

THE TRICORN

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

August, 1988

The Book: A Vanishing Species?

Back in the Thirties, little thrill seekers played "doctor." Their more repressed schoolmates played "librarian," a simple, pleasing game that involved the marking of borrowers' books with a pencil-mounted date stamp. This satisfying pastime led many children to plan careers as librarians.

How the last five decades have changed that picture! The joy of book-stamping has passed into limbo, along with the hand-cranking of ice cream and the hanging out of the family wash. For many years now book borrowers' cards have been recorded electronically at check-out desks. But that's the least of the changes in our libraries. Though books are at this time still to be found on the shelves and people are still browsing and borrowing, that's only the cherry on the sundae: new non-print materials are the ice cream, the chocolate sauce, the whipped cream, and the nuts. Circulation of video cassettes, microcomputers, software, compact discs, and books on tape is soaring. Librarians, of necessity, have become experts in all the new technology. Philadelphia's old and much respected Drexel University School of Library Science has metamorphosed into The School of Information Retrieval Services. The electronic revolution has even spawned a popular new version of the book itself. Books on tape—designed for "reading" on personal stereos and cassette decks in cars—are a popular item in our public libraries.

How are the library specialists responding to their changed environment? The reaction is mixed. Some see the library scene as simply catching up with the changing century. Others who favor the expanded range of materials point out that video cassettes have drawn people who never had a library card—potential new book borrowers. Those who deplore the new focus away from the written word complain that library conventions exhibit nothing but videos and software, and that librarians-in-training are learning to become information specialists rather than children's librarians or young adult librarians.

Where will it all end? With acid-processed paper deteriorating alarmingly fast and electronic competitors dealing further mortal wounds to books, will libraries of the future shelve any volumes at all? Booklovers must not yield to despair; their numbers will always insure the availability of this essential article in our nation's 115,000 libraries. But we have traveled light years beyond the libraries of our childhood, when all a librarian needed was a date stamp, an ink pad, and an effective whisper.

Word From Boston

The School Committee of the little town of Harvard, Massachusetts—the Athens of the Nashoba Valley, home of the biggest little Great Books group in the nation—recently interviewed a candidate for the position of superintendent of schools who was inspired to apply for the job, she said, because “the people in Harvard support art, music, and Great Books.” She is a proponent of Paideia, Mortimer Adler’s Great Books-based discussion method of teaching in the public schools. Unfortunately, from the perspective of this one qualification at least, the School Committee hired someone else. But in the meantime it was kinda nice for the town’s Great Bookers to have a moment of glory.

Members of the Greater Boston Council will discuss Eiseley and Calvino at their fall One-Day Institute this year. The theme that reflects the books’ similarities is “The Transforming Universe.” Loren Eiseley’s *The Star Throwers* is a posthumously published collection of essays about chance and change in the universe. Italo Calvino’s *Cosmicomics* is, says Nancy Reifenshtein of the institute committee, “a humorous interpretation of the meaning of evolution.” It treats more or less the same material as does *The Star Throwers*, she says, but from a point of view entirely different from that of the poetic Eiseley. It sounds like fun. The institute will be held on October 15th and will again be at the Tufts University campus, which is at its most beautiful at the peak of the New England foliage season. Anyone who wants more information should call or write Bill Shea, 9 Lincoln Street, Arlington, MA 02174, (617) 648-8322.

The Boston Spring Weekend, on the subject of romantic love, was a winner. We read an essay on love translated from the Tibetan; *We*, by Robert Johnson; and Zora Neale Hurston’s poetic and moving *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. *We* retold the Tristan and Isolde myth from a Jungian point of view. It was very productive of discussion and insight, though some of us wondered, if this was “*We*,” what Johnson’s *He* could possibly be about. Hurston’s book was a revelation for those who had never read it before—it’s a book that deserves far more than its usual designation as a “celebration of black folk culture. The weekend was held in Plymouth, Massachusetts for the second time. I think the weather was good. I know the forsythia was out. Think about joining us next year.

