



THE KEY REPORTER

How Does a College or University Get a Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa?

Editor's note: Only 248 of the institutions of higher learning in the United States currently have chapters of Phi Beta Kappa. Each triennium, the ΦBK Senate's Committee on Qualifications considers applications from across the country and picks a number of institutions for thorough investigation as potential new locations for chapters. We asked the chairman of the committee, Burton M. Wheeler, professor of English and religious studies at Washington University, to describe the criteria and current procedures for awarding charters for new chapters.

Since 1931 the Committee on Qualifications has had the task of evaluating applications for new chapters, reporting its findings to the ΦBK Senate, and presenting the recommendations of the Senate to the triennial Council. The final decision about every new chapter rests with the delegates at the Council; only those applications that are approved by a two-thirds vote are granted charters.

The committee members are elected by the Senate, usually for six-year terms; they may be reelected. The 12 members of the current committee have demonstrated a commitment to undergraduate education; represent the humanities, social sciences, and natural and physical sciences equally; and come from 12 institutions, ranging from liberal arts colleges to private and public universities.

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A Well-Traveled Visiting Scholar Reports on Her Year

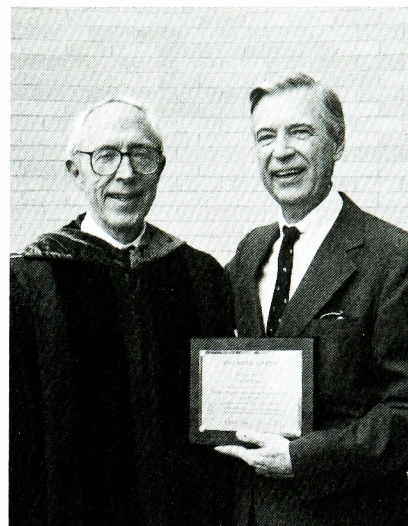
By Linda Seidel

IN A REVERSAL OF THE late-medieval practice in which students traveled from city to city in search of inspiring lecturers, Phi Beta Kappa each year sends out about a dozen university professors to campuses across the country for two-day visits that include presentations ranging from public addresses, seminar discussions, and classroom lectures to interviews for campus radio. Breakfasts, lunches, suppers, and coffee klatches with groups of students may expand to an occasional "office hour." Tours of the library and of any other local sites the hosts want to show off (and the visitor has time and energy enough to see) take care of "spare" time.

An exceptionally attentive staff in the Phi Beta Kappa office arranges all the travel and encourages the secretaries of the host chapters to handle everything else. These hosts plan memorable meals in country inns and presidents' houses and provide for functional meals in campus joints and dining halls; they also secure lodgings in dormitory apartments, historic hotels, and charming guest residences.

At one college I visited, assorted guests to the campus gathered at the end of their busy day around a fire in the living room of the ranch-style dwelling that the college maintained, sipping tea and snacking on cookies that were stocked in the kitchen. We

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



When the Society's vice president, Frederick Crossson (left), traveled to Carnegie Mellon University last April to install the new ΦBK chapter there, he presented certificates of membership to a number of distinguished friends and alumni of the university, including Fred Rogers, host and creator of the children's television program "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood."

KEY NOTES

Monterey Institute Awards
Scholarships to ΦBK Members
PAGE 3

ΦBK Members in Annapolis
Organizing an Association
PAGE 3

More Three-Generation
ΦBK Families Report In
PAGE 3

Life Outside Academe
by Robert Hellenga
PAGE 7

Letters to the Editor
PAGE 9

Former ΦBK Senator Wall Dies
PAGE 10

Recommended Reading
PAGE 11

HOW TO GET A CHAPTER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Some History

During the first century after the founding of Phi Beta Kappa at the College of William and Mary in 1776, the increase in the number of chapters was as gradual as the development of American higher education. By 1876 only 23 institutions, mostly small liberal arts colleges, had chapters. No chapter existed west of the Allegheny mountains until 1847 or in the South until 1851.

During Phi Beta Kappa's second century, several significant developments marked its growth: In 1899 Vassar became the first college for women to have a chapter. In 1938 the College of Saint Catherine became the first Catholic-affiliated institution to have a chapter. And in 1953 Fisk and Howard universities became the first predominantly black institutions to receive chapters. Most significantly, the number of public institutions with chapters increased. As late as 1889 the ratio of private to public institutions with chapters was seven to one.

How the Committee Selects Candidates For Recommendation

Because charters are awarded to Phi Beta Kappa members at an institution, rather than to the institution itself, the application for a charter originates with the faculty members of a college or university who are also members of Phi Beta Kappa. Obviously, an important initial criterion is that the institution have a substantial proportion of ΦBK members on its faculty.

The selection process is most readily understood by following the 1991 triennium that ended with the Council meeting in San Francisco in August 1994, when seven new charters were approved. Be advised that I have suppressed anecdotes, the occasional misadventure, and the idiosyncratic actions common to all selection processes.

Stage 1. In 1991, applicants who inquired about the application pro-

cess received a copy of the form "Preliminary Information Required of Applying Institutions" and the brochure "Phi Beta Kappa: The Founding of New Chapters," which details the application procedures and stipulations concerning eligibility for election of members in course (i.e., undergraduates). To be eligible for election to Phi Beta Kappa, students must major in an area of the liberal arts or sciences and take at least three-quarters of their work in such areas. Students whose principal study is in applied or professional work are not eligible. Candidates must have demonstrated knowledge of mathematics and a foreign language. These stipulations generally discourage applications from ΦBK faculty members at institutions with predominantly vocational programs.



Burton M. Wheeler

By November 1, 1991, the Society had received 53 applications, with the accompanying bulletins, admissions material, pamphlets on honors programs, and financial statements—including detailed information on student retention, academic programs, faculty, libraries, student activities, and athletic programs.

Between February and April 1992, every member of the Committee on Qualifications studied the submissions independently before assembling in Washington for a two-day meeting to discuss all the applications and to determine which ones held the most promise of deserving the award of chapters. From these

deliberations the committee agreed to visit nine institutions, in three-person teams.

Stage 2. Over the summer of 1992, the committee sent the names of the nine institutions to all existing chapters and invited them to present relevant information to the committee. The nine institutions selected for examination were asked to submit more extensive information on all aspects of their activities before the committee teams visited in the spring of 1993.

Site visits are essential to determine how an institution pursues the objectives it proclaims, to assess the vitality of its academic programs, and to discover whether students are developing skills suited to a life-long passion for learning. Visiting teams oriented to the distinctiveness of each institution were formed, and meetings were scheduled with institutional administrators and selected faculty and students. During the visit each member of the team devoted the better part of three long days to interviews, library evaluation, and inspection of physical facilities. Honors students and faculty were queried about the quality of programs.

After the campus visits, each team prepared a detailed, written report for the full committee. The reports were sent to all members by early May 1993. At a final two-day meeting in June, team participants were quizzed about their findings, and weaknesses and strengths were discussed. The committee unanimously decided to recommend to the Senate that seven of the nine applicant groups be awarded charters.

No academic institution fully achieves its objectives or meets the needs of all its students. The seven that were recommended were judged to be effectively creating a learning culture that nurtured students' achievement in the liberal arts and sciences. The committee, through the secretary of the Society, also sent to the two institutions that were not recommended some suggestions for strengthening their academic programs and enhancing scholarly activity of students and faculty, suggestions that might enable them to be recommended for charters in the future.

How Recommendations Reach the Council

Well in advance of the annual meeting of the Senate in December 1993, ΦBK senators received copies of the report of the Committee on Qualifications, including the detailed reports of the visiting teams.

The senators spent most of a day discussing the recommendations, and, voting separately on each institution, recommended all of them to the Council. (In other years, the Senate has, on occasion, voted to recommend only some of the institutions to the Council for action.)

At the Council meeting in August 1994, following the chairman's summary report, the chair of each visiting team reported on the institution with which he or she was most familiar and answered questions from the floor. Anyone who has attended a Council meeting can attest to the probing specificity of the questions. Some delegates spoke on behalf of particular institutions. In the past, delegates have occasionally made impassioned appeals to reject the award of a charter to a particular institution; institutions rejected by the Council must repeat the entire application procedure. At the 1994 Council meeting, however, all seven institutions were granted charters (see *Key Reporter*, Summer 1994).

The Future

Even before the 1994 Council meeting, the cycle for the 1994-97 triennium had begun. In October, 47 faculty groups presented applications. In April, the committee selected 10 institutions for comprehensive applications. On-site visits will occur in 1996.

Although the selection cycle will probably continue as in recent years, the Committee on Qualifications recognizes that it must be constantly alert to the need to adjust its procedures and to reconsider its criteria. As institutions of higher education adapt to different constituencies with varying expectations, the committee, too, must adjust, yet remain faithful to the Society's purposes. In particular, we are doing our best to ensure that we fairly assess rapidly evolving,

comprehensive universities where vocationally oriented programs outnumber traditional programs in arts and sciences.

