



THE KEY REPORTER

A Visiting Scholar Considers The Law and the Humanities

By James Boyd White

IN THIS ARTICLE I first present some general impressions I formed during my time as a Visiting Scholar for Phi Beta Kappa in 1997-98. I then summarize the main points from one of my lectures about the relationship between the law and the humanities.

The Visiting Scholar Experience

I have, of course, often been told that the system of higher education in this country is one of America's extraordinary achievements, a source of remarkable health and strength, but this observation became much more vivid for me as a result of my work, just completed, as a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar. The eight colleges and universities that I visited I now think of affectionately as "my" schools: Three are state universities, one each in the upper Midwest, the Deep South, and the Northwest; and

five are small liberal arts colleges, in the Southwest, the Midwest, and again the Deep South. I spent two days at each institution, giving lectures, participating in classes, and talking with faculty and students.

I have a kaleidoscope of memories: the frank intensity and intelligence with which a young woman at the University of Idaho questioned me after a lecture; the comfortable conversation with faculty members at Alma College, admirably sure of their own identity and the mission of their college; the magnificent museum of musical instruments, one of the best in the world, at the University of

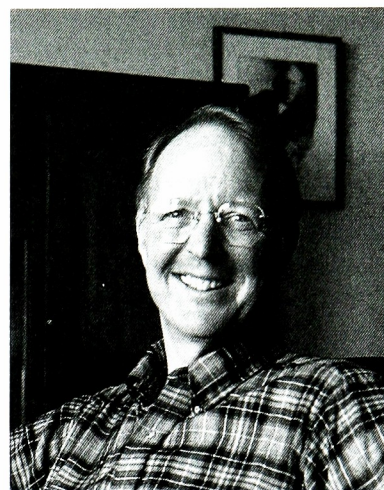


Photo by Gregory Fox

James Boyd White

South Dakota; the energetic faculty seminar on "the sentence as a cultural artifact" at Ohio Wesleyan, a place of obvious intellectual vitality; the penetrating questions from a remarkable student at Southwestern University in Texas who was majoring in biology

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Haverford Graduate Wins 1998-99 Sibley Fellowship

Alison J. Murray, a 1989 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Haverford College who is now a graduate student at the University of Virginia, has won Phi Beta Kappa's Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship for 1998-99. For her project she will analyze the representation of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa in French documentary films from the interwar period. The fellowship, which was established by a bequest in 1934 to aid

young women scholars, provides a stipend of \$20,000.

In 1999 the Sibley fellowship will be offered for studies in Greek. Candidates must be unmarried women who are between 25 and 35 years of age and hold the doctorate or have fulfilled all the requirements for the doctorate except the dissertation. They must be planning to devote full-time work to their project during the fellowship year beginning in September 1999.

Further information and application forms may be obtained by writing to the Sibley Fellowship Committee, Phi Beta Kappa, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036.



Alison Murray

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and political science and determined to become a truly educated physician; breakfast with the young women of Agnes Scott College, who debated with learning and intelligence certain aspects of the English Reformation as though it were the most natural thing in the world to do; the wonderful tone of the poetry class I visited at Kalamazoo College, full of alert intelligence and good feeling; and the fine questions posed at a faculty seminar on religion and the law at the University of Georgia. In addition, of course, there was the enormous geographical and architectural diversity, from the rolling wheat lands of Idaho to the magnificent views of the Missouri valley in South Dakota, the lush and beautiful grounds of the campuses in Georgia, the sun and openness of Texas, and the comfortable and civilized campuses of the midwestern colleges.

The impression I received from all this was remarkable: In every institution, wherever it was located in the country, and whether rich or poor, new or old, there were serious-minded and devoted teachers, scholars eager to make important contributions, and students ready to engage the challenges offered them—a familiar sight to all of us in college or university life, but also a glimpse of an extraordinary cultural and social invention. It would not have to be this way, and in most countries and periods of history it has not been.

What is it, I wondered, that gets all these teachers up in the morning, off to offer once more a class about the origins of the French Revolution, or Shakespeare's comedies, or basic biology? And what is it that brings these students to class after class, arriving usually on time, having done most of the reading, performing adequately and often well on exams and papers? I think that all this is an enormous and collective act of faith, of belief in the value of education itself, a belief that can never be proved. These institutions, and others like them, represent a kind of institutional miracle.

