

# THE TRICORN

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

March, 1981

## Colby: Communication For Understanding

Colby = communication. For a quarter of a century Great Books pilgrims have trekked to Maine to share ideas, feelings, experiences. The talk is constant. Oral and aural organs work more during Colby week than in any **month** at home. There is continual communication on every level, from "Feel like another frozen custard?" to the deepest probing of abstractions.

This summer, Colby will focus on the communication process itself. The word "communication" itself heads the vocabulary of therapists and trouble-shooters of every sort. Everyone agrees that improved communication is "a consummation devoutly to be wished," as well as worked for. The quotations that follow (from books being considered) show the fascination to be found in the struggle.

### From The Meaning of Meaning, by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards

Why scientists and others are now agreed that what we see is not chairs and tables will be at once obvious if we consider what we do see when we look at such objects. On the other hand, the accounts given of what we do see have not taken the matter further, owing to bad habits, which we form in tender years, of misnaming things which interest us. The following, for example, is a common method of procedure illustrating the way in which these habits arise: --

"I remember on one occasion wanting the word for Table. There were five or six boys standing round, and, tapping the table with my forefinger, I asked, 'What is this?' One boy said it was a **dodela**, another that it was an **etanda**, a third stated that it was **bokali**, a fourth that it was **elamba**, and the fifth said it was **meza**. These various words we wrote in our note-book, and congratulated ourselves that we were working among a people who possessed so rich a language that they had five words for one article."

The assumption of the reverend gentleman is that, having asked a definite question, he was entitled to a definite answer. Very little study of what he actually saw or tapped might have saved him the trouble of discovering at a later stage that "one lad had thought we wanted the word for tapping; another understood we were seeking the word for the material of which the table was made; another had an idea that we required the word for hardness; another thought we wished for a name for that which covered the table; and the last, not being able, perhaps, to think of anything else gave us the word **meza**, table--the very word we were seeking."

## **From Through the Looking Glass, by Lewis Carroll**

The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was, "Why is a raven like a writing desk?"

"Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles--I believe I can guess that," she added aloud.

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least- I mean what I say--that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see!'"

"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like!'"

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe!'"

There are still a few places open for this year's Great Books Colby College experience, August 9 - 15, 1981. The cost is \$210.00 per person, which includes room, meals, books and all social events. The \$110.00 per person deposit is refundable, less the charge for books and mailing, if you cancel before July 1, 1981. Please let us know how you want your name listed, if you want to be in a leaderless group, and whether you want a no-smoking group (if it can be arranged). Please make your check payable to The Colby Summer Institute Committee, C/O Isadore S. Wachs, 1822 Lewis Tower Bldg., 15th and Locust Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19102.

## **The Junior Program Flourishes**

The New York Times supplied good news to go with the Sunday morning bagels or kippers last January 4. A half-page article entitled "Junior Great Books Write a New Chapter" told of the stunning success of our nation-wide program for students in grades two through nine. A half-million students--two and a half times the 1977 enrollment--are in Junior Great Books groups. Last year the foundation sent out ten instructors to train 18,500 new leaders.

When the program began in 1962, all leaders were parent volunteers. Now, with this pool of women largely back in the work force, most children's groups are led by teachers, librarians, and school administrators. The foundation will not fill book orders from schools where no one has taken the training; it is the discussion techniques as much as the anthologies of classics and lively contemporary material that have made the program go so well.

"The biggest factor in our rise in enrollment is new interest in the gifted," said foundation president Richard Dennis. Training Coordinator Leslie Paul added that the "back-to-basics" movement and state-mandated reading programs are also responsible for the present popularity of the program.

The children who find Great Books enriching and stimulating should, in a few years, be an excellent source of participants for adult groups.

## Boston News

### Boston Council to Meet with Massachusetts Librarians

Library personnel form a group whose support is essential to the continued growth of the Great Books Program. Good librarians recognize the value of Great Books to their patrons and are motivated to support the program because Great Bookers tend to be library supporters. Public support for libraries is particularly important to them in these days of Propositions 2½, 13, and so on.

The Boston Council, recognizing the important role of librarians in furthering the Great Books Program, initiated a request to participate in the annual program of the Massachusetts Library Association (MLA). It seemed a fine way to approach several thousand librarians at once. The PR Committee was charged with negotiating with the MLA. Dr. John Mogan and Ann Levison volunteered to lead a discussion of a short essay or poem. Their program will be unique on three counts: first, the librarians will be required to read and discuss the essay or poem from their seats in the auditorium; second, hundreds of librarians are expected to participate; third, a strong pitch for Great Books will be made after the discussion.

The MLA enthusiastically accepted the Great Books proposal; the event will take place on May 12, at the Sheraton Sturbridge Inn.