There are larger issues that Phi Beta Kappa as a whole must address:

- We must clearly define our understanding of academic freedom for some institutions of high academic quality that stipulate religious practices.
- At a time when the word *liberal* has pejorative associations for many, we must effectively interpret to all institutions of higher education, with and without chapters, the assertion contained in the brochure on the founding of new chapters: "Phi Beta Kappa requires that its member institutions give primary emphasis to curricula liberal in character and purpose and that courses distinguished by these qualities shall constitute the principal requirements for the bachelor's degree."

Phi Beta Kappa, as I understand it, is committed to much more than recognizing superior academic accomplishment. We honor and support an educational process that exalts openness to divergent views, the interplay of ideas, inquiry and integrity, and the accomplishments of the human mind and spirit. We are egalitarian in denying that class, gender, race, or religion determines excellence. We are elitist in positing intellectual pursuits as our highest objective.

The foregoing paragraph is my personal interpretation. If the other members of the Committee on Qualifications were asked to endorse it, a heated, fascinating debate would surely ensue, and I would not predict its outcome. This is how it should be. We speak candidly and are argumentative. We look at hard data but may interpret it differently. When a session ends, we are tired but sometimes elated. What is more important is that we emerge committed to the sense of the majority.

To the more than 20 members of the committee with whom I've worked over more than 11 years, I owe my confidence that Phi Beta Kappa can be a continuing, creative force in American higher education.

Monterey Institute Awards Seven Scholarships to ΦBK Members for 1995-96

The Monterey Institute of International Studies, which, two years ago, began offering half-tuition, two-year scholarships to members of Phi Beta Kappa who are admitted to a degree program at the institute, gave 7 such awards for 1995-96, from a field of 23 applicants.

The institute is again offering the scholarships for 1996-97. To obtain application forms, write to the institute at 425 Van Buren St., Monterey, CA 93940. The deadline for receipt of applications is February 23, 1996.

Annapolis Members Organizing Association

Members of Phi Beta Kappa in Annapolis, Maryland, are organizing an association. People who are interested in joining should telephone Carole Falk, (410) 849-8016.

More Three-Generation ΦBK Families Report In

Three more three-generation families of Phi Beta Kappa members (see *Key Reporter*, Spring 1995) have come to our attention:

1. James Samuel Owens, University of Michigan, 1932; his son, James Carl Owens, Oberlin College, 1958; and a grandson, Daniel Edwards Owens, Michigan State University, 1993.

2. Dorothy Christensen Williamson, Colorado College, 1934; her daughters, Karen Williamson Andrews and Kristin Williamson Adcock, Colorado College, 1962 and 1967; and a grandson, Erik Adcock, Colorado State University, 1994.

3. Noah Bramwit, CCNY, 1929; his son, David Bramwit, Tufts, 1958; a son-in-law, Eugene Lind, Rutgers, 1962; and two grandsons, Mark Bramwit, Tufts, 1988, and Robert Lind, Cornell, 1995.

By their intelligence, dedication to learning, integrity, and faith in liberal education, they sustain the ideals of our Society.

Burton M. Wheeler

A VISITING SCHOLAR REPORTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

felt like well-cared-for undergraduates as we exchanged stories about what had brought us there; I learned some of the ins and outs of recruiting from that evening's lively group of visitors.

At another college, guests made one another's acquaintance at the breakfast table in a fine old house from which we could walk to the tree-studded campus. One of the visitors, a well-known cartoonist, there to give a talk on his work, alerted me to the exhibition of his sketches in the library. My host made certain that we had ample time to examine the drawings during a gap in my schedule that afternoon, and together we passed a marvelous hour examining the subtleties of this art. I regretted that I couldn't hear the artist's presentation, which had been arranged for the same hour as my own, or ask him questions about some of the visual decisions he made as he revised particular conceptions.

Local hosts worry about our transportation to and from destinations, even at 5:30 in the morning—should it be essential to get us on our way to the airport for the trip to our next location at that unconscionable hour. The main thing I needed to do was bring along well-stocked slide trays that would allow me to shift, at the flick of a finger, from presentations on the 11th century to ones on the 15th, from western Europe to the Holy Land, from sculpture to painting, and from monks to women. I also had to leave behind, for my students in Chicago, a carefully planned routine of take-home exams and in-class film screenings that allowed their work to proceed on schedule.

In exchange for four carefully selected weeks squeezed out of an already hectic academic year and a readiness to improvise as required, I was granted an exhilarating exposure to liberal arts education in some places I had long admired and in others I had scarcely heard of. At the end of each of the weeks, I flew home exhausted but thrilled at the vitality that I found in the most diverse

places. I was rewarded many times over by stimulating exchanges with lively faculty and by the satisfaction that comes when a question indicates that a student has been following one's argument intently. On numerous occasions, I stood by as my ideas were expanded and enriched by the observations of thoughtful colleagues who ended up educating me as well as our student audience.

About My Subject

The subject I teach and in which I do research is the history of art. Since that crisp fall morning in the late 1950s when I walked into my first art history class at a woman's college in the East and was swept away by the black-and-white images of Renaissance masterpieces that flickered on the screen, I have abided belittling asides—first, of classmates, then, of would-be friends, now, of talk-show hosts, and always, of colleagues in text-based pursuits—about the frivolousness of my major field of inquiry. After more than 30 years in the profession, I am still doing what I

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love most in the company of dedicated, tough-thinking, inspiring colleagues. We teach with the conviction that our subject is both historically significant and eminently consequential; the fact that it is delightfully, even dangerously, seductive adds another highly important dimension to what I do in and out of the classroom.

Students (and their parents) still wonder about the seriousness of the subject, however, especially in the belt-tightening world their generation now inhabits, where support for art matters far less than aid for arms. Even though much of our students' time is spent watching television and movies or sitting in front of a miniature screen on which text changes shape and color with the press of a button, and icons control thinking processes more thoroughly than

such objects did in the early medieval church, the sense that we learn through images as well as through words has not yet been translated into widespread appreciation of the need for visual education.

I understand the goal of my efforts as an educator to be the enhancement and encouragement of students' capacity to think for themselves; consequently, I try to teach in ways that require members of my classes to actively engage material and one another rather than to sit passively by while I do that work for them. This engagement is critical in my discipline; the fine arts have traditionally been defined in exclusive and elite terms that cast the teacher in the role of keeper of the flame, high priestess of a sacred if not secret cult.

It was especially important to me therefore, as I mapped out the topics on which I was prepared to talk and as I requested information about the non-art-related classes that had expressed interest in my participation, that I not be thought of as someone whose task it was to provide visual relief from the burdens of books by entertaining the classes I visited with illustrations of things they already knew about.

At most institutions I visited, I was asked to participate in classes that ranged from art history to other histories—religious, social, intellectual, literary—and included both women's studies and Western civilization. How exciting to introduce students in a class on women in European history to visual representations in place of the verbal ones to which they were accustomed and to help them discover for themselves in what ways the two differ, what those differences might mean, and whether either is necessarily true to life. How gratifying to have slides re-create the constructed boundaries of monastic confines in a class that had had no access to such material, and then encourage members of that religion course to think of gathering information about devotional practices from a new kind of nontextual primary source. How tantalizing it is to make Chaucer's world come alive with

paintings by his Flemish contemporary Jan van Eyck—paintings that are every bit as accomplished as the Englishman's prose (and no less playful or deceptive); what delight there is—and what difficulty—in teaching students to *look* rather than to *listen* for irony and metaphor.

It was eye-opening for me, on a visit to a class in Islamic history, to discuss the effects of European colonization of the Holy Land during the Crusades. I pointed out borrowed designs and alien structural forms in French architecture as evidence of artistic appropriation in the service of victorious rhetoric, while just a few miles from where I stood, in the dusty flatlands of southwestern Texas, stone-vaulted churches with elaborately carved portals testified to related acts of transplantation on the part of Franciscan missionaries a few hundred years later. During my visit to the largest of these missions later that day, a group of Eastern Orthodox priests from a nearby community was touring the site too, testing the acoustics of each chamber with an outpouring of melodious chant.

Students in that class, many of them from places I'd never heard of, had at hand the tools to understand some things more easily than could the cosmopolitan students of the metropolitan communities and city suburbs with whom I customarily come into contact. Regionalism, a sense of pride in one's past and in the traditions of one's surroundings, was one of the strengths I came to appreciate in my travels; I realized how productively it can be incorporated into instruction, and I made efforts at every turn to do so.

Some Surprises

A number of unusual events can be configured into the Visiting Scholars' campus visits to take us beyond the walls of the classroom. Most memorable for me was an occasion that began with an invitation to give a homily in chapel on the morning of my first day at a small, rural campus. The idea that members of a reasonably heterogeneous and intellectually sophisticated college community voluntarily came together for a few minutes each morning to acknowl-

edge one another and the common aspects of their varied heritages interested me. Moreover, I was attracted by the possibility of an outsider's instant, if momentary, integration into the heart of such a community's routine: Outsider I certainly would be—a visitor from the big city, a woman, a Jew, an art historian without slides!

