem is nothing short of stunning.

The problem facing Great Books is not a shortage of money, but simply a shortage of will. The slowness to act is a direct result of a prevailing belief that if new ideas aimed at halting the membership skid and originating outside the Great Books inner sanctum are adopted, somehow this will lead to relinquishing control to, or at least diluting it with, those seen as less worthy of Great Books custodial duties. There has never been in Great Books a shortage of people willing to contribute their time and energies *when the promise of accomplishment is unfettered.*

This defacto scorched-earth policy of Great Books is something we will not be proud of 20 years from now. One would hope that after all that reading for all those years we would be smart enough to ensure our own survival.

Presley Brown

LONG ISLAND NEWS

Spring Institute Theme: HISTORY
HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF
ITSELF

The Readings:
THE MARTIAL SPIRIT by Walter Millis

A History of the Spanish American War and America's rise to world power in the 20th century, analyzing the political causes and the motives of the time's leading spirits.

UTILITARIANISM by John Stuart Mill

The principle of Utility - an action is right insofar as it tends to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number, the act deriving its moral worth from its utility - and how the principle relates to democratic concepts of justice.

The Date and Place:
June 5, 1994, at Hempstead House, on Sands Point Preserve, Port Washington, NY

The Cost:
\$23.00, 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, 1994)

Please reserve _____ places at the Long Island Institute at \$23.00 each, enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

IS WACHS

A Colby Memorium

IS

reaching out
a small man
with quick movements
tilted coming toward you
so eager to grasp your hand -
yes! and take you in

WAS

a spirit
and a lover -
'You bet your sweet ass!'
and
'You're goddammed right!'
but most of all

IS WAS

a giver reaching out
gave us in his week
enough to last a year.

Charles Ferrara

WESTCHESTER GREAT BOOKS COUNCIL'S FIRST ONE DAY EVENT

The Westchester GB Council invites you to Pursue Happiness with *The Conquest of Happiness* by Bertrand Russell, and *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf. The event takes place on Sunday, April 10 at the Hackney School, Tarrytown, NY, directions to be sent with books. The \$45.00 registration fee includes books, coffee, lunch, refreshments. Please send checks for \$45.00 per person, made out to Westchester GB Council, to Audrey Sharman, 20 Oak Road, Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510.

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Philadelphia Theatre Party

What a deal! A great play, a beautiful theatre, a fine company, post-play refreshments and discussion, supervised parking across the street, and all for only \$12.

Date: Saturday, April 2, Matinee at 2:00 PM
Place: Tomlinson Theatre, Temple University, 13th and Norris Streets, free parking on Diamond Street, east of 13th.
Reservations: Please send your check for \$12, payable to Phila. GB Council, to Fritzi Green, 2401 Pennsylvania Ave., Apt. 10B21, Philadelphia, PA, 19130.
Information: (215)978-7828

PHILADELPHIA'S 35TH ANNUAL SPRING SEMINAR

PURSUING IMMORTALITY

Gilgamesh, the ancient Sumerian king, and Muriel Spark's very contemporary blunderers in her *Memento Mori*, are consumed by the same anxiety: How to reconcile themselves to the fact of mortality. Gilgamesh undertakes a mythic journey in search of eternal life. Spark's characters exhibit every imaginable sort of behavior when forced to acknowledge their fate. The unknown author of *Gilgamesh* creates a beautiful and mysterious tale. Muriel Spark delights readers with her wit and originality.

Sunday, May 15, at Chestnut Hill Academy, 500 W. Willow Grove Avenue, just opposite the Philadelphia Cricket Club. \$25.00 covers books, lunch, snacks.

Please send your check for \$25.00 per person, payable to Phila. GB Council, to either Bill Meiers, 3 Woodside Drive, Richboro, PA 18954, or to Max Klayman, 2200 Tremont Ave., Apt. 206, Philadelphia, PA 19115.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I liked your August Tricorn, which Ernest Jaski of Chicago brought back from Colby for me. I especially enjoyed the letter from Aaron Bechtel. I agree that a leader with an inflexible list of questions does not make for a good GB discussion. I was taught (in Los Angeles about 30 years ago) to:

1. Start with a strong interpretive opening question and have a backup of three or four such questions in case the first one runs out of steam. This question should always have more than one "right" or reasonable answer and should reflect the basic issues of the selection.

2. Be alert to participants' interests as they pursue this opening idea, but also be sure to keep the group on one issue long enough to explore it in some depth. However, if there really isn't much interest in what you thought was a good question, be willing to drop it and introduce your own second question, or pick up a participant's question and run with it.

I often follow up a participant's comment with a question such as, "What do you mean by _____?" "How would you answer the question you raise?" "Are you agreeing with what _____ said a few minutes ago?" "Does that agree with what the author says on page such and such?" or even simply "Why do you think so?" This puts the participants in charge, yet it also keeps the discussion focused on important ideas. No reason we can't do both at once! Besides, it's a lot more fun.

What's best of all is when the participants start talking like that to each other. Then I sit back, keep quiet, and know I've done a good job. (It's also a great feeling when, near the end of the evening, a participant says, "It all comes back to that question Janet asked at the beginning.")

Someone in Los Angeles once told me, "With an experienced group, all the leader has to do is be a traffic policeman." Not entirely true, but something to think about.

Janet O. Philips
Editor, Chicago Area GB Council Newsletter

Great Books
14 Bay Second St.
Islip, NY 11751