

# THE TRICORN

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LONG ISLAND + PHILADELPHIA GREAT BOOKS COUNCILS

AUGUST, 1976

## New Directions For Great Books

A few months ago, a letter was received by numerous Great Bookers, sent by Richard P. Dennis, President of the Great Books Foundation, Chicago. The letter stated, "We have begun a major revision of the reading selections for the Adult Great Books Program." It outlined some of the changes now in process or on the planning boards.

There has long been talk and feeling among some of the more active Great Bookers, as well as within the Foundation itself, about the need for revisions of some of the readings of the current Great Books sets. Also a feeling that more modern works should be included, and more works of fiction. But the delay has been due largely to the substantial costs involved. Now we appear to be getting closer to action. However, the recent letter from Dennis seems to have left many Great Bookers somewhat uncertain or confused about the specifics of the new directions of the Foundation and the Great Books program. So Iz Wachs volunteered to make a personal visit to Chicago for first-hand clarification. He talked with both Dennis and Ed Moldoff, Academic Director of the Foundation. Here is Iz's report to us on that meeting:

I visited the Foundation in Chicago on April 17, as a representative of the Boston, Long Island and Philadelphia Councils. My extended meeting with Ed Moldoff was cordial and productive. He is especially pleased with the new policies that Dick Dennis has launched to reduce expenses, and is looking forward to a banner year for the Foundation commencing September, 1976.

The original plan of the Foundation, to revise the first six sets of Great Books readings, will be indefinitely postponed. For the present, the first five sets will continue unchanged, and all are now available. Therefore, there seems to be no reason right now for our own Councils to submit comments and suggestions about new selections and translations.

Set #6 will be supplanted by selections from sets #7 and #8, and will contain two more modern readings. Duplications from earlier sets will be omitted. The cost of all sets except #1 remains at \$12 each until September, 1976, when the price will rise to \$14. Sets #2 and #5 are in short supply but will be replenished if there is sufficient demand.

The Foundation is about to launch a new series that will be in addition to the sets now current. The first, called "Search For Meaning," will consist of 16 comparatively short works of fiction in three volumes, to be available in September, 1976, priced at \$9.50. In my view, this new venture is a trial balloon. It's the result of numerous comments the Foundation has received on the regular readings from both leaders and participants, requesting an infusion of shorter, less difficult and more modern works. A compromise in this direction has already been made in the Junior Great Books program.

I have been assured and reassured by the Foundation that the Great Books readings will continue to be based on broad themes in the classics. Also, when the time for revisions arrives, the members of the Adult Discussion Groups will be consulted for recommendations and suggestions. We ourselves must recognize that the administrators of the Foundation must necessarily be aware of economics. However, they have long demonstrated their dedication to the concept of the Great Books Program. I am confident they will continue to foster and promote the Great Conversation - - but now allowing for some more recent voices to participate in it.

It's important to cite that the planned new series will be a supplementary program, and will consist mainly of works of fiction, most written after 1800 (short fiction is a relatively modern literary form, established only in the past 200 years). According to Dennis, the plan is to eventually have about ten such new sets, each based on a particular theme. Examples: Becoming Human (the nature of man), The Individual and The State, Looking At America, Problems of Civilization, Of Men and Women. Here is an example of the readings (all fiction) in the first of the planned new thematic sets, this one called "The Search For Meaning":

