

# THE TRICORN

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED JOINTLY BY THE NEW ENGLAND ♦  
LONG ISLAND ♦ PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

FEBRUARY 1996

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## COLBY 1996: THE FATE OF HUMANKIND

Man has made far more progress in conquering nature than he has in gaining mastery over his human nature. Technological growth has roared past spiritual development. What further journey is in store for humankind? What are the inescapable implications of his past?

The Readings: Plato's *Phaedo*, Dante's *Inferno*, Pico della Mirandola's *Dignity of Man*, Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and selected sonnets by Shakespeare.

From Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus side shows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorted glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or fragments of their imagination - indeed, anything and everything except me... That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.

From Shakespeare's *Sonnet CXXIX*:

All this world knows well; yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

From Plato's *Phaedo*:

(Socrates)... I do not consider my fate a misfortune... you seem to think me inferior in prophetic power to the swans, which, when they have to die, sing more loudly than they ever sang before, for joy that they are about to depart into the presence of God, whose servants they are.

For it is said that the genius, who has had charge of each man in his life, proceeds to lead him, when he is dead, to a certain place where the departed have to assemble and receive judgement.

From Pico's *Dignity of Man*:

(The Supreme Maker to Adam): We have made you a creature neither of heaven or of earth, neither mortal or immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of you own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.

From Dante's *The Inferno*:

... so long as I am not rebuked by conscience, I stand prepared for Fortune, come what may.

From Freud's *The Future of an Illusion*:

We arrive at the singular conclusion that of all information provided by our cultural assets it is precisely the elements which might be of the greatest importance to us and which we have the task of solving the riddles of the universe and of reconciling us to the sufferings of life - it is precisely those elements that are the least authenticated of any.

If you love to think and talk about the world's great ideas ( and we know you do), share that pleasure with like-minded others at the Wachs 40th Annual Great Books Summer Institute at Colby College, Maine, from August 4 through 10. We can accommodate children between the ages of 4 and 14; children over 14 are registered with the adult program. If there is sufficient interest among the younger children, a discussion program will be arranged. If there is not, we will arrange with the college to provide care for the children while you attend your discussion groups. Please contact Sylvia Eusebi (914/238-5283) to express your interest in a discussion program for children.

If you have never experienced Colby, this August would be a perfect time to come, with such marvellous works to be discussed. Come with old friends or make new ones during a week of discussions and fun of all sorts on the beautiful campus of Colby College, in the hills of Waterville, Maine.



COLBY REGISTRATION

Cost: \$414 per person, deposit of \$114, \$40 of which is refundable prior to July 1, 1996. Please send registration form with deposit to Colby Summer Institute, 680 Elton St., Riverhead, NY 11901-2585. Information: 516/727-8600.

**APPLICATION (Please Print)**

Make checks payable to Colby Summer Institute

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name, First Name

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Street or P.O. Box Apt. # City State Zip Phone

Notes and comment (Please list children's ages as of August 1996): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Prefer leaderless group



# NEW ENGLAND NEWS

## Updated Membership Lists

Until a new coordinator is appointed, local group leaders/contact people are urged to submit the names and complete mailing address of their members to Jean McGreehan, 228 Nashua Rd., N. Billerica, MA 01862. I will pass them along to Bill Thurston, who has maintained the Council's database for the last few years. In the course of updating our list of local groups, I spoke with many leaders eager to know what other groups are reading. Several groups are using Dover Thrift Editions. This series, which includes many traditional great book titles, features poetry, short fiction, plays, and a few nonfiction works. Most books are \$1.00; a few are \$2.00. For a catalog, contact: Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11501.

### A Small Success

The problem of what to read when your 30-year old group has been through the Chicago Great Books Foundation series three times\* is a daunting one. The original members don't want to read the Chicago list yet again (especially in its current super-excerpted form); at the same time no one wants to deprive newcomers to the group of the excitement of encountering the classics that gave us oldtimers our education in philosophy and the humanities. But how do we choose a list all on our own? Where to begin? Where to get good books at reasonable cost, especially living as we do in the boonies? And how to broaden the range of what we read to include, in addition to those indispensable classics, works by non Western, non-Christian, non-male writers and philosophers - including (oh, heresy) a few newer works? For years it was all too much to contemplate, which is why, until now, we've read it all again, and again, and again.