Ann Levison

(Editor’s note: Ann is signing off as Boston correspondent with this dispatch. The Tricorn will greatly miss her sprightly style, her to-the-last-comma correctness, and her utter dependability. Thanks, Ann.)

Words on Literature

Anatole Broyard: Saul Steinberg has a drawing of a man with an enormous bubble of alphabets issuing from his mouth. His sentence is bigger than he is, like a boast. It can be argued that this is what literature is—a boast, an attempt to deliver more than the naked eye can see or common sense might expect.

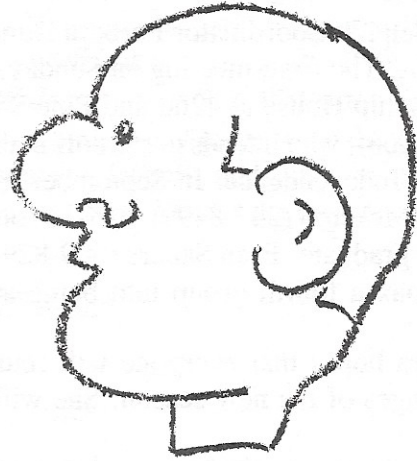
Joseph Brodsky, Nobelist: The way to develop good taste in literature *is to read poetry*. If you think I am speaking out of professional partisanship, that I am trying to advance my own guild interests, you are badly mistaken. For, being the supreme form of human locution, poetry is not only the most concise, the most condensed way of conveying the human experience; it also offers the highest possible standards for any linguistic operation—especially one on paper.

FROM THE LONG ISLAND FERRARA FILES

WHO IS THIS MAN???

This self-portrait, drawn by a Colby participant as part of the 1987 Friday Night Activity, is the only portrait that no one has been able to identify.

If you know who he is, send his name on a postcard to "Unknown Participant," 14 Bay Second Street, Islip, NY 11751, or better yet, give his name to any bartender at the WachsWorks and receive a free drink.



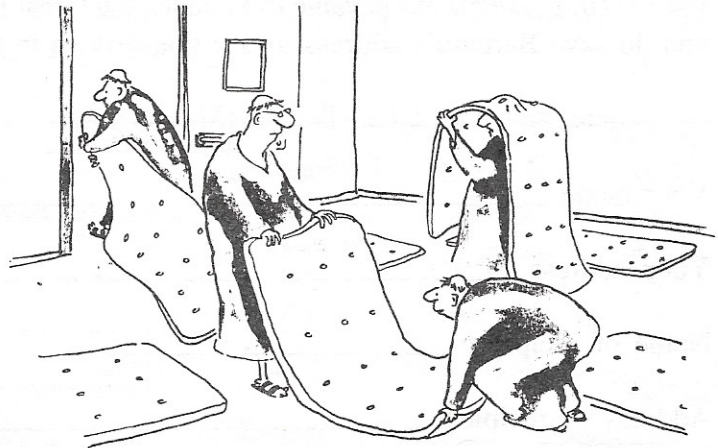
... from a personal dictionary for his novels, by Milan Kundera

Irony: Which is right and which is wrong? Is Emma Bovary intolerable? Or brave and touching? And what about Werther? Is he sensitive and noble? Or an aggressive sentimentalist, infatuated with himself? The more attentively we read a novel, the more impossible the answer, because the novel is, by definition, the ironic art: its "truth" is concealed, undeclared, undeclarable. . . It is futile to try and make a novel "difficult" through stylistic affectation; any novel worth the name, however limpid it may be, is difficult enough by reason of its consubstantial irony.

Novel: The great prose form in which an author thoroughly explores by means of experimental selves (characters), some great themes of existence.

Novelist: The novelist makes no great issue of his ideas. He is an explorer feeling his way in an effort to reveal some unknown aspect of existence. He is fascinated not by his voice but by a form he is seeking, and only those forms that meet the demands of his dream become part of his work. Fielding, Sterne, Flaubert, Proust, Faulkner, Celine, Calvino.