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| 1) <u>Anton Chekhov</u> : A Dull Story              | 11) <u>Doris Lessing</u> : The Temptation of<br>Jack Orkney                |
| 2) <u>Graham Greene</u> : The Destroyers            | 12) <u>Lino Novas Calvo</u> : The Dark Night<br>of Ramon Vendia            |
| 3) <u>Stephen Crane</u> : The Open Boat             | 13) <u>Flannery O'Connor</u> : A Good Man Is<br>Hard To Find               |
| 4) <u>Jean-Paul Sartre</u> : The Wall               | 14) <u>Alan Sillitoe</u> : The Loneliness of the<br>Long-Distance Runner   |
| 5) <u>Leo Tolstoy</u> : Father Sergius              | 15) <u>Henry James</u> : The Figure In the Carpet                          |
| 6) <u>Fyodor Dostoyevsky</u> : A Nasty Story        | 16) <u>Heinrich Boll</u> : Murke's Collected Silences:<br>The Thrower-Away |
| 7) <u>Franz Kafka</u> : The Metamorphosis           |  |
| 8) <u>Saul Bellow</u> : Seize the Day               |  |
| 9) <u>Thomas Mann</u> : Mario the Magician          |  |
| 10) <u>Herman Melville</u> : Bartleby the Scrivener |  |

Essentially, the new direction of Great Books is to (1) broaden the program by including a better balance of notable works in both fiction and non-fiction; (2) bring more modern works (post-1800) into the readings. But the "great ideas" principle that has been the pillar of Great Books will remain intact. Also, it's believed that by broadening and updating the scope of the program, that more

newcomers will be attracted to Great Books, and those already in the program will be more motivated to sustain their interest and continuing participation. The Great Books program has been functioning for some 30 years, and is now entering its "second generation" phase. It's only natural that the second generation of anything should break new ground. We are looking forward to the new era of Great Books.

### Philadelphia Council News

Mini-Institutes. For the third consecutive year, Philadelphia plans to launch its Fall activities with a series of Mini-Institutes in the city and suburbs, beginning late in September. Project Chairman Iz Wachs says, "We've found this combination of sample discussion, Great Books pitch, and socializing to be a winning formula. We not only recruit new members for many groups, but we also develop entire new groups through the Mini-Institutes. Also, our established members have a chance to get together with other nearby groups, and to introduce friends to our program. We'd like present leaders and secretaries to contact either me (KI5-0380) or Norma Oser (ME5-3504) for information about the time and place of the Mini-Institutes closest to their territories."

"I Think I Know What I'm Saying. Do You Hear What I Mean?" You keep mulling that over in your mind and you're ready for psychoanalysis. As the patient, that is. Anyhow, it's the very captivating theme for the 1976 Fall Institute Weekend to be held at the Tamiment Resort and Country Club, near Stroudsburg, Pa. (in the Poconos). On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, November 12 - 13 - 14. The discussions will center on the following readings:

Interaction Ritual, by Ervin Goffman  
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee  
Cry The Beloved Country, by Alan Paton

The facilities at Tamiment will accommodate more participants than last year, when there was an overflow of applications that couldn't be fulfilled because of limited capacity. This year, double rooms are \$75 per person. The hotel has made available a limited number of singles at \$90 per person. The cost covers meals, lodging, books, entertainment and tips. A deposit of \$25 per person, made payable to the "Fall Institute Committee," must accompany your registration. The balance of \$50 will be payable at check-in time. If you must cancel, the deposit, less charge for books, will be refunded, but only up to October 8. If you don't intend to read the books, please do not sign up. Below is a registration form.

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To: Mrs. Robert Blumenthal, 1205 Cromwell Rd., Wyndmoor, Pa. 19118

Enclosed please find my check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ (\$25 per person) as a deposit for registration at the Fall Institute Weekend. Give names of each person.

Name (s) (first) \_\_\_\_\_ (last) \_\_\_\_\_  
(first) \_\_\_\_\_ (last) \_\_\_\_\_

Address (city, state, zip, phone) \_\_\_\_\_

If you want to room with or near someone, write your request on the back of this form, and where possible we will honor such requests.

Eggheads go hard-boiled. Philadelphia is planning a picnic for Great Books Week in the Fall. Established and new members, as well as guests who might be converted into new members, will get together for a festival of fun. Date and place haven't yet been decided, but chairman Emil Bix and his committee are crystallizing all the details and will pass them on to all the locals shortly. Meanwhile you can prepare for it by doing the following: (1) find a shoe box for your fried chicken; (2) polish up your frisbee skills; (3) have your sneakers retreaded; (4) alert your friends to this upcoming event.