The reading of the day was from the second chapter of John's Gospel, and I elected to talk about it even though I had been told I could speak about anything I wished—for up to eight minutes. The passage that a student read aloud before I presented



Linda Seidel

my remarks described the miracle at Cana in which water is turned into wine, a text that was particularly familiar to me from a medieval cloister carving on which it is "illustrated."

After conjuring up, for assembled students and faculty, details of the representation that gave heightened emphasis to the text, I contrasted the carefully constructed visual environment in which the medieval sculpture was situated with the unbounded profusion of images in our own culture. I drew the attention of those gathered in the chapel to the opportunity the monks had for contemplation of both the visual *and* the material as independent paths toward knowledge, and I invited my

listeners to incorporate into their lives the notion of learning through seeing as an authorized alternative to reading, not simply a supplement to it. In the lesson for the day, something *seen* had, after all, been the clue to things that were, as yet, otherwise unknowable; what do we lose when we dismiss visual signs as meaningless or, possibly worse, irrational?

Religious metaphors persisted for me in my travels and served to organize many of my experiences—in part because campuses, my own especially, have traditionally borrowed the plan and forms of spiritual communities, and in part because several of the institutions I visited started out as sectarian foundations, even seminaries. In addition, a few of the colleges I visited either constituted historic sites or were near them; in my spare time, or on the midweek day that is allotted for travel between campuses, I was able to visit recognized as well as informal monuments, secular shrines of a sort. Surprises always awaited me when I got there.

Northfield, Minnesota, the location of St. Olaf and Carleton colleges, is the site of one of Jesse James's bobbed bank robberies. The First National Bank on the main street there, now handsomely restored, serves as the local historical society. While I was waiting for it to open one morning, a passerby inquired whether I would be willing to witness a will. It took a moment to figure out exactly what I was being asked to do, and then I wondered whether an itinerant scholar would qualify. Told that I would, I proceeded into a nearby office to witness the signing of a legal instrument, amused by the knowledge that my talk later that day would examine the claim that a celebrated Renaissance painting was created to serve as a surrogate document.

The center of the Hollins College campus in Roanoke consists of a group of redbrick buildings that form a large U-shaped structure; white wooden covered porches opening onto a lush, tree-filled green space connect the buildings. The main portion of this construction was begun on the day that Virginia seceded from the Union; people I met during my

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

A VISITING SCHOLAR REPORTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

visit talked about the history of the campus in ways that indicated that “the War” remained a vivid memory. My public lecture was given in a mirrored, Victorian parlor where literary readings and elegant receptions seemed more appropriate than slide shows and surely were the more familiar fare; my topic, Renaissance representations of marriage and images of brides as objects of exchange, had undeniable resonance, however, in the historic hall of a venerable institution for women.

The short trip up the valley to Washington and Lee University was turned into a significant detour by my decision to visit Monticello, which I had never had a chance to see and which I knew I couldn’t afford to miss. The principles on which it is built, and those by which its architect lived, are inscribed many times over in the materials with which all of us come into contact every day; it is not simply an architectural historian’s icon. It was indescribably gratifying to stand on that little hilltop for a few moments on a late fall day and take the measure of spaces—natural and planned, built and hoed—that had been shaped by passionately held ideas.

Two campuses I visited incorporated into their plans significant shrines, one with overtly religious overtones. Here my visits enacted the kinds of pilgrimages about which I teach. At Marquette University in Milwaukee, I spent a while with a student studying architectural details in a reconstituted gothic chapel that was dedicated to Joan of Arc, whose house at Domrémy in eastern France I had visited two years before. The structure contains a ledge that the Maid of Orleans is said to have kissed; lore has it that this stone remains colder than the ones around it. Like pilgrims of old, I made an effort to investigate its truth during my visit.

At Washington and Lee—the sixth-oldest institution of higher learning in the country—I was taken on an extensive tour in the rain along the imposing colonnade linking several

of the older academic buildings. The first U.S. president endowed the campus, and Robert E. Lee was president of the college at the time of his death. Lee is interred in the undercroft of the handsome Victorian chapel he had constructed at the center of the campus; immediately outside his tomb is the burial site of his favorite horse. Traveler’s grave was marked on the occasion of my visit by a tiny Confederate flag and the offering of a single Granny Smith apple, testimony to the presence of pilgrims before me.

Three months later and half a continent away, a locket on display in the lobby of a historic hotel in San Antonio brought Lee and his steed back to mind and heightened my sense of the patterns we construct in seemingly unplanned practices, and of the way in which objects accrue meaning and

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value over time. The general had preceded me to this place. After allegedly riding his horse into the lobby of the hotel, he is said to have picked up the owner’s daughter and presented her with the trinket that now lay before me in the vitrine. Dents and scratches attested to the claim that her children had all cut their teeth on it.

Rituals invariably focus on food. The Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, whoever he or she may be, is regarded as a special guest in all of the places I visited and treated to spectacular fare in memorable surroundings. Southern women’s colleges take particular pride in their chefs, a fact that can be appreciated whether one is tasting soup in the cafeteria with dedicated art majors or sitting in an elegant, art-filled faculty home

dining on exquisitely prepared Cajun cuisine. At one campus, the college president, just back from a trip to distant ports, shared her husband’s tips about sleep deprivation, from which we both thought we suffered, over an elegant buffet; at another college, the president’s wife took me on an after-dinner tour of their art collection and newly renovated kitchen, and gave me the recipe for one of the delicious dishes we had just eaten.

Above all, I shall long remember a more ordinary meal in a campus dining room that was rendered extraordinary by the Phi Beta Kappa students and faculty assembled around the tables. Among the latter was a colleague in my own field who had been an undergraduate in one of my classes a quarter-century before and who now enjoyed a glowing reputation of her own as a teacher; I had the pleasure of leading two of her classes during the course of my visit. At the end of the supper, a birthday cake emerged from the kitchen in the hands of the chapter secretary, and a round of tuneful wishes was sung to someone who had arrived, the evening before, a stranger, and had spoken in chapel that morning as an outsider.

Far from my own family, I was a member that night of a wonderfully warm, surrogate one. I brought away from that visit, as from all of the others, memories of varied experiences and diverse audiences along with appreciation of a shared commitment on the part of students, teachers, and even administrators to exacting standards of learning. In the end, what best characterizes for me my year spent as a Visiting Scholar to far-flung, largely collegiate communities is my realization that the work I do matters in different ways in different places to different people, along with the reminder that students everywhere flourish when they know that their work can and does matter too. ■

Linda Seidel, professor of art history at the University of Chicago, made nine trips to college campuses as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar in the 1994-95 academic year.

Robert Hellenga (*University of Michigan*, ΦBK, 1963) is author of *The Sixteen Pleasures* (Sobo, 1994; Dell, 1995), a novel set in Florence shortly after the city was devastated by floods in 1966. The protagonist is a young female book conservator from Illinois who volunteers to help rescue the art treasures. Although this is his first novel, Hellenga has published fiction in numerous periodicals. He teaches English at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois.

IT'S LATE MAY AND I'M just back from a book tour for the paperback edition of my first novel, *The Sixteen Pleasures*—six cities in seven days. It's not something I'm eager to do again, but I wouldn't have missed it: escorts waiting at the airport, first-class hotels, an expense account, people making a fuss. And the best part—the readings. I love to read aloud. I've read *The Lord of the Rings* aloud three times to my three daughters, and I especially love to read my own fiction aloud. But the readings are also the worst part, because I don't know whether anyone will show up. Before each reading I hang around the bookstore, wondering if any of the other people hanging around are—at the appointed hour—going to stop hanging around and sit down in the small space set aside for the reading.

On a Sunday afternoon in San Francisco I read to an audience of four people, one of whom is the bookstore manager. I try to get them to sit closer together, so that I can take them all in at a single glance, but they don't want to. It's okay, I tell myself; it could be worse. It has been worse, in fact. I once read to an audience of three people, one of whom was my niece. I do a good job, but I feel apologetic, like the host of an unsuccessful party.

On the Sunday evening, however, there's a terrific audience at Black Oak Books in Berkeley—about 50 people, sophisticated, receptive, wide awake. I read a passage I often read, a passage that's the right length for a bookstore reading (26 minutes) and one that always goes over well. Margot, my protagonist, tells about the tapes that her mother made for her

family just before she died. Her mother had some important things to say to each one of them and to all of them about their life together. Three years after her death, during the Christmas holidays, the family finally feels strong enough to listen to the tapes, and each family member brings a different question to the



Robert Hellenga

moment. Margot's question is about an Italian lover her mother had. Margot is the only one who knows about this lover, and she can't fit him into the picture she has of her family. Will his true importance be revealed on the tapes, or will he recede into the shadows?