I feel that the New York and Philadelphia Councils could easily develop the same kind of program at the state or county level. Copies of the correspondence which contributed to closing the deal may be obtained by writing to me, care of Hockett Associates, Inc., Mill Dam Lane, Concord, MA 01742.

Jack Hockett,  
PR Chairman

### Boston Leaders Attend Board Meetings

The Boston Council has instituted a practice of inviting leaders of discussion groups in the metropolitan Boston area to attend the regular meetings of the Board of Directors. The Board hopes to 1) introduce the Board to the leaders; 2) give leaders a forum for airing any problems their groups may be encountering; and 3) make the leaders (and through them, the groups) aware of the work of the Council.

### Boston Spring Institute in the Berkshires

The beautiful Berkshire mountains, 135 miles from Boston and 140 miles from New York, are the setting for the annual Boston weekend institute on April 10, 11, and 12. The Holiday Inn in Lenox, Massachusetts is on a wooded road 8 miles from the Massachusetts Turnpike. Directly across the road is an Audubon wildlife sanctuary.

The readings, on the theme **Men and Women**, will include E.O. Wilson's **On Human Nature**, **The Descent of Woman** by Elaine Morgan, and a Randall Jarell poem, "**Woman.**"

The weekend will include the 3 discussions, a movie, a party, 6 meals, and use of the Inn's tennis courts, indoor pool, and sauna. And, the best news of all: the price is less than last year--only \$99 per person (double occupancy), complete! Send a \$25 deposit with your registration, made payable to the Metropolitan Great Books Council, to: Ed and Judy Geschelin, 19 Fairfax Rd., Milton, MA 02186, by March 21.

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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate additional reservations, or specify roommate choice on a separate sheet.

## Hesse Survey Results

Those who attended the Pocono Weekend last fall responded to a survey devised by me to learn their feelings about Hermann Hesse's **Journey to the East**. My questionnaire asked participants to designate which of the following possibilities best expressed their opinion of the novel, both before and then after the discussion.

Do you consider Hesse's story to be:

- (a) A surrealistic novel?
- (b) A religious propaganda message?
- (c) A spiritual allegory?
- (d) A crazy story?
- (e) A literary hoax?
- (f) The narration of a tormented dream?
- (g) The narration of a tormented drug trip?
- (h) The narration of a parapsychic experience?
- (i) Something else? If so, please explain.

Enough questionnaires (170 of 250) were returned to validate statistical conclusions about the impact of the discussion in the 15 groups. I assume that those questionnaires with only one answer were completed by people whose opinion was not affected by the discussion. If those single-answer responses were excluded from the statistical analysis which follows, the effect of the discussion on the shifts in opinion would be even greater.

The largest group considered the novel a spiritual allegory; the discussion increased that proportion from 66% to 76%. Another 5% of the respondents moved from this answer to other choices. On the other hand, the discussion increased also the proportion of those who thought the book was a religious propaganda message (from 4% to 6%), or the narration of a parapsychic experience (from 2% to 5%). There was a decrease in the proportion of those who initially thought it was a surrealistic literary creation (from 15% to 9%), the narration of a tormented dream (from 4% to 3%, or simply a crazy story (from 4% to 0.6%).

If you agree with the majority that **Journey to the East** is a spiritual allegory, what do you think that Leo represents in Hermann Hesse's life? I would be most interested in getting responses to this question.

Andre Juliard, Ph.D., 103 W. Montgomery Ave., Ardmore, PA 19003.

## Long Island News

### Attention!

Long Island Great Books groups--Where are you? Who are you? What are you reading? When do you meet? Who are your leaders? Do you need help? The Long Island Great Books Council would like answers to all of these questions. In order to maintain records and accurate up-to-date mailing lists and to direct prospective participants to active groups it is most important that you send your group's vital statistics to: June Ferrara, 14 Bay Second Street, Islip, NY 11751.

## One-Day Institute

The Long Island Great Books Council will hold its annual one-day institute on Sunday, May 31 at Mille Fleurs on the Sands Point Park and Preserve in Port Washington. This is a beautiful estate on the Long Island "Gold Coast."

The theme of the day is **The Prophetic Vision**; readings are selections from **The Koran** and from **Varieties of Religious Experience** by William James. The fee is \$12.50 per person, which covers the cost of books, lunch and refreshments.

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Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Send check or money order to Long Island Great Books Council, P.O. Box 821, Port Washington, NY 11050.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a reprint from our local newspaper about the group which I started here in 1948. We are the oldest Great Books group in New England, and the Chicago office believes we may be the oldest group in the country! I came here from Mamoroneck, New York, thirty-three years ago. I had been a member of a spirited group there. It was a commuting town, and I remember people walking up and down the aisles of the New York train continuing the discussion of the Great Books meeting of the night before.