For those cramming for
Colby: Lighten up!



THE BROTHERS CARRY MATS OFF

PHILADELPHIA NEWS

Coordinator's Report

Philadelphia Coordinator Barbara Duno expects to be listing four new groups the next time she goes to press. The first, meeting on Sunday, July 24th from 7-9pm at the Woodland Presbyterian Church Fellowship House at 42nd and Pine Streets will be initially under the guiding hand of Mack Blank (727-3066), who intends to start off in the time-honored way with a rousing discussion of The Declaration of Independence. In September, three other groups should be raising their heads: new leader David Meketon (247-8499) plans to round up neighbors and friends in the Mt. Airy section; a second recent graduate, Fran Sauers (609-829-3424) in Riverton, New Jersey; and a corps of old stalwarts will coax a fourth group into being at the Main Library, Logan Square.

Barbara hopes that everyone will return from vacation rejuvenated and energized, ready for the challenges of the new season. She will be available as always to help solve problems (527-1632).

One problem that Barbara needs *your* help with is the distribution of promotional materials to area libraries, our chief source of recruits. Volunteers are wanted for her Adopt-A-Library program. A twice-a-year trip to two (or more, if you wish) of your local libraries to deliver materials and have a ten minute chat with the staff will fulfill your obligation and do much to spread the Great Books gospel.

Leader Training

As always, the health of the Great Books Program depends heavily on the availability of trained volunteer leaders. Sibyl Cohen's Leader Training Academy will instruct a new class as soon as people have come forward in sufficient numbers. If you would be interested in learning what makes a group successful, how to read at the deepest level, and how to formulate good discussion questions, call Sibyl (568-9827) or coordinator Barbara Duno (527-1632). If you're not interested, perhaps you could finger a friend who would be a good candidate for group leadership.

A New Service

The Philadelphia Great Books Council now joins the organizations glad to receive honor and memorial donations. A note will be sent to the person or family thus commemorated, telling them of the contribution to Great Books, tax deductible of course for the donor. Please send your contribution, along with the necessary information to Barbara Isaacman, 1122 Countryside Drive, Harrisburg, PA 17110. Make checks payable to Philadelphia Great Books Council. Please use the tear-off below, and do save Barbara's address to use this service in the future.

Your name _____

Your address _____

Name of recipient _____

Address of recipient _____

Occasion _____

Probing the Feminine Psyche

We started back in March, when the focus of our Princeton Theatre Party was *The Dark Sonnets of the Lady*, a lively dramatization by Don Nigro of the relationship between Sigmund Freud and his early patient, Dora. Chairman Olga Wallace, assisted by Henrietta Rogers, made the day spin without a snag. Then in May we did deep delving into the psyche of woman at the Philadelphia Spring Institute, discussing Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, that stunning spectacle of the early years of the first Mrs. Rochester. Ruth Allen and Fran Jacobs were the efficient organizers. On the eve of the discussions, as always, board members, leaders, and out-of-town guests gathered for a party. Hosts Eva and Emil Bix extended their super hospitality for the umpteenth time.

18th Annual Fall Institute Weekend

Date: November 11-12-13, 1988
Place: Pocono Manor, Pocono Manor, PA
Theme: America Through Its Literature
Readings: *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain
Love Medicine, by Louise Erdrich

A literary adventure through the annals of our nation, reflecting its diversity of people, values, geography, culture, and humor across the centuries. Our view will stretch from Puritan New England, down the Mississippi River, to contemporary Native American settings in the Dakotas.

Cost: \$170 per person / double occupancy
 \$232 per person / single occupancy (if available)

The price includes meals, lodging, books, entertainment, and tips. If you must cancel, the deposit less a charge for books will be refunded if your cancellation is postmarked no later than October 8th.