As I read I can feel the audience's interest quicken as Margot, who spent a year with her mother in Italy, figures out (in retrospect) that her mother was having an affair; I can feel the tension tighten into a hard knot as her father threads the tape, sets the machine in motion, and hurries

After every reading someone asks how I managed to write from the point of view of a young woman. . . . The real question is, How can anyone write from *anyone* else's point of view? And is gender the most difficult line to cross anyway?

across the room to his chair. And I can feel the shock as the audience finally realizes, along with Margot and her two sisters and her father, that the tape recorder had malfunctioned, that the tapes are blank, and that Margot will spend the rest of her life catching herself, during little pockets of silence, involuntarily listening for the sound of her mother's voice, waiting for the tape to begin.



It's a satisfying moment, and I'd like to dwell on it briefly because I think it sheds some light on the relationship between writers and readers. What has happened here? What is the nature of this experience, this coming together?

When I imagine this scene as a reader—when I picture the family sitting around waiting for the tape to begin and then realizing that the tapes are blank—I experience a kind of hollowness, a sense of loss, of sadness at the failure of transcendence as the immediate problem of Mama's affair with an Italian is displaced by the larger problem of her silence. I'm pretty sure that this is what other readers experience too, because I've had lots of letters about this passage. What's the "good" of imagining such things? Why do we (readers) value this sort of experience?

Traditional explanations derive from a nut/kernel metaphor that reputable critics have repudiated for decades without ever actually discarding it: Texts are nuts to be cracked for their kernels of meaning (or, in contemporary terms, texts are sociological or political constructs to be decoded in order to expose their corrupt ideological assumptions).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

These explanations miss the mark, in my opinion, because they focus almost exclusively on interpretation instead of experience.

But what experience? Whose experience?

My intention in writing about the tapes was not to communicate my own personal experience (suitably reshaped); nor was it to express my emotions (recollected in tranquility); nor was it to make a point. It was simply to invite the reader to imagine interesting people doing interesting things (to borrow a phrase from Martin Russ's *Showdown Semester*). Nothing I've ever written has come so easily; the words flowed as fast as I could put them down on paper—until I got to the moment of truth, that is, the moment at which the family sits down to listen to the tapes. Then I was stumped.

I often tell my writing students that when their wise old grandfather or grandmother character finally speaks, he or she had better have something really wise to say. That's the way I felt about Margot's mother: She'd better have something good to say. But I couldn't come up with anything; it was the last round of the fight and I was down on points, but I couldn't deliver the knock-out punch. I had no idea what was on the tapes. Finally I gave up and left them blank. It's a solution I've never regretted: As a writer I had taken myself by surprise, and I hoped to take my readers by surprise too.

But that's not the only thing, and it's not even the most important thing. The most important thing for me as a writer was that I had articulated something that was important to me; I'd put it into words, given it a definite shape. I think this is the most important thing for the reader too. It's what writers have to offer—words. The experience—to use a familiar analogy—is like finding the right word for something, the word that's been sticking on the tip of your tongue; no other word will do the job. You try to get on with your life, but you need that word; and when you finally find it, something clicks into place. This is why we not only

Excerpt from *The Sixteen Pleasures*, page 50

So, by all means, check all your equipment. Yes. But that's a moral for the head, not the heart. What can I say about the heart?

I suppose the real question is, Why does it matter so intensely? What could Mama have said that would have altered the course of our lives?

I think about this question a lot—not all the time, but often enough—without coming any closer to an answer. All I know is that my life is filled with little pockets of silence. When I put a record on the turntable, for example, there's a little interval—between the time the needle touches down on the record and the time the music actually starts—during which my heart refuses to beat. All I know is that between the rings of the telephone, between the touch of a button and the sound of the radio coming on, between the dimming of the lights at the cinema and the start of the film, between the lightning and the thunder, between the shout and the echo, between the lifting of a baton and the opening bars of a symphony, between the dropping of a stone and the plunk that comes back from the bottom of a well, between the ringing of the doorbell and the barking of the dogs, I sometimes catch myself, involuntarily, listening for the sound of my mother's voice, still waiting for the tape to begin.

read texts, we reread them—not because we have forgotten what they mean, but because we want to reexperience them, because we want to reexperience that clicking into place, that coming into focus.



After the reading in Berkeley (and after every reading), someone asks how I managed to write from the point of view of a young woman, a question that suggests a quite different metaphor for literary experi-

I often tell my writing students that when their wise old grandfather or grandmother character finally speaks, he or she had better have something really wise to say.

ence—not a mirror that reflects our own deepest selves but a window through which we can look out and see the world through other eyes.

"I never gave it a thought," I say. "I wasn't trying to prove anything. It's just that I have a wife and three daughters; we're a close family. We spent a year in Italy together, and since that time my daughters have all gone off by themselves to far-away places (usually Italy). I'm very interested in their well-being, and my

imagination is prompted by wish-fulfillment and fear-fulfillment fantasies about them. And besides, the real question is, How can anyone write from *anyone* else's point of view? And is gender the most difficult line to cross anyway? What about race? class? age? . . ."

That's my original answer, and it's served me well. Recent experience, however, has forced me to modify it and take a more radical position: "Not only do I find it easy to write from the point of view of a young woman," I say now, "I find it easier than writing from my own point of view" (i.e., from the point of view of a 53-year-old male).

I made this discovery while working on a new novel, a story about the bombing of the train station in Bologna in 1980, or rather, a story about a man whose oldest daughter was killed, along with 85 other people, in the Bologna bombing. I went to Bologna earlier this year and spent three months doing many of the things that my 53-year-old protagonist would have done: I went to the morgue at the Istituto di medicina legale, to the intensive-care unit at the Ospedale Maggiore, to the courtroom where the terrorists suspected of the bombing were originally tried in 1987, and so on. Everything went well.

The teachers at the language school where I worked on improving

my Italian were friendly and helpful; the Association of the Relatives of the Victims of the Bombing provided me with all the information I needed, including transcripts of the trial. I went to the Methodist church (Italian), fantasizing that natives would invite me into their homes, and they did. I played my guitar—my protagonist is a blues player—at an *osteria* and met more people. But it wasn't enough.

As a person I felt I had become an active participant in the life of the community, but as a writer I felt confined. My own voice wasn't enough. I kept hearing the voice of a young woman, a voice that had lots to say. All I had to do was listen to it to generate material. Why? Not *simply* because I have three daughters, though that's important; but because it's such an exciting time to be a young woman—so many things are happening. The old patterns are no longer suitable; there's room to move, to explore, to imagine new patterns. So I've had to make room for a second narrator, another daughter, to get a second take on the bombing and on the story of the family.

Some theorists, of course, would argue that the experience of seeing through other eyes is illusory, that neither writers nor readers can ever cross any of the lines I've mentioned, that the texts that writers write are projections of unconscious fantasies or of internalized sociological and ideological constructs; that the texts that readers read are, similarly, essentially raw materials that readers reshape according to their fantasies or internalized constructs. Maybe so. Solipsism is impossible to refute. But that's not what the experience feels like. What we feel, as readers, is what Helen Keller felt, that words enable us to see with "a strange new sight," and this is what we value, as writers and readers, even if it is only an illusion.



The Sixteen Pleasures was rejected 39 times, generally on the grounds that it was too literary and wouldn't sell. Luckily I'd followed Freud's advice and hadn't put all my emotional eggs in one basket; my sense of well-being did not depend entirely on publication. Still, I'd worked hard for several years and was very discouraged after almost three years of rejections, so I con-

Letters to the Editor

'Goodbye, Gutenberg'

As a scientist engaged in the computerized distribution of information as well as its computerized preparation since 1970, I would make the following comments on the "Life Outside Academe" article by Donald S. Lamm (*Key Reporter*, Summer 1995). Mr. Lamm's most prophetic statement about the information highway may be when he laments "a society that listens to voices in Washington and elsewhere hell-bent on persuading us that information, uncontaminated by knowledge, will set us free." From personal experience I know that the characteristic of information that is the most important, as well as the most expensive and difficult to achieve, is quality. I see no structured effort to ensure that quality will be a characteristic of the content of the information highway, and I see many forces that will serve to diminish its quality. Most of the quality that now exists is, ironically, derived from books.

The Gresham's Law of the Internet may well be, Bad information drives out

sider myself fortunate to have found an agent who never quit, and a publishing house where everyone cared about the book and worked hard to make it a success.

These thoughts run through my mind, even as I'm reading aloud. As I stand at the lectern at Black Oak Books in Berkeley and look at my audience, I see a few familiar faces: two daughters of an old friend; a cousin I haven't seen in 18 years; a couple of former students from Knox College, where I teach English; mostly strangers, though.