Then, this year inspiration struck. The Harvard Great Books group put together a sort of template - a description of the range of books we want to read - into which we can plug specific titles each year. Somehow this made the problem of deciding what to read much easier. And at the same time, salvation appeared in the form of a truly talented shopper (Irene Strang, who else?) who volunteered to research sources, and came up with classics that can be had for free, classics that cost a dollar, modern works that can be had at a discount. The upshot was a list of ten readings for just under \$35.

The template we came up with looks like this (the categories are listed in no particular order):

1. A basic Greek philosophy, mostly Plato
2. A *Greek* play
3. A Shakespeare or other classic drama
4. A book of the Bible
5. A classic work of philosophy or history from the Great Books lists.
6. A work of nonfiction (philosophy, religion, essays, whatever) from the non-Western world.
7. Fiction from the non-Western world
8. Classic fiction, chosen from a broader base than is ordinarily the case in the Great Books lists, but can include works from the list, e.g., Conrad, Tolstoy, Dickens, Cather, Austen, George Eliot, Woolf, GB Shaw, Twain, deMaupassant, Moliere, Joyce, Wharton, etc., etc.
9. A modern work - can be anything: fiction, nonfiction, serious pop science, current philosophy, drama
10. Poetry

Throughout we try to include more women authors, more non-Christians, more non-Westerns, but *never to the exclusion of the classic Western canon.*

...continued on p.8

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\*Only three times in 30 years? Well, we meet once a month, so each series lasts us two years if we plug in a couple of "extras," and we've even put in a few discouraging years on the "Search for Meaning" series.

# NEW ENGLAND GREAT BOOKS SPRING INSTITUTE

Hotel Viking, Newport, Rhode Island

MARCH 22 TO 24, 1996

## Love and deCeption

*The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a novel by Thomas Hardy

*M. Butterfly*, a play by David Hwang

"Truth..." an essay by Robert Louis Stevenson

"...Veracity to sentiment, truth in a relation, truth to your own heart, and your friends, never to feign or falsify emotion - that is the truth which makes love possible and mankind happy." - R.L. Stevenson, "Truth..." At our Spring Institute we will examine Stevenson's appeal to truth in light of the deception and delusion pervading Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. The hero of Hardy's novel, an indigent farm worker who sells his wife and daughter during a drunken stupor, rises to a position of wealth and social status as Mayor of Casterbridge, but he fails to develop the human relationships that would bring him success in his personal and professional life. Years later when his wife returns to him, her lie, told with the best intentions, complicates her daughter's life. In his Tony Award-winning play about the ultimate delusion in love, David Hwang challenges stereotypes of race, culture, and gender, especially that of the submissive Asian woman depicted in Puccini's opera.

A NEW VENUE! Historic Newport, on the beautiful Rhode Island seacoast, is the site of the nation's most beautiful summer "cottages." Walk the beaches, visit palatial nineteenth-century mansions. Best of all, savor the joy of discussion with friends old and new who love great books and great ideas.

The cost of the weekend is \$205 per person double occupancy and \$280 per person single occupancy. Prices include books, discussions, lodging, five meals, gratuities, and all social activities. Commuting is an option at \$65, which covers books, discussions, and all social activities. 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 the Spring Institute Committee at the address at right, or call Mac Snodgrass at 401 683-5260.

To register, mail the form below with a deposit of \$100 per person for double occupancy or \$150 per per-

son for single occupancy, or the \$65 fee for commuters, to:

The Spring Institute Committee  
P.O. Box 545  
Harvard, MA 01451-0545

Make checks payable to the Spring Institute Committee. If you cancel by February 19, 1996 your deposit or commuter's fee, less the cost of books and mailing, will be refunded.

REGISTER BEFORE THE NEW YEAR AND SAVE \$\$\$!

Early bird reduced rates: \$199 per person double occupancy and \$274 per person single occupancy when your registration payment or deposit is postmarked before December 31, 1995.

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### 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 \_\_\_\_\_



# PHILADELPHIA NEWS

## The "Ongoing Conversation" Continues (Naturally!)

"A Gathering of Equals" took place last July 6 at Philadelphia's Convention Center, as reported in the August 1995 Tricorn. As planned, six sessions of "Ongoing Conversations," carrying further the National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored discussions on American pluralism and identity, are taking place at Friends Select School. The next discussion will be February 15. It appears that three reconstituted groups will emerge to continue indefinitely discussing the theme: one group will meet in Chestnut Hill, one at International House in West Philadelphia, and a the third at either Friends Select School or the Painted Bride Art Center. Information: Sibyl Cohen, 568-9827. Because of the January Storm-of-the-Century cancellation, the February 15 session will discuss Unit 4 Created Equal: The Myth of the Melting Pot.