Registration: Please send a deposit of \$70 per person (double) or \$102 per person (single, if available) with the form below to:

Sylvia Perelman, 8214 Marion Road, Elkins Park, PA 19117

Please Note: Registration represents a commitment to read all the books and attend all the discussions.

Registration Form

Enclosed is a deposit of \$ _____, made payable to Fall Institute Committee.

Names (please give first and last name of each person)	non-smoking group	smoking group	no pref.
(first) _____ (last) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(first) _____ (last) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Address _____			
(city) _____ (state) _____ (zip) _____	(phone) () _____		

Please tell us any special requests, and we'll try to accommodate you.

The Battle of the Books

William Bennett, the soon-to-depart Secretary of Education, has made friends and enemies in equal numbers during his tenure. His firm conservative stance on all matters that cross his desk has caused acrid debate. When Stanford University announced last spring that their obligatory curriculum in Western civilization would be broadened to include Eastern, Black, feminist, and other new studies, Bennett raised a memorable ruckus. The same issue has surfaced at Harvard, and other elite schools. By now the "Great Books" canon has become a loose cannon on the deck of the good ship Academe, as more and more scholars and institutions argue the question of change in the standard roster of works underlying Western civilization.

One of the most celebrated of the combatants is Professor Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom fears that the drive for "careerism, relativism and egalitarianism" has weakened or perhaps mortally wounded the old ideal of a sound liberal education. He feels that the great questions man has always had to face are dealt with best in the "Great Books," not in the debating of parochial present concerns. Naturally such opinions have led to Bloom's being called an elitist, an epithet he doesn't mind at all. He doesn't dodge the designation: "Elitism has taken on a new meaning. It is elitist to read the 'Great Books' because very few people wrote them and because they have been written by white, Western males. Such books have come to constitute an elitist canon, taught by a clan of priests like me."

Henry Rosovsky, the former dean of the faculty at Harvard, who was chiefly responsible for the broadening of the liberal arts curriculum several years ago, doesn't share Bloom's attitude. Rosovsky argues, "All education has to impact and reflect the times and the places in which we live. Knowledge of our time cannot be static."

But is this simply a two-sided issue? On June 27, in an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* Arthur R. Gold, who teaches English at Wellesley, argues a third position most forcefully: "In the conflict between the right and the left over what college students should be required to read, no one is talking about pleasure—the reason one reads in the first place. Nor is anyone talking about freedom: one's freedom not to like this or that, even if the authorities say it is part of one's Western heritage, or that it represents one's left-out brothers or sisters or forebears. Yet pleasure and freedom have always been fundamental to literature, and I am not alone in wishing a pox on both houses because of their mutual puritanism and mutual indifference to the free character of all genuine aesthetic experience. . . . The reason we read *The Odyssey* is that it's the best adventure story, affording the most effective of escapes from reality. If one knows of a better adventure story—written yesterday, and by a blind native American woman in a wheelchair—one should read (or assign) that." Gold goes on to point out that the inclusion of works in the canon is not done to enhance the concept of self-worth of this or that group, but to enthrone literary excellence.

He concludes his editorial with this question: "How are our students going to be helped to read freely, and read for the pleasure of apprehending their own minds at work, if men and women in positions of authority keep telling them that what matters in a book is that it did, or did not, shape what Mark Twain had Huck Finn call 'sivilization'?"

As readers immersed in the traditional Great Books canon, how do you feel about the inclusion of Eastern, contemporary, Black, feminist, and ethnic works? Should we retain the Fifty Year Measure of Merit, or should we focus on the present as well as the past? If you have strong feelings on this matter, please send them to The Tricorn. Are we stirring up a hornet's nest, or more accurately, a W.A.S.P.'s nest?

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Wilmington Summer Sessions

Wilmington Great Books members vacationed this summer in Japan, via the old armchair. That Far Eastern nation was experienced through several readings discussed in three sessions at the Concord Pike Library. Works chosen were *Spring Snow*, a novel by Mishima; *Hajitomi*, a Nō play; and poetry by Kawabata, as well as his essay "Japan the Beautiful and Myself."