The enjoyment of creating community activities has become habit-forming. Twenty-five years ago, I co-founded Massachusetts Art Week, to be held the last week in May in perpetuity, by the governor's proclamation. Most recently, I started the Dartmouth Arts Council, to administer the local unit of the Massachusetts Arts Lottery Council. This is the first lottery in the world to subsidize the arts and humanities. I hope to get funds for more sets of Great Books for our local library from the lottery. Perhaps other Massachusetts Great Books groups could do this also.

Mary Lindenberg  
North Dartmouth, Massachusetts

Editor's note: Mary Lindenberg is a well-known New England artist, as well as a community activist and Great Books promoter.

## Philadelphia News

### Mme. Verdurin Lives!

Marcel Proust's Mme. Verdurin would be ecstatic to know that her "Wednesdays" are still being observed by a "little group" in Philadelphia. Dr. Cottard, Prof. Brichot and Princess Sherbatoff can no longer faithfully attend, of course, but others equally devoted have replaced them. And instead of gathering at Mme. Verdurin's every Wednesday, the present salon forms on four Wednesdays a year at the homes of the new members. At the first meeting, the Proustian spirit was evoked by nibbling Madeleines. The new group has replaced back-biting, gossip, and social climbing with the delightful study of the masterwork of Mme. Verdurin's creator, **The Remembrance of Things Past**.

All of this started more than two years ago when Aaron Heller cajoled and constrained five Great Books friends into reading the French masterpiece. Aaron and Rita Heller have been Proust devotees for many years; they have even traveled to foreign cities to see paintings mentioned in **Remembrance**. Aaron and his group expect to complete the reading in 1983, which will bring them in slightly under Proust's writing time.

### Ghost Chasing at the Philadelphia Spring Seminar

Some ancient ghosts reach out to clutch and bind us. Some shades we seek ourselves for nurture from our source. The past can drain us or sustain us. Bygone times, both real and mythic, flood present lives in **The Woman Warrior**, by Maxine Hong Kingston, and **Song of Solomon**, by Toni Morrison. Both of these books have won prizes for their original concepts and for the drama and power of their words.

At the 22nd Annual Spring Seminar held by the Philadelphia Great Books Council, books, lunch and refreshments are included in the \$14.00 fee. For information please call Ceil Cooper, 233-1964 or Mae Shapiro, 379-2203. The seminar will be on Sunday, May 17 at Chestnut Hill College, Germantown Pike below Northwestern Avenue.

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To register, send check or money order payable to Philadelphia GB Council to Harold Moll, 7657 Wyndale Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19151.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ GB Group & Leader's Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Delaware Spring Seminar

Should Orestes be tried? The justice meted out to this mythic matricide will be the theme of the Spring Seminar of the Great Books Council of Delaware. The one-day affair will take place on Sunday, March 8 at the Jewish Community Center in Wilmington. Participants will discuss **The Oresteia** by Aeschylus and **The Flies** by Jean-Paul Sartre.

## The Songbird of Shijchiazhuang

This is what my colleagues had dubbed me that evening in our hotel in Shijchiazhuang, Province of Hebei, China, when I told them that one of our students had asked me to tape some folk and popular songs of America and Britain. Mr. Li, a university teacher in English, was one of the fifty students in the short English training class we five teachers from the United States had come to give at Hebei University in Shijchiazhuang for five weeks this past summer. A gentleman in his fifties of Chinese descent who had grown up in India, he was recalling the old favorites of his youth.

Who were we, "The gang of five" in this remote industrial city of 900,000 ("Bayonne in a dust storm," as one of our gang called it), one hundred and fifty miles southwest of Peking, and why were we there? We had come as representatives of Staten Island College to teach English in an innovative program for fifty students, all university teachers of English, who almost without exception had never before met a "Westerner" and who were passionately devoted to learning as much American English and culture as possible during this summer course to transmit to their own students. We, in turn, were enchanted by their intelligence, curiosity, warmth and high spirits. We had arrived on July 9 to a glowing welcome and left five weeks later enormously enriched with memories of our extraordinary experiences.

During our daily sessions we presented much linguistic, literary, historical, and cultural material. Our students were grossly ignorant of Western history and culture and grasped eagerly at any verbal or written information. A Newsweek magazine was described by one of my students as a "small encyclopedia of contemporary knowledge." (What would they have commented about a New York Times Sunday edition!) Many students had never heard of Christ, Martin Luther King, European classical music, credit cards, or many other Western cultural staples. Each book presented to them was treasured. Our daily English lessons and special lectures on American education, literature, linguistics, photography and classical music were taped. Undergraduate students not in our program awaited us daily as we emerged from our hotel or classrooms to exchange a few words of English with "American friends." We called them the "English hustlers!"