But not strangers by the end, for we have entered into an intimate relationship. For a few moments they have allowed me to enter into their imaginations, to shape their fantasy lives till together we feel something click into focus, like a slide clicking into focus on a screen. They have accepted my invitation to see the world for a few moments through the eyes of a young woman who is very real to me, even though she is wholly imaginary; they have paid close attention, and I am profoundly grateful. That's what a writer—at least this writer—wants.

Robert Hellenga, Galesburg, Ill.

good information. Virtual reality may become an entertaining, but fictional, image on the back wall of Plato's cave. Will the sheer volume of misinformation negate the good information? Will Entertainment become the Dark Age of the Intellect on the Internet? Bacon said, "There is no royal road to knowledge." Neither does the information highway have that unique destination.

Surely the new information technology has much promise, but I join Mr. Lamm in his concern for its and our future.

Alfred A. Brooks, Oak Ridge, Tenn.

I enjoyed Donald Lamm's colorful analysis of the book business, but your readers should know that he's mistaken about "barriers to entry." Founding a publishing house is easier and cheaper today than it ever was before. Compared not only with the 1920s (which Lamm cites as the good old days in this connection) but with any other previous period, this is the era of easy access. Last year alone, nearly 7,000 new publishers started up, partly because the new technology that some find so threatening has sharply reduced capital requirements.

According to the best available statistics (which come from *Books in Print* and ISBN records), about 47,000 book publishers are now doing business in the United States, and the count is rising. . . .

Judith Appelbaum, New York, N.Y.

[Appelbaum is author of *How to Get Happily Published* (HarperCollins)].

ΦBK's Identity, Purpose, Fees

I am writing in regard to the feature in the Spring 1995 *Key Reporter* focusing on the confusion over the identity of Phi Beta Kappa among students and the general public. Although I knew of Phi Beta Kappa, and was honored to become a member when I was elected in 1987, I also was confused over the purpose of the Society.

At St. Olaf College, most students are elected and inducted less than a month before graduation, resulting in two unfortunate consequences, which perhaps occur at other schools and add to the confusion of which the article spoke: First, there was no real student membership in the organization most of the time, except for a few exceptional students who were inducted at the beginning of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

their senior year. Second, there is not sufficient time for the students who are inducted right before graduation to become involved in the organization and to develop an appreciation for its worth.

Is this a common practice among Phi Beta Kappa chapters? If it is, the lack of enthusiasm for membership is not surprising. When we are continually confronted with requests for our time and our money, it makes sense that students might not choose an organization that seems not to have a clear purpose or visible activities.

It sounds as if the national organization is trying to improve its visibility with more public relations materials; perhaps we should also encourage earlier election and more active campus chapters, and the reputation and status of the organization might rise.

Laurel Botes Zaepffel, St. Paul, Minn.

I write regarding letters to the editor published in the Summer 1995 *Key Reporter*. While I was not nearly as alarmed as others by the reprint of the article about University of Arizona electees' failing to respond to their invitations to join the organization, I am concerned about the tone one of the responses took, the letter from Robert B. Heilman.

When I was notified of my invitation to join Phi Beta Kappa (by my parents to whose address the materials were mailed) roughly a month prior to my graduation from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in June 1994, I too was among those unaware of Phi Beta Kappa—or, as Mr. Heilman puts it, unable “to distinguish Phi Beta Kappa from a host of other Greek letter organizations.” Luckily for me, my parents informed me of Phi Beta Kappa's reputation, and I was honored to be considered for its ranks. However, I was never notified of the selection process or criteria for election.

The vision of Phi Beta Kappa Mr. Heilman puts forth makes me reconsider my decision. I joined because it was an honor to be considered worthy, and because it was something in which my family and I could take pride. What I found after joining was an organization of pompous individuals who seem to think that their membership places them in a position superior to all other members of our society. This makes me uneasy. I find myself fearing that despite my various

academic accomplishments and my recent acceptance of a teaching position in a prestigious public school district, I too would be considered by Mr. Heilman to be “not Phi Beta Kappa material” simply because I do not speak with the vocabulary of a stuffy university professor and do not enjoy reading the books that frequent the “Recommended Reading” list. (Is fiction really so “low class” as to appear that rarely?)

If we are to be a group of egotistical elitists, more concerned about branding others as “non-Phi Beta Kappa material” than doing anything useful to promote education and scholarship among our youth, then I do sincerely regret my association with the organization.

Edith J. Kelly, San Francisco, Calif.

In “Letters” Robert Heilman states that Phi Beta Kappa's “raison d'être is to honor people who exhibited certain discipline of mind. That is enough.” That is not enough! Phi Beta Kappa must press hard on all college campuses to promote liberal education. In the face of increasing materialism, in a time when funds to the arts and to the broadcasting of intellectual programming are being curtailed, we cannot sit back and restrict our interests to electing new members (and collecting their dues).

Every campus chapter should have an academic agenda that includes expanding the arts and sciences in the programs of all students. Chapters that fail to do this are not taking seriously their commitments to a liberal, and liberating, education for American youth. Let's put more on our meeting programs than the annual election of officers and the welcoming of new members. Let's press our university faculty councils to increase requirements in the arts and sciences. Let's press for greater funding for capable teaching in these areas. Let's develop speakers bureaus to reach out to student groups to promote their interests in the liberating curriculum.

If electing new members is our goal, we can abandon the whole thing and let the college computer do it for us.

Clint Chase, Bloomington, Ind.

How sad it is that election to Phi Beta Kappa has become so trivial to self-centered “young geniuses” that they want their initiation fee to be paid for them! Perhaps it is just as well that they are having a bad time finding jobs. Are they being subsidized in this search, too? What color carpet do they want to be rolled out for them?

Former ΦBK Senator Wall Dies

Joseph F. Wall, professor emeritus of history at Grinnell College, died on October 9. He served as a Phi Beta Kappa senator from 1988 to 1994.

In 1942 when I was elected to Phi Beta Kappa I was in my first year in medical school. If I wanted to attend the dinner—and I certainly did—I had to hitchhike from Omaha to Lincoln. I did not have money for bus fare. I caught a ride at the western outskirts of Omaha. Imagine my despair when the driver told me that he would not be continuing on to Lincoln. I was dropped off with about 30 miles to go about an hour before the dinner. Car after car passed me by as my spirits fell. Finally one car stopped. I arrived in Lincoln with several blocks to run, arriving a little late, but in time for the awards. . . .

Whatever costs nothing is usually worth about that.

Warren Bosley, Grand Island, Neb.

'Origin of Species'

A mistake crept into the lead article of the Summer '95 issue, and it's a common one: Darwin's book is not “Origin of the Species” but rather “*The Origin of Species*.”

I applaud the idea of having the topic of “Darwin: The Man and His Era” for public school teachers. . . .

Cynthia Power, Roanoke, Ind.

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RECOMMENDED READING

BOOK COMMITTEE

Humanities: Svetlana Alpers, Frederick J. Crosson, Simon McVeigh, Robert P. Sonkowsky, Jean Sudrann, Laurence Willson

Social Sciences: Earl W. Count, Louis R. Harlan,

Thomas McNaugher, Catherine E. Rudder, Anna J. Schwartz

Natural Sciences: Ronald Geballe, Russell B. Stevens

Thomas McNaugher

The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf. Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor. Little, Brown, 1995. \$27.95.

The only problem with this book is its title, which implies that "the generals"—notably, Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf—dominated planning for the Gulf War. In fact, Gordon and Trainor document the typically American approach to war, with President Bush and his civilian advisers wrestling with each other as well as with the generals to define the war's objectives, sketch its operational pattern, and set its controversial end-date. The title makes more sense with regard to the book's central and undoubtedly controversial thesis that Powell and Schwarzkopf, made wary of air power from formative experiences in Vietnam, delayed launching Desert Storm's ground campaign until well after Iraq's forces had succumbed to aerial bombardment and begun a quiet retreat. The key event for the Iraqis, Gordon and Trainor argue, was the one American generals virtually ignored—the mid-February battle of Khafji, in which Iraqi generals saw their hopes of drawing Americans into bloody battle crumble under attacks by coalition air power. Even close students of the Gulf War will find loads of new information in this well-researched and very readable volume, which stands as the most comprehensive study of the Gulf crisis yet to appear.

On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace. Donald Kagan, Doubleday, 1995. \$30.

This book poses a compelling challenge to "end of history" optimists and American liberals who see war as an aberration, peace as normal. Drawing on elaborately detailed case histories of wars ancient (Peloponnesian, Second Punic) and modern (World Wars I and II), as well as of the Cuban missile crisis, Kagan documents the realist argument that war

is as natural as peace in human affairs, that it springs from ever-changing power relationships among independent actors on the international stage, and that it has been driven as much by pursuit of honor and prestige as by considerations of material gain or loss. The current absence of war among the great powers arises not from the triumph of capitalist democracies, Kagan argues, but from the welcome—yet temporary—condition in which one great power "has overwhelming military superiority and no wish to expand" (p. 568). Peace cannot be expected to keep itself, he concludes, but rather must be kept: "What seems to work best, even though imperfectly, is the possession by those states who wish to preserve the peace of the preponderant power and of the will to accept the burdens and responsibilities required to achieve that purpose" (p. 570). Although not a new argument—Kagan approvingly quotes Thucydides' initial formulation of it throughout—it surely bears repeating as Americans debate their post-cold war foreign and security policies. Rarely has the argument been documented so carefully and stated so eloquently.

Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics. John Mueller. HarperCollins, 1995. \$13.

In sharp contrast to Kagan's political realism, Mueller here poses his own special blend of idealism and liberalism. It was not the collapse of Soviet military power that ended the cold war, he notes for starters, but rather the collapse of communism as a motivating idea. The dominance of ideas over raw power is good news, in Mueller's view, because ideas can change more rapidly and dramatically than the power structure. Nor is communism the only bad idea now on the run; in Mueller's view, the idea of war also is slowly losing its appeal, at least among the industrialized countries.

Meanwhile, the idea of democracy is on the rise and likely to continue gaining ground, because it is "really a simple idea, that . . . can come into existence quite

naturally. . . ." (p. 156). Among the developed countries, at least, "economics, not military structures, substantially determines status and influence relations among the major countries" (p. 4). Yet Mueller doesn't accept the popular notion (now enshrined in U.S. foreign policy) that democracies won't go to war with each other. The rise of democracy and the decline of war are simply parallel trends; whether they continue to spread in parallel is anyone's guess. Mueller's book may not be the last word in the ongoing debate about the nature of world politics, but it is novel, provocative, and ultimately uplifting.

Svetlana Alpers

The Poetics of Perspective. James Elkins. Cornell, 1994. \$39.95.

I have rarely read a book as illuminating as this. Perspective is a geometric procedure used in picture making. And the Renaissance painters who employed it, or at least so we have come to believe, imagined the picture as a window through which they saw the world. The system granted commanding authority to the artist, and unity to the world so seen. Extended metaphorically, this confidence in perspective has been used in our time to explain (and, by opposition, to subvert) everything from the notion of subjectivity to the age of exploration and more.

With great tact and inventiveness, Elkins offers two basic correctives to what has been taken as the foundational procedure underlying Italian Renaissance painting and, by extension, Renaissance culture: (1) Perspective was referred to not in the singular but in the plural—not a perspective but perspectives; and (2) it was not about drawing a unified pictorial space, but about drawing objects—not a way of unifying a picture, but an often playful fashioning of the objects in a picture. Many things emerge: Individual paintings appear more various to the eye; complex diagrams demonstrating perspective methods take on a pictorial interest of their own; mathematical reasoning can be appreciated as much for equivalence and harmony as for the compatibility (or elegance) that we assume.

Intellectually as well as pictorially, the Renaissance, on this account, was quite at ease with what seems to us to be disorder. The book is as much about us as it is about them. We are left wondering why the myth of Renaissance rationality and ordering has been so necessary for people in our time. What will the results be if we now let it go?

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

RECOMMENDED READING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Manhole Covers. *Mimi Melnick; photographs by Robert A. Melnick. MIT, 1994. \$39.95.*

For something completely different, this is a book about those cast-iron disks that cover the entrances to the wet, nether world of our cities. The Melnicks' fascination began with the notion of putting a decorative bit of industrial art on the wall over the sofa. The investigation of the 200- to 300-pound lids with their intricate and amazingly diverse surface patterns took off, despite the obvious impracticality of hanging one up. After giving a brief history of their production and use, the elegantly produced book opens into a sequence of more than 200 black-and-white photographs of the covers themselves.

What gives them such visual interest: Is it the format of these photos? Or our nostalgia for a time when objects of such ordinary and heavy use (set in their rims, the 24-inch lids have to sustain wheel loads of up to 16,000 pounds) were a matter of individual and considered design? Or is the joke, a postmodern one perhaps, on us for taking it all so seriously? This is an unexpected piece of American urban history, modestly told and beautifully presented.

Frederick Crosson

Julian of Norwich's *Showings*. *Denise N. Baker. Princeton, 1994. \$29.95.*

The first woman (so far as is known) to write in English, the 14th-century anchoress left an account of her visions and an explication of them. Baker has studied the *Showings*, thoughtfully and learnedly; she is alert to subtleties in the text and informed about the literature of medieval theology and spirituality. Thomas Merton wrote that Julian was the greatest of the English mystics as well as a great theologian, but he did not provide the textual case to support that judgment. Baker makes a cogent argument for her own high estimate of Julian.

The Adventure of Difference. *Gianni Vattimo. Johns Hopkins, 1993. \$29.95.*

A collection of essays by Italy's leading postmodern philosopher, unified by their connections with the theme of difference and by the thinking in the aftermath of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Vattimo is quite critical of Derrida's development of the notion of difference and of some of the French interpretations of Nietzsche, cautious in explicating Heidegger, and

silent here on anything other than the contemporary scene. The writing is clear, but some previous knowledge about its subjects is probably required for optimal advantage.

Hypatia of Alexandria. *Maria Dzielska. Harvard, 1995. \$29.95.*

Augustine: Ancient though Baptized. *John Rist. Cambridge Univ., 1994. \$59.95.*

Philosophy in Christian Antiquity. *Christopher Stead. Cambridge Univ., 1994. \$59.95; paper, \$17.95.*

Three first-rate studies of thinkers and ideas in the centuries of the confluence of Rome and Christianity. Hypatia, the most famous woman thinker of antiquity, was a teacher of philosophy and mathematics who lived at the same time as Augustine. Dzielska discusses the legends and the uses that have been made of her life and death by Voltaire and later writers, examines the extant sources of information, and weaves together a persuasive portrait of her career and work.

Augustine, perhaps the most influential Western writer for a millennium after his death, remains very much a member of our contemporary conversation on a wide set of philosophical and theological questions. In this admirably clear and impressively researched book, Rist aims to provide an accurate account of the whole range of Augustine's thought, and one reflecting the state of current scholarship.

Stead's intention is more general: to examine the way in which Christian religiousness encountered, appropriated, and developed classical philosophical ideas and came to conceive of itself as a new philosophy, a new wisdom. This readable and informative book is addressed to the interested general reader, so it begins by retrieving the teachings of the Greek and Roman thinkers from Socrates on, and then discusses how these doctrines both formed and were transformed by the later writers. It ends with a section devoted to—guess who—Augustine, which is marked as much by critical evaluation as by exposition.

An Intellectual History of Liberalism. *Pierre Manent. Princeton, 1994. \$19.95.*

This volume by a French professor and intellectual covers familiar ground—the history of European liberal political thought—but it does so with a definite and stimulating point of view. Hence it has a unity of interpretive perspective that can disclose continuities either unnoticed or insufficiently appreciated hitherto. The language of the narrative is incisive and unqualified, the tone positive

and assertive, but it ends up inducing thinking—or rethinking. Apart from the usual figures (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc.), the history runs from Machiavelli to the French trio of Constant, Guizot, and Tocqueville. Stimulating.

Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banares. *Diana Eck. Beacon, 1993. \$24.*

Author of (among other books) a well-known study of temple worship in India, Eck here reflects on her spiritual journey. Professor of comparative religion at Harvard, she says she writes as a Christian but wants to address questions about how one is to understand the relationships among the different religious traditions. The format is generally to describe a conference attended or an encounter experienced and to reflect on the questions that they raised in her mind. She ends by espousing a "relativist" position that she characterizes as "pluralist." Whether the reader shares that view or not, this is an honest and thoughtful book.

The Hungry Soul. *Leon R. Kass. Free Press, 1994. \$24.95.*

Imagine attending a dinner where, as the courses follow one another, the host reflects with learning, delightful intelligence, and deft insight on the infrastructures of eating: on metabolism and life, on animality and diet, on the edible and the inedible (both natural and conventional), and on the rituals—cultural, social, religious—of repast. For a philosopher at least, and I think for any reflective person, this book is a pleasure to read and to ponder. You will never again sit down to a meal, whether fast food or banquet, without the capacity and stimulus to think about what you are doing. Recommended.

A Philosophical Testament. *Marjorie Grene. Open Court, 1995. \$18.95.*

Grene's first book (on Heidegger and existentialism) appeared a half-century ago; 10 more have appeared between that and this one. (My favorite is *The Knower and the Known*.) This is a rereading of topics and texts she has written about earlier, but also a statement of how she sees being and knowing and coping at present. Iconoclastic, outspoken (my eyes widened a number of times at what she said about persons and fashions in philosophy), pedagogical in the best sense—Grene knows how to lead the reader into the universe of discourse of a disputed subject—the text testifies to an irrepressible mind and spirit. *Ad multos annos.*

Ronald Geballe

Wrinkles in Time. *George Smoot and Keay Davidson. William Morrow, 1993. \$25.*

The big-bang theory faced a serious challenge: to explain the observed inhomogeneity in the way matter is distributed through the universe. Stars are clumped together in galaxies; galaxies are clustered and the clusters form structures. No one knows how the "dark matter" that supposedly constitutes more than 90 percent of the matter of the universe is distributed. In 1964 evidence of the residue of a big bang—radiation that appeared to be nondirectional, smooth—was discovered. But to form structures out of the big bang, there must have been some small fluctuations in density and temperature; Smoot calls them "wrinkles." This book relates his successful 15-year search for the wrinkles, and in so doing gives a vivid picture of the struggle against equipment, politics, and geography. It is a highly personal account that pays attention to the contributions of his colleagues and rivals.