A Lamentation

High school physics wasn't too tough for a girl lucky enough to hit it in the pre-atomic age. Understanding the use of levers to move worlds and the strange behavior of iron filings wasn't beyond my grasp. Physics even offered moments of fun in Girls High, as when we discovered in our text an artist's rendering of Galileo "throwing his balls from the Tower of Pisa."

In college, I escaped physics (by then solidly "atomic") by a hair; my freshman struggles with zoology demonstrated my unsuitability for medical studies, parting me firmly and finally from all math and science courses.

Physics remained easily avoidable until as a Great Books leader I was faced with Aristotle's work on the subject a couple of decades ago. I discovered then how long twenty-five pages can be. The words were impenetrable; the diagrams added to my bewilderment. When I prepared to lead the discussion scheduled for the next day, all my questions were honest ones, queries that I myself hadn't a clue on. I dreaded the discussion to come. Once again, though, a kind fate intervened. The next morning the world was coated with ice. The group secretary and I conferred and then called our members to postpone the meeting. Just about everyone on the other end of the line admitted sheepishly, "Well, I wasn't really planning to come, anyway." So I made the decision forced on me by circumstances, cancelling rather than postponing the Aristotle. Then I danced around the room. Understand that this was the one and only time I ever cancelled a reading.

From that day until now, my *bête noire* has lingered in his lair, not troubling me with even his shadow. But today, on my desk just to the right of my typewriter sits Werner Heisenberg's *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*. It has a most menacing look in its ugly cover, an appropriate puke green. I must read it, since it came in my Colby carton of books. And when and if I get through it, I'll sooth my spirit with *The Brothers Karamazov*, that most glorious of novels. But how I will suffer with the Heisenberg.

Physics, I see now, is my fate. Welcome to Samara. This coming confrontation was always as inevitable as the meeting of Oedipus and Laius at the crossroads. I must cover my typewriter and turn to my destined encounter. Perhaps the intervening decades of feminism have opened my mind to abstruse matters I used to feel only males could comprehend. A brief prayer to Athena might be of help before I dip into the Heisenberg:

Oh goddess, do remove my fright
At matters deep and recondite--
Don't let my worried wits take flight;
For just this once, please light my light.

N.O.

What Books Doth This Our Caesar Read?

As always in presidential election years, we good citizens worry about how to know truly what sort of men our candidates are. We know what they are not: those smiling, all-wise, God-fearing, glib fellows thrust upon us by their image-makers. But by what measures shall we determine their magnitude? Which tools will reveal to us their hearts, minds, and souls? Some suggest that by their books ye shall know them. If this is so, what sort of reading would we prefer our political leaders to choose?

John K. Clemens and Douglas F. Mayer, professors of management at Hartwick College, offer an extended answer in their recently published *The Classic Touch: Lessons in Leadership from Homer to Hemingway*. They believe that modern managers and leaders could learn much of use from the classics. Thoreau's *Walden* shows "the badness of bigness." *King Lear* demonstrates the pitfalls of "succession, delegation and decentralization," to say nothing of rashness and overweening pride. The authors declare Plato's *Republic* the best text ever written on leadership style, and they make the obvious citation of Machiavelli's *The Prince* for its advice on the attaining and retaining of power.

Another academic, David Bradley, who teaches not business but literature at Temple University and has received laudatory criticism for *The Chaneysville Incident* and other novels, sees the reading choices of political leaders somewhat differently. He thinks no literary work would be of greater importance to our next president than *Robinson Crusoe*, showing the pitfalls of isolation. *Julius Caesar* might make him wary of advisors who share his isolation, and *Macbeth* could caution him about possible problems with the First Lady. Bradley believes that good novels teach understanding of the human condition. He would ask political contenders "When did you last read a novel?" and "Did you weep for Little Nell?"

Great Books
14 Bay Second St.
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