Spring Institute: Close to 200 Philadelphia area Great Bookies and friends convened last May 16 to ponder and discuss "God-Seeking." The readings explored were Murder In the Cathedral, by T. S. Eliot, and The Bhagavad-Gita. Co-Chairpersons Rita and Aaron Heller assigned one leader per group instead of the customary leader and co-leader, and the new arrangement met with favorable response. This traditional One-Day Institute never seems to lose its lustre, and always seems to be the perfect finale of the Great Books "season."

Leaders' Club Party. Lots of local leaders, spouses and out-of-town guests met the night before the Spring Institute at Rusty and Phil Lindy's for a super indoor-outdoor-all-over-the-place kind of party. A fascinating film about artist Maurice Escher and his work was shown and discussed. The late partying and conviviality served to fine-hone the skills of the leaders for the next day. One Institute leader even got in a dry-run rehearsal by singing "Bhagavad-Gita" to the tune of "Hava Negila" - - which proves that Great Books readings have a lot of elasticity. While the public has always subscribed to the axiom that "early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise," the Philadelphia Council has always abided by its own axiom: "Early to bed and early to rise, and you miss meeting all the regular guys."

Movie benefit. Age and youth welded together nicely both off and on the screen when Adult and Junior Great Books Councils co-sponsored a film benefit featuring the movie classic, "Harold and Maude," last April. The romance (followed by the marriage) of a restless 18-year-old boy in search of life's meaning, and an 80-year-old free-spirit woman who has searched and found it, became the perfect setting for a discussion of the impossible dream.

### **Boston Council News**

Spring One-Day Institute. The Boston Council's traditional One-Day Spring Institute was held on Saturday, May 22 at Bunker Hill Community College, at the foothill of historic Bunker Hill Monument in Charlestown (part of Boston). More than 90 Great Bookers met to discuss Phaedrus (Plato) and Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (Pirsig). Despite the fact that some 2,400 years separate these two classics, both were grist for lively discussions and for opening new psychic dimensions.

This year the location and format were changed: an in-town site, and no lunch provided. However, the preference seems to be for a more countrylike setting and a communal lunch. Nevertheless, full-blooded Great Bookers will meet anywhere, including Death Valley, for a lively discussion. An interesting sidelight was the appearance of several non-registrants who had simply turned up because they'd "heard about" the event.

Fall Weekend Institute. This year's Fall Institute will have two important changes: a new location, and an extended weekend. Instead of the usual Saturday-Sunday schedule, the event will begin on Friday evening. The dates are October 22-24, Friday evening through Sunday afternoon. The new location is the famous Northfield Inn, Northfield, Mass., about two hours drive west of Boston. This is great fall foliage country, and the timing is ideal to view nature's explosion of colors. Prices aren't yet firmly fixed, but will be approximately \$80 per person, two nights double accomodation, including 6 meals; or \$52 for one night double accomodation with 4 meals. Books and gratuities are included. This year's discussion theme will be Prejudice. The three readings are:

The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin  
The Crucible, by Arthur Miller  
Too Late the Phalarope, by Alan Paton

The facilities at Northfield Inn include a 9-hole golf course and tennis courts. The Institute will open with a buffet supper Friday evening, followed by a short film showing and discussion. There will be a cash bar and the traditional "amateur night" entertainment Saturday evening. The surroundings are magnificent for leisurely walking and the accompanying mental-emotional therapy. For reservations contact Mrs. Lorna Feeley, #10J, 790 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02911 (617-536-2597). For those attending Colby Week, reservations for the Fall Institute will be available there.

BANNED IN BOSTON. For many years the label "Banned In Boston" meant virtually best-seller status for a book or play throughout the rest of the country. Today, it's practically a generic term. But how did it get started, and what sustained it over the many years? Rich Stromer, a member of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Boston Great Books Council, did some extensive research on this. Here's his report.