Poetry of the Universe. *Robert Osserman. Anchor, 1995. \$18.95.*

The poetry here is mathematics, the imaginative mathematical developments that over the past 2,500 years, from the triangles of Pythagorus to the fractals of Mandelbrot, have helped us to uncover what we know of the universe. Sometimes, mathematics led physics and cosmology; sometimes mathematics was driven by the other two; the interplay has been important. For all its discussion of mathematics, this small volume eschews equations; words and graphs suffice to enable Osserman to present a lucid description of how "mathematical imagination and imagery, closely linked, provide the vision that allows us to see the hidden but exquisite structure below the surface."

The Beat of a Different Drum: The Life and Times of Richard P. Feynman. *Jagdish Mehra. Clarendon/Oxford, 1994. \$35.*

Feynman is turning out to be one of those monumental figures of science about whom much has been written and doubtless more will be. He had a wide-ranging interest in physics that extended into areas beyond it. He was a "character" about whom stories abound. In this volume, Mehra, a physicist who knew him well over three decades and who has treated others of this category, has produced an authoritative, comprehensive biography that brings out the human side

of Feynman's life and discusses in detail all of his varied and influential scientific accomplishments. There is much in this well-written account for the general reader as well as for the scientist.

The Values of Precision. *Ed. by M. Norton Wise. Princeton, 1995. \$49.50.*

This volume is a compilation of 13 essays on how quantitative precision was brought into Western culture and how it assumed importance in political and social life as well as in science. In the 17th century, Tycho Brahe's observations, Johannes Kepler's analyses of planetary orbits, and Galileo's experimental studies of motion brought out the need for careful instrumentation and observation. At about this time, quantification suited the needs of administrators who wanted to establish populations as a basis for taxation and needed other statistical information as well.

Quantification did not proceed without controversy, however. Many people did not want to be counted. Some scientists were reluctant to accept agreement between values obtained in different ways (e.g., the speed of light and the speed of electric disturbances) as verification of theory (e.g., Maxwell's electromagnetism). Mathematicians played an important role, of course, but seem not to have been drivers toward quantification. For readers interested in how our reliance on numbers grew, this book will provide much understanding.

Naked Earth. *Shauna Vogel. Dutton, 1995. \$21.95.*

Despite its title, this book deals mostly with the earth's interior. It is a lively account of the unfolding of understanding that the interior is a busy region. Motions at the earth's surface give clues, but modern technology has given geophysicists and geochemists means for probing the complex insides and finding turmoil that has caused continents to form and split more than once, oceans to rise and fall, and magnetic poles to wander and retrace their paths. Vogel writes in a clear, journalistic style that describes today's understanding with its ongoing controversies over interpretation.

The Next Great Thing: The Sun, the Stirling Engine, and the Drive to Change the World. *Mark Shelton. W. W. Norton, 1994. \$25.*

In 1816, Robert Stirling, a clergyman, took out a patent on a heat-driven engine of a remarkably simple design. A gas-filled cylinder-piston arrangement, it required only low pressures, and, because heat was obtained from an external source, it

could make use of any kind of heat source. In contrast to present-day internal combustion engines, it did not expel burned or exploded fuel. The Stirling engine's disadvantages were its large size compared with the power produced and its low efficiency. For these reasons it never caught on. But in today's world it offers promise for relieving our dependence on a diminishing supply of fossil fuel and our worry about the effects of emissions from conventional engines.

It takes dedication, ingenuity, and capital to develop an improved, economically satisfactory version, and salesmanship to penetrate a well-entrenched industry. Sunpower, Inc.—a small group of scientists and engineers—has produced a couple of operating sun-powered models. This book is an account of their 20-year pioneering hope to change a major basis of our economy.

A Scientist in the City. *James Trefil. Doubleday, 1994. \$29.95.*

Enjoying the view from the observation deck of the Sears Tower in Chicago, Trefil began to ask himself about the problems that had to be solved to make that viewpoint possible. He found himself seeing a city as an ecosystem. Much depended, he knew, on the social interactions that make a city, but much also depended on scientific and technological understanding. Cities have grown along with our understanding of materials and of the atoms of which they are made, of ways to store and transmit energy over longer distances, of ways to store and transmit information and to transport people and goods. Trefil reasons that we have reached a stage that presents no technological constraints on the kinds of cities we build. He conjures up five different futures for cities but warns that what actually will happen to them depends partly on our will and strongly on forces of nature, which we do not control.

Lawrence Willson

Thirty-five Years of Newspaper Work: A Memoir by H. L. Mencken. *Ed. by Fred Hobson, Vincent Fitzpatrick, and Bradford Jones. Johns Hopkins, 1994. \$34.95.*

For some obscure reason, Mencken bequeathed the hefty mass of manuscript here to the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore with the stipulation that it be sealed for a quarter-century after his death, even though he had already mined it for such major works as *Happy Days* (1940) and *Newspaper Days* (1941)—vintage Mencken, as this is not. Yet it is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

RECOMMENDED READING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

always exhilarating to harken to the iconoclastic, bullying invective of the master-journalist ("incomparably the most brilliant man engaged in journalism in America," his editor wrote in 1929) as he describes the excitement, the hubbub, the shouting of the philistines at the political conventions of 1920; the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, a few years later; and the dying days of national Prohibition. Sometimes he was wrong—wrong on an incredibly grand scale, as in his support of Germany in both world wars—but for all his occasional foolishness and buffoonery, his was often the main voice of sanity in the land.

He was a shaper of the liberal mind of his time, and if the antiliberals of the present day scorn him, he is well pleased, for he had "no desire to be admired by morons." The nation would be the poorer without such phrases as "the Pellagra Belt" (descriptive of the South) and "the preposterous Coolidge" (for the vice presidential candidate of the Republicans in 1920), and his characterization of democracy as "the art and science of running the circus from the monkey cage."

Remember Laughter: A Life of James Thurber. Neil A. Grauer. Univ. of Nebraska, 1994. \$20.

James Thurber liked to think of himself as having inherited the mantle of Mark Twain, but he didn't. Will Rogers did, both he and Twain operating on homespun native wit, whereas a more impressive honor belongs to Thurber, who "in large measure . . . created the tone of sophisticated, understated wit that established *The New Yorker's* reputation" and prevailed as the national humor until the emergence of the Far Side with its complete surrender to the absurd, which Thurber only skirted with his famous cartoon of the seal in the bedroom and the reclining woman saying into a telephone, "Well, if I called the wrong number, why did you answer the phone?"

The titles of Thurber's books enumerate the continuing hang-ups of contemporary American life: *Is Sex Necessary?* (written with E. B. White), for example, and *Let Your Mind Alone*. He published 25 volumes of stories, essays, fables ("for our time"), and cartoons, 20 of which are still in print, nearly 35 years after his death. He invented the denizens of contemporary suburbia, both male and female, not to mention their dogs—the archetypal male being Walter Mitty,

created in the typical contemporary style: "the stream of nervousness."

Thurber was the "woebegone chronicler of his own inadequacies" whom Peter De Vries called "the comic Prufrock." It is sad to relate that long before his career ended, his eyesight failed, and so did his sense of proportion, as is typical of aging humorists. He became vain and pompous, "blind and angry and alcoholic and old," a man for whom life was "vicious and horrible" and death "that long sweet darkness." He thought he deserved the Nobel prize, and if one ponders the achievement of some who got it, maybe he was right.

People Have More Fun than Anybody: A Centennial Celebration of Drawings and Writing by James Thurber. Ed. by Michael J. Rosen. Harcourt Brace, 1994. \$22.95.

Rosen, literary director of the Thurber House in Columbus, has gathered here 18 prose pieces and 75 drawings hitherto uncollected. The prose is not all top-drawer Thurber, but his comment on how he fits into the age of technology, "I Break Everything I Touch," is worth preserving, and so is "No Sex after the First of the Year." As for the drawings, there is nowhere, collected or uncollected, one that is not top-drawer. E. B. White thought Thurber's drawings greater works of genius than his writings. I think his greatest genius resides in his drawings of dogs, civilized, urban dogs, sad-eyed hounds that (to return to Grauer) do not want "to hunt anybody or anything," that are "more civilized than . . . humans, . . . more dependable, sensible, and sane, . . . sound creatures in a crazy world."