**The Spring Theatre Party is not yet finalized. Watch for the flyer soon.**

### Post Your Great Books Events on the Internet

There are now 20 million persons in North America that have access to the Internet. To reach these people, we have now the opportunity to publish Great Books events and other interesting GB information cost-free on the Internet. We suggest seminars, discussion places and times, reading lists, book fairs, etc. for publication on that new medium. Be sure to include name and phone number of your contact person. The material you will submit for publication will be cross-referenced with events from other Great Books regions. We envision that information about Great Books events anywhere in the US will eventually be available on the Internet. If you already have access to this medium, you can see what has been published by GB so far by entering this line into your "Web Browser": '<http://members.gnn.com/greatbooks/gbevents.html>'. There is no charge for this service. Send your material via any of the following routes:

- By mail (on paper or as text file on IBM-PC or Macintosh diskette)  
to: Klaus Traubmann, 502 Whitby Drive, Wilmington, DE 19803
- By e-mail to: [greatbooks@gnn.com](mailto:greatbooks@gnn.com)
- By modem transfer: call 302-478-4058
- By Fax: First call 302-478-4058 to initiate fax device; fax #: 302-479-5425.

## Philadelphia's 37th Annual Spring Seminar

### *The Cold & The Bold*

In a time when we can produce "virtual reality," the odd mix of the real and the imaginary in our readings shouldn't be too confusing. In our Spring Seminar books, men and women (yes, women) are tested physically and emotionally as they struggle to reach the South Pole. Beryl Bainbridge's novel *The Birthday Boys* tells of the very real Polar expedition of Capt. Robert Falcon Scott, while Ursula Le Guin's story, "Sur," relates a wholly fantasized women's excursion to the Pole. Last, a blending of the real and the unreal in Elizabeth Bishop's poem, "The Imaginary Iceberg."

Come and chill on  
a warm May day:

Sunday, May 19, at Chestnut Hill Academy, 500 W. Willow Ave, just  
opposite the Philadelphia Cricket Club  
Fee covers books, lunch, snacks

Please send your check for \$25 per person, Payable to Philadelphia GB Council, to Clark Simons, 269 Mather Road, Jenkintown, PA 19046. Information: Bill Meiers, (215) 953-0147

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

A good text is like an uncut gem. As each participant brings their own light to bear, a facet is revealed. Together, we come to see the gem, made brilliant by the varied lights the group shines upon it. A good leader facilitates the conversation's cutting into the stone; a good leader - and fellow participants - helps each person polish their personal illuminations. The dynamics of interaction reflect the brilliance.

Liz Bass

To the Editor:

For just over fifteen years I have been associated with the discussion methodology that I shall dub "The Great Books Way." As an initiate, it did not take me too long to learn and appreciate "The Rules of the Road," as put forth by what I presumed to be an unusual gathering of Olympian-like equals who gave no thought to impressing each other with the power of their intellects. They merely wanted to augment their own understanding of the great ideas in a venue of sharing.

My betters before me have decided that a Great Books discussion is a place of shared inquiry. What a wonderful sound of these words, "shared inquiry," have! And what a wonder-filled event it is when the spirit evoked by the words is enlivened by discussants who commit themselves to a lively, healthy exchange of ideas. Shared inquiry occurs in an atmosphere of respect, in an environment that is safe and free from ridicule, explicit or subtle, one in which all participants feel actively listened to.

In the days when the line of distinction between ecclesiastic authority and secular power was blurred, the Pope would sometimes issue a decree called a Papal Bull, to be obeyed by the monarch, aristocracy, and peasantry in Roman Catholic countries. It is painfully obvious to me that there are some papal wannabees out there who sometimes attend Great Books discussions. For those unlucky groups graced by their presence, shared inquiry is replaced by dogmatic pronouncements that have the force of "infallibility" behind them. These pronouncements, which can be interminable in their presentation, often have an enervating effect on the literary exploration of the group. Dogmatists tend to take on a posture of disdain when the group continues its effort to resolve an issue to its own collective satisfaction.