The phrase Banned In Boston dredges up the image of a provincial and prudish city completely out of keeping with Boston's current status as a cosmopolitan and intellectually free-thinking metropolis. The term Banned In Boston was popularized by H. L. Mencken in 1926 in his American Mercury. It referred to the activities of Boston's infamous Watch and Ward Society (watch for vice and ward it off). Originally named the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, this organization of self-appointed guardians of the public morality was formed in 1898, and was extremely effective in the use of coersive tactics for the banning of controversial books. Mencken launched a personal crusade against the activities of the W & WS which eventually gave Banned In Boston national noteriety and made it a household phrase.

It was probably Mencken's well-known antipathy to puritanism which explains the commonly held misconception that New England's puritan traditions were responsible for Boston's proclivity for literary censorship. The earliest case of book-banning in America did indeed occur in Boston in 1650, when the Colonial legislature ordered the public burning of "The Meritorious Prize of Our Redemption," a theological tract that did not strictly coincide with Calvinist beliefs. The vast majority of book bannings, however, occurred in the century following 1850 and were the results of

Victorian sexual prudery and taboo. The single most prohibitive decade of book-banning, officially or otherwise, was the 1920's, during which time scores of books were prohibited from sale. Following is a very small sample list, with date of banning in parenthesis:

LEAVES OF GRASS, Walt Whitman (1881)  
SALOME, Oscar Wilde (1895)  
MY FIGHT FOR BIRTH CONTROL, Margaret Sanger (1925)  
WHAT I BELIEVE, Bertrand Russell (1925)  
ELMER GANRTY, Sinclair Lewis (1927)  
ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, Erich Maria Remarque (1929)  
LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER, D. H. Lawrence (1929)  
STRANGE INTERLUDE, Eugene O'Neill (1929)  
AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY, Theodore Dreiser (1930)  
THE SUN ALSO RISES, Ernest Hemingway (1930)  
GOD'S LITTLE ACRE, Erskine Caldwell (1950)  
NAKED LUNCH, William Burroughs (1965)  
JURGEN, James Branch Cabel (1919)

Most of the above and other books were banned on the grounds of sexual indecency or obscenity, though others primarily on religious grounds. For example, Elmer Gantry, What I Believe, and All Quiet On the Western Front, were banned because they either satirized or denied the validity of religious beliefs. Some were banned for their use of socially realistic depictions of life, as in God's Little Acre, and An American Tragedy.

It is revealing how much the temper of the times has mellowed in the recent past. As little as a decade ago the use of profanity or realistic sexual depiction was sufficient to outweigh the demands of free expression. Burroughs' book (Naked Lunch) was the last book banned in Boston. It is unlikely that any other work will be so censored in the foreseeable future. During most of the nation's first two centuries, Boston book bannings were a persistent and sad occurrence. But now in this Bicentennial year of 1976, Banned In Boston has become an anachronism. And perhaps as a tribute to Boston's (and the nation's) new literary liberalism, it may be fitting for Great Books groups to use some of those formerly banned books for readings and discussions. It should remind us, as some anonymous author said, that "the mind is like a parachute - - it doesn't work unless it's open."

#### Long Island News

Advanced Leader Training. Several months ago an advance Leader Training session was held at the Bryant Library in Roslyn. This delightful annual event has become an occasion for leaders to join in their common cause. Rachel Leon led the group in a discussion of Shelley's In Praise of Poetry. Also discussed was Dylan Thomas' poem, Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night. When it comes to leading such a discussion, along with oral renditions of it, Rachel is a sun in her own galaxy: brilliant, warm, enriching.