The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child. Carolyn L. Karcher. Duke, 1995. \$37.95.

The more or less professional feminists keep justifying their zeal by rediscovering such once-eminent women as Lydia Child, whose contemporaries would be astonished to know that her name in the century and a quarter since her death has all but vanished from the lexicon of active reformers. The author of 47 books and tracts, she was once celebrated, and rightly so, as the peer of such women as Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Such books of hers as *The Frugal Housewife* and *The Mother's Book* demonstrate her efforts to assist the untutored women of the community in their daily rounds; and that she did not neglect the education of their children is shown by her *Juvenile Miscellany*. She even assem-

bled a volume of readings for senior citizens, *Looking toward Sunset*. As Thomas Wentworth Higginson said, she "seemed to supply a sufficient literature for any family through her own unaided pen."

She was a vigorous and vocal abolitionist, impatient with President Lincoln for his careful treatment of the South during the Civil War: "I rather think 'old Abe' MEANS to be honest, but he is a narrow man with faculties better adapted to splitting rails, than for the embodying of great principles in wise energetic measures." Her *History of the Condition of Women* shows her concern for women's rights. Her *Progress of Religious Ideas* was hailed by Theodore Parker as "THE book of the age; and written by a WOMAN!" And so on. No wonder William Lloyd Garrison called her "the first woman in the republic." Karcher has provided the current women's movement a distinguished service in rescuing from oblivion a true leader in their cause.

Novels 1942–1954. Go Down, Moses/ Intruder in the Dust/ Requiem for a Nun/ A Fable. William Faulkner. Ed. and with notes by Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. Library of America, 1994. \$35.

The first of the novels listed above is Grade A Faulkner, the second a solid B, but the last two illustrate what happens when a master tries to rekindle a spark that flickers and fades. Near the end of his career and eager to make the assurance of his enduring fame doubly sure, Faulkner turned to the themes required for greatness—forgiveness and redemption—and, as is always a mistake, a retelling of the Gospel story. It is also a mistake to imitate one's early style, for it is likely to turn to bombast.

Jean Sudrann

Balzac: A Life. Graham Robb. W. W. Norton, 1994. \$30.

Robb's biography offers the substance of Balzac's fiction and an interpretation of the man as well as his era, defining Balzac by his ambitions and appetites as well as by the great self-discipline that fueled his productivity. While tracing Balzac from his schoolday trials through his later observations of the nightly spectacle of the Palais Royale's mingling of prostitutes, respectable citizens, and shady entrepreneurs, Robb keeps the reader continuously aware of the energies that finally boil over into Balzac's literary career. Balzac's legal training has instructed him in the manipulative power of the word; the arrival of Gothic and

Romantic novels from England frees him to explore what he most longs to explore: modern times reflected in the mirror of the past. Because Robb knows all the vulgarities of the man who gobbles peas off the edge of a knife and whose appetite for women is as insatiable as it is eclectic, he knows that Balzac's experiments in fiction contribute only a single strand to the accumulated materials he is weaving into the life story.

Yet, in the long run, the fictions emerge as Balzac's final reality. This is a world where he can, if he wishes, keep his deserving characters safe from the Palais Royale underworld. Thinking in terms of a single *oeuvre*, Balzac realizes he can control his characters by having them move from book to book, growing old, or rich, or exploited, as points of view shift, family quarrels blossom, and Balzac directs all their destinies. By so fusing the man and the works, Robb has revealed the extraordinary quality of the life and enriched the reader's experience of the art.

Excursions in the Real World: Memoirs. *William Trevor. Knopf, 1994. \$23.*

Trevor's subtitle may suggest the shape of autobiography; his title suggests otherwise. Consider the implications of "Excursions" and you recognize the precision of Trevor's language and the extent to which these "memoirs" testify to the writer's delight (for what else is an excursion?) in all aspects of the real. The delights are varied, but there is always a

recognition of the intricate doublings of pleasure and pain that define the "real world."

Balancing his delight with equally certain knowledge of the harm that people—unthinkingly or willfully—do to others, Trevor continually explores the courage of human endeavor. As a child, he witnessed the enduring love of his parents for their children despite the secret wounds of their shattered marriage; as a writer "sixty years on from childhood," he can applaud the elderly as they enjoy the wintry sunshine of the Sussex shore.

The real world also offers Trevor the mysteries of desire, memory, and dream, again mingling delight and terror. He learns how the shy headmaster's wife of his early school made a vivid life for herself at the race track; he memorializes the El Dorado dreams of the starving Irish headed for the San Francisco Gold Rush; he recognizes the loneliness of the Austrian dentist in Shiraz who writes and mails letters to read to himself. The pleasure and pain, present in Trevor's memoirs, consistently inform the best of his fictions with compassion, respect, and love for even the oddest of his characters.

Robert P. Sonkowsky

In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self. *Ruth Padel. Princeton, 1992. \$12.95.*

This extraordinary book deserves to be read by all hellenists, both professional and amateur. Although she never uses the terms, the author seems primarily concerned to remedy two of historical scholarship's most besetting errors: (1) the kind of "genetic fallacy" that assumes earlier means less complex and (2) the failure to understand that certain "dead metaphors" of our own thought processes today were once very, very much alive. Relying primarily on ancient medical and tragic writing, she illuminates the relations between the hidden and the visible mental and emotional reaches of Greek tragic humanity and divinity. This book is written with consummate skill.

The World of Roman Costume. *Ed. by Judith Lynn Sebesta and Larissa Bonfante. Univ. of Wisconsin, 1994. \$47.50.*

This is virtually a high-quality textbook, with chapters by various scholars, on aspects of Roman dress from Etruscan influences down through medieval examples. Having benefited from discussions held in a National Endowment for the Humanities seminar at Rome in the summer of 1988, the contributors succeed in astute division of the topics, a certain commonality of focus and terminology, and a spirit of intellectual curiosity going way beyond mere antiquarianism. They illuminate the social, religious, and political significance of the evidence from literary and artistic sources as well as from actual remains of clothing, jewelry, and the like. About 200 black-and-white plates, a final chapter on reconstructing the garments with modern fabrics, a glossary, a bibliography, and an index complete a splendid example of scholarly collaboration.

Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form. *Peter Dronke. Harvard, 1994. \$32.50.*

Although Dronke is by appointment a medievalist, his various comparative studies of Western medieval literature never fail to shed light upon Classical antecedents as well. As the title of this book implies, he here focuses on what has traditionally been called "Menippean satire." He interprets certain key passages from a long chronological range of authors, including a fragment of Menippus himself (3rd century B.C.) and one of Varro (116–27 B.C.) as well as selections from Petronius and others. Dronke is at his most brilliant with Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and works of the subsequent medieval authors, showing their dialectical procedures, mixing prose and verse. From author to author a rich tradition unfolds, and the reader is prepared in the most delightful way to go back to the texts for more discoveries.

the American Scholar

In keeping with its tradition of presenting fine reading on a variety of subjects, *The American Scholar* offers a cornucopia for the winter months. Among articles scheduled to appear in the Winter 1996 issue are Jasper Griffin's glimpse of Alexandria, "the library of our dreams," destroyed in the third century A.D.; a memoir by distinguished historian Oscar Handlin, on his years at Harvard; Linda S. Gottfredson's look at what's known about IQ test results and what can be said of them in light of the bell curve controversy; and a biographer's view of Robert Frost's love affair after the death of his wife. Rounding out the issue will be Jeremy Bernstein's memoir of E. J. Kahn and an article on pronunciation by Joseph Epstein, well-known essayist and editor of the *Scholar*.

We think you will enjoy reading this issue and many more to come. If you agree, send your subscription order now and receive the Winter 1996 issue in early December. Just complete and return the coupon below.

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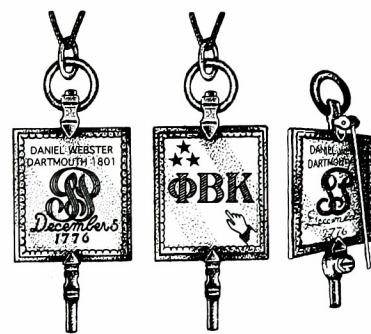
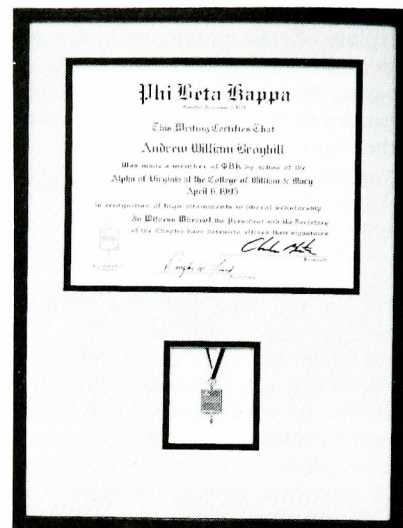
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