Invitations were extended to return next summer and possibly for a year to continue our program. We all left with a deep sense of enduring friendship. As their "beloved professors" we had been extensively catered to, assuring our comfort, and as we bid an emotional farewell we were told, "Now you must look after each other." (Again the stress on mutual caring.) Perhaps the "songbird" will return to Shijchiazhuang to add to their musical archives and continue the disco dancing embraced by our students!

Marilyn Apelson

## Winter Theatre Events

Boston and Philadelphia agreed that "the play's the thing" wherein we'll catch new members and raise funds. Great Books Councils in both cities scheduled winter theatre parties. Boston participants were invited to see and discuss Sean O'Casey's **Juno and the Paycock**; Philadelphia booked **The Knight of the Burning Pestle** by Beaumont and Fletcher.

## Looking at Leading

Debating which books qualify as classics has generated argument in earlier Tricorns. The modern literature that constitutes the bulk of the three newest Great Books series has been attacked and defended in letters and articles here. We have thought much about which works we should read and discuss.

Another vital aspect of the program, which we haven't considered, is style of leadership. We know that some leaders adhere to traditional Great Books method. We know that others depart from it in different ways. In reality, each group becomes a small, independent fief of the leader. He can define his role in any way he chooses, and, in most cases, his method is accepted by his group. He can prepare careful question clusters. He can lead "by the seat of his pants." He can be an authority figure. He can become a participant. Even the most orthodox of leaders feel enormous temptation at times to lecture or to participate. Should leaders learn to live with the fact that they will not hear all of their own deepest insights expressed? Should they continue to slam the door in the face of every outside authority? Should all biographical data be proscribed? Can we allow any cracks in the fortress of our orthodoxy?

Leader in the field, how do you conduct your group? Participant, (identified or anonymous), how does your leader's modus operandi work? Let's look into leading in the next issue of the Tricorn.

### The Good Old Times Have Just Begun

"A deterioration of standards in craftsmanship and the arts... ascribed to the era of the mass man... a culture dominated by commercialism directed to popular consumption rather than to the taste of the most discerning." **The New York Times Magazine** thus touted "The Decline of Quality," a jeremiad by Barbara W. Tuchman it published last November. What are the yardsticks of quality applied by the noted historian, who calls herself an "observer with half a century's awareness and occasional participation in public affairs"? Can we who also often make snap judgments agree with her findings reached without "documentary or other hard evidence according to usual historical method"?

One may not quarrel with Tuchman's catch-phrase definitions of quality, no matter how banal: "Investment of the best skill and effort possible... honesty of purpose... (no) compromise with the second-rate"; nor should one belabor her off-the-wall notion that "quality is inherent in a given work." It is in her choice of would-be authentication, however, that the historian buries her head in the sands of bygone times. Michelangelo's Moses and David are held against today's ceramic princesses, Snow Whites and Bambis when the works of Brancusi, Moore, or Lipshitz should afford fair comparison, regardless of merit. Who is to say what worthless junk caused the five-and-ten shoppers of the Cinquecento to shell out their soldi?

Similar journalistic cheap shots pit Jean Rhys against **Princess Daisy**, but not against Maxine Hong Kingston or Toni Morrison; New England's white-steepled churches against orange-roofed Ho-Jos, but not against the Frank Lloyd synagogue; **Ninotchka** against **Star Wars**, but not against **Days of Heaven**. Parting ways with Dante, whose middle years brought forth his masterpiece prompted by the memory of teenage Beatrice, Tuchman denigrates "films devoted to teenagers (as) consequently... boring." One wonders whether she feels left behind in time as much by the precocity of Romeo and his innamorata; Joan of Arc; Cyrus the Great, et al., not to mention Huck Finn or Holden Caulfield.

Like every fundamentalist, she knows unerringly what is best for all; her revealed values--heretofore safeguarded by princely patrons--have been betrayed by the great unwashed. Her article's left-handed acknowledgment of contemporary social advances is scuttled at once by a rattling assault on egalitarianism, linked to the mournful assumption that elitism is dead. One differs not so much with Tuchman's praise of the elite, as with her assertion of its demise.

## On With "The Great Conversation"

From **Industry Week**, September 29, 1980

"Humanities: Practical Management Education", by Dr. Frederick Herzberg

"Today, there are more professional people-helpers practicing more varieties of people-helping, but fewer human conversations and still less human companionship."

### Don't Cull Us--We'll Cull You

In line with our continuing effort to keep costs down, we are culling from our mailing list people who are no longer interested in our activities. If you no longer want our mailings, please cut off your mailing label and send it to Henry Cohen, 5800 Tulip St., Philadelphia, PA 19135.

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