In fact, when Everard Smith heard of it, he was inspired to write us. Everard, now well into his eighties and retired in Florida, is a longtime Long Island Great Booker and Colbyite. In fact, at his last year at Colby (the year of the "Counterculture") he was awarded "The Bus," the highest participant achievement of the year. Some excerpts from his letter are pertinent:

I'm sure your leaders' session was full of joy even if sober as befits the deep subject of your reading. It could not miss with Rachel leading. I should hesitate to presume success with a lesser guide . . . I like poetry, but mostly the oral rendition, for the typed version is only half alive. We all have moods and the poet searches them out for us. Anyway, poems are words, words close to music, and not too much attention should be paid to their meaning, else a pragmatic like myself reluctantly withdraws. So if we don't have to fret with the interpretation, all is well.

Great Books starts with The Apology where Socrates says that the poets do not know whereof they speak, and that too was perhaps the voice of age and experience who expressed no regrets and departed without rage into the night. But then, I question whether there is room for rage in philosophy. Emotions are best left to the poets.

The Great Books program prospers down here. I am with a group going over the first year for the umpteenth time. It confirms the persistent tenet that certain truths are eternal, which is a comfort in this age of tumultuous change. I have found that the readings serve to expose the prejudices of your neighbors. And as a votary of satire I know full well that discussions become the mirror which reflects the marks of every face but our own.

Great Books Fall Rally. A "convention" of Long Island group leaders has become an event we all look forward to. Our next one is scheduled for Friday, September 24, to plan for the new 1976-1977 Great Books season on the Island. There will also be a discussion of a reading to be announced shortly. Promotional materials for use in local communities will be available. The meeting will be at Wantagh Public Library.

Leader Training. Last May, leader training sessions were held on three successive Saturday afternoons, with Long Islanders joined by New Yorkers. Rachel Leon made the course inspiring and productive. The combination of experienced and new leaders as co-leaders will prove effective. This Fall, the Oceanside group will be co-led by Ben Newman, a longtime Bookie, and Mrs. Montella, a new leader. Valley Stream's group will have experienced leader Selma Zoref and new leader Mrs. Spear.

Bicentennial One-Day Institute. This was held on June 6. Joe Cowley's dramatic flyer for the event highlighted a Mortimer Adler quote: "The world today is divided not only by conflicting interests and ambitions, but also by rival conceptions of freedom." The theme is this year's Institute was The Idea of Freedom. One reading was Adler's Concept of Freedom, which described three philosophical ideas of freedom: self-perfection, self-determination, and self-realization, each distinct from political liberty. The second discussion centered on Burke's classic address to Parliament, On Conciliation With the Colonies, which included this moving conclusion: "I have this comfort - - that, in every state of American affairs, I have steadily opposed the measures that have produced the confusion, and may bring on the destruction, of this empire. I now go as far as to risk a proposal of my own. If I cannot give peace to my Country, I give it to my conscience."

And here was one of the best exchanges of the day:

1st participant (referring to the reading): "But that's not what Descartes said about freedom."

Leader (leafing through pages): "Let's see - - where is Descartes?"

2nd participant: "I think you'll find it before Des Horse."

Gourmets and Punch Lines. A short time ago a letter appeared in the New York Times column of Craig Clairborne, the widely-read professor of food knowledge (he's the guy who boggled our minds with that 37-course gourmet meal in a famous Paris restaurant, costing \$4,000). The letter was from Carroll W. Dawson of Staten Island:

On Staten Island for the past 25 years we have belonged to a Great Books club. We meet every two weeks at the home of one of the members, have a few drinks and some light food, and discuss the current reading. Some time ago, the host for one evening's discussion opted to serve something called Fish House Punch. I can't remember which book we discussed that night, or whether we discussed it at all. I do remember that at some point one member suggested we put on some records and dance.

The apartment grew warmer and someone opened a couple of windows (this was after the third refilling of the punch bowl). Inevitably, the police arrived, summoned by some neighbors who complained that the party had become remote from its literary beginnings. Naturally, somebody invited the cops in and offered some punch to them. They stayed. At 4 AM a lieutenant from the Commissioner's office rounded up the cops and sent them home - - a very touching farewell for us all. Ever since, even at the mention of the word "fish," I seem to get a strange, dizzy feeling.

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