The behavior I describe, which is so familiar to us, could never be produced or accounted for by a system of incentives or disincentives, or by the calculated pursuit of individual self-interest. Most of the work is done in private, where there is no one to watch. It is an inner force that drives the teachers to prepare an extra hour, or to reread the papers, or to call upon reserves of energy they did not know they had when facing an exhaust-

ing class—and a similar force that brings the students to the classroom, to listen to us or talk with us once more, despite their prior experience of our obvious limitations.

It may sound odd to say so, but these institutions of higher education are in a real sense the medieval cathedrals of our time. Not so beautiful as the great cathedrals, of course—though sometimes handsome enough—but like the cathedrals in the extraordinary complexity and variety of their organization, in the simultaneous multiplicity and unity of life that they provide, and in their foundation in a faith so deeply shared that no one knows it is there.

The comparison with the cathedral is in a way not surprising after all, for the cathedrals were the great architectural creations of the Middle Ages, and the universities their great educational inventions. We now live in a world in which

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institutions of all kinds are subject to systematic attack, theoretical and political, on the grounds that they restrain or modify forces that would otherwise be more rationally and efficiently expressed in the market. But the college or university works on principles that are very different from those of the market, especially in its recognition that all the participants have something to learn, both from the past and from each other, indeed from the very tone and atmosphere of the institution itself, which are not reducible to the views or imaginations of its present population.

In the market we assume that any preference expressed by an economic actor is rationally formed to advance his or her self-interest, and thus to advance the sum of self-interests that make up the world. In the institution of learning we believe that our preferences, or, better, our values are subject to questioning, reflection, and change; we believe in changing the self and its values, always working toward what we are not yet and wish we could be.

This is most obvious with respect to

the students, who are there to learn to think in new ways, and to imagine themselves and the world differently as they learn, but it is equally true of the faculty, who have given themselves to a life in which changes of their own understandings, of their own minds, are to be sought and desired. It is in our own commitment to the process of self-education, in fact, that our most important teaching takes place.

As for my own contribution on behalf of Phi Beta Kappa to the life of these schools, I taught or participated in a wide range of classes: on the poetry of Robert Frost and George Herbert, on the sentence as a cultural artifact, on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, on the creation of authority in law and literature, on the difficulty of talking about religion in the language of the law, on the structure and significance of Plato's *Phaedrus* and its relation to Plato's other dialogues, and on the nature of legal education.

Both of the formal lectures I offered were efforts to connect the array of interests reflected in the classes just mentioned. The second lecture is outlined below.

The Humanities and the Law

Let us begin by considering three fragments of works that would be the object of study in the humanities: a piece of Emily Dickinson's famous poem, "Because I could not stop for Death/He kindly stopped for me"; the pair of scales in the well-known painting by Vermeer at the National Gallery in Washington, in which a woman stands at a table on which gold coins are scattered, holding those scales pensively in her hand; and the location of the door in the chapel at Ronchamp by Le Corbusier, which is atypically on the south side of the church rather than at the west end. With these I compare a quotation from *Brown v. Board of Education*. The question is, What connections can be drawn among these various items, or between what we do when we study and respond to the first set of items and what we do when we study and respond to the last?

Let us start with the first set, trying to work out what it is that humanists typically do; then we turn to the activities of the law, which at first seem utterly different but which in the end reveal surprising similarities.

The first and most important characteristic of humanistic work is that it

focuses on a text or other artifact made by others, in other cultural circumstances, and usually in the past. The distinctive concern of the humanist is with the *meaning* of the artifact we examine—that is, its meaning to the maker and the original audience, and its meaning to the present viewer and the audience today.

Because each of the items with which we begin is a fragment of something larger, the first task is to define the “whole” of which the item is a part—the whole poem, or painting, or church. But this approach leads us to other wholes—the whole *oeuvre* of the maker, or the whole world of poems or paintings or churches that defined the expectations of the maker and the original audience, indeed the whole cultural context against which it is a performance.