Some visitors to a discussion seem to take delight in impressing others with their erudition, no matter how far afield their remarks are with regard to the question at hand. I am not suggesting that discussants respond like students in a high school English class; however, it is not entirely unreasonable to expect that responses can be focused and crisp, as well as relevant. And, of course, the evangelical fervor of a proselytizer belongs in a different setting.

Curt Boddie

### Wilmington Spring Seminar

*"Sow the Wind, Reap the Whirlwind"*

Out el-Kouloub's novel *Ramza* tells of the profound intellectual and social ferment in Egypt, especially in the lives of women, with the passing of power from England. *Indian Ink*, a Tom Stoppard play, dramatizes the upheaval in India that comes with the ending of the Raj.

Date: Saturday, March 23, 1996

Place: First Unitarian Church, 730 Halstead St., Wilmington, Delaware

Cost: \$25 for lunch, books and refreshments

Please send checks made out to the GB Council of Delaware to Lois Myoda, 1224 Evergreen Rd., Wilmington, DE 19803, Phone: (203) 762-4938



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## FOUNDATION NEWS

Those active in local groups will be glad to hear that the GB Foundation in Chicago plans to offer more support for adult groups. To celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, the Foundation will issue two titles in 1997: a manual, *How to Discuss a Book* and an anthology with 25-35 selections including fiction, nonfiction, and contemporary readings. The Foundation currently has available a booklet prepared for its program "A Gathering of Equals." These short selections are taken from American works such as Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Gary Schoepfel, new Director of Adult Education, can be reached at the Great Books Foundation, 35 E. Wacker Dr., Suite 2300, Chicago, IL 60601-2298, Phone: 1-800-222-5870.

## LONG ISLAND NEWS

Spring Institute Theme: CULTURE AND CHAOS

The Readings:

*SWEETNESS AND LIGHT*, an essay by Matthew Arnold

"Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it."

*ARCADIA*, a play by Tom Stoppard

"It makes me so happy. To be at the beginning again, knowing almost nothing... A door like this is cracked open five or six times since we got up on our hind legs. It's the best possible time to be alive, when almost everything you knew is wrong."

DATE AND PLACE

Sunday, June 9, 1996, at The Bailey Arboretum, Locust Valley, New York, formerly a North Shore Estate and now an ARCADIA featuring a collection of trees and shrubs from other lands. The discussions will be held, and lunch served, in the main house, built in the mid-1800's. Enrollment will be limited because of the size of the facilities.

The cost: \$24.00, including readings, travel directions, coffee at registration, lunch and post-discussion refreshments.

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Mail to: Long Island Great Books Council, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, NY 11050. (Please send before April 1, 1996)

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ Places at the Long Island Institute at \$24.00 each, enclosed

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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## New England News (continued)

This year's list specific list of books, in the order we're discussing them, is

1. Tennyson, *Ulysses*. Free. Available as part of the New England Council training packet; but poems never cost anything.
2. Plato, *Apology*, Free. Photocopied from the series with Chicago's permission.
3. Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Folger edition. \$3.19.
4. Leslie Silko, *Ceremony*, (A beautiful, poetic modern novel by a Native American.) \$7.96
5. St. Paul, *Corinthians*. Free. Photocopied from the series.
6. George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, \$2.36.
7. *Baghavad Gita*, Dover edition: \$1.
8. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, \$6.36
9. Euripedes, *Medea*, Dover edition: \$1
10. Lorraine Hansberry, *Raisin in the Sun*, \$3.19.

## The Last Holdout

The last one in town with a horse and a buggy  
With everyone else in a slick Model T;  
I wash my clothes on the rocks down by the river;  
What functioned for Piltdown is dandy with me.

The telephone? Hell, dixie cups work as well,  
And I'm writing these lines with my quill;  
Millennia come and millennia go,  
But for me, it is "Plus ça change" still.

Yet lately I find more and more on my mind  
Irritation with those so much ruder  
That all they can say on most any old day  
Has to do with their god - the computer:  
It's "hard drive shaft" this and "gigabyte" that,  
"mouse," "modem," and much CD-ROM";  
But I tell myself "Chill! Let them rant to their fill;  
I'll stay tranquil - just call me Dot Calm."

And maybe the most exciting fallout from our new plan is that we picked up several new members for the first time in a number of years. People seem intrigued by the selections.

AnnLevison

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Great Books  
14 Bay Second St.  
Islip, NY 11751