Thus, to understand Vermeer we need to understand something of the school of Dutch painters who preceded him and began to represent, as he did, the informal interiors of bourgeois homes and the ordinary lives of the people who lived there, including the women. And if we do compare Vermeer’s work with paintings by de Hooch, for example, we will see an

Humanistic study thus involves attunement to the culture and context against which the work in question is a performance. Like travel to a different country, the experience of this attunement changes our own imagination, and we return to our own world with different eyes.

extraordinary difference: Instead of simply representing the scene, Vermeer’s painting invites the viewer to ask questions about the narrative it implies—What is the woman doing with the scales? Is the gold good or bad? Is the woman actually pregnant, as she seems? What is the meaning of the picture on the wall behind her?—questions the painting will never answer, thus directing our attention to something else, to the internal experience of the woman magically presented to us, her moment of pensiveness itself. Vermeer transforms his tradition, giving the person at the center of the domestic interior an interior life of her own, of equal richness.

To understand Dickinson, we need to understand something of the sentimentalizing conventions governing 19th-

century American verse, especially women’s verse, for only then will we see her resisting some, using others, to make a verse that is extraordinarily her own. In the poem I use, for example, the comfortable way “Death” is represented at the beginning, as a kindly gentleman neutralized by his companion “Immortality,” is consistent with the tendencies of her day; but the poem reverses these, and ends with great bleakness, converting “Immortality,” with all of its promise of heaven, into “Eternity,” something very different indeed.

Much the same is true of Le Corbusier, for his church, which seems so odd at first, like nothing one has ever seen—on the outside like a sculpted haystack, on the inside dark and disorienting—turns out, as we work our way into it, to have the same basic architectural form as other churches. Initial strangeness proves familiar and illuminating. But neither part of the experience, neither the strangeness nor the familiarity, would be available to one who did not know what to expect of the design of the church in this culture.

Humanistic study thus involves attunement to the culture and context against which the work in question is a performance. Like travel to a different country, the experience of this attunement changes our own imagination, and we return to our own world with different eyes. It is, in fact, part of the point of such work to expose and thus subject to the possibility of criticism some of our own unconscious presuppositions and attitudes.

To anybody doing this kind of work, the experience is one of constant alternation of attention: between that world and our own, the part and the whole, the work and its context—between this work and others in the tradition with which it is to be compared. For only by comparison will differences, evolutions, and transformations emerge for us. And there is an internal alteration, too, between different activities of the mind: engagement and reflection, practice and theory. Our perception of the work is never stable and unified, but consists of continual tension or movement among perceptions.

The meaning of a work of the kind we are discussing is thus fundamentally experiential in kind: the surprise into familiarity that Le Corbusier’s church at Ronchamp offers, for example, or the despair enacted in the shift from “Immortality” to “Eternity,” or the frustration of asking questions about the Vermeer painting that it will never answer. The experience is never complete; it is not the same for

everyone; and to work our way into it is an activity that changes our own mind and imagination.

Once we have started to do this with respect to a particular work, we discover something disconcerting, namely, that we cannot represent this experience in any language available to us without real loss. This is partly because the experience is either not verbal at all, or if verbal, of a different register or quality from our own speech, and partly because in each case the meaning is specific to the cultural background against which it works.

... Lawyers, like humanists, are constantly concerned with the understanding and interpretation of texts that are made by others, in other cultural circumstances, and usually in the past.

But in any event we learn that we cannot simply represent or interpret the experience the artifact offers us, the experience we have worked so hard to attain.

When we try to explain, even to ourselves, the meaning of the sort of experience-creating artifact I have been describing, we are engaged in an act of translation from one culture to another and from one mode of expression to another, and in both senses the enterprise is truly impossible. This is to define the activity in which we are engaged as an art, an essential part of which is trying to represent in one language and culture what has its full meaning only in another. At the same time it defines an ethic, based on one’s necessarily divided loyalties, which runs both to the original artifact and to the world into which we are trying to carry its meaning.

To summarize this race through the humanities, then, we can say that the work of the humanities is about artifacts and texts from other cultures and times; that it is about their meaning, as fully understood as possible; that this meaning requires an understanding of the context against which the original work is a performance; that this meaning cannot be fully restated, both because of the gap between one culture and another and because of the gap between different parts of the self.

Such is one view of the nature of what I have called the humanities. What connection can there be between this set of activities and the law?

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It may seem at first none at all: The law is, after all, the bureaucratic arm of a bureaucratic state; it is about consequences or results in the real world, not about texts or language or the world of the imagination; it is about power, not beauty or truth. It is very often seen as a branch of public policy, in which legal questions are collapsed into questions of social science or political preference. More familiarly, perhaps, law is often seen simply as a set of rules, to be obeyed or disobeyed. Of course the law can be imagined, sometimes usefully, in each of these ways, especially when viewed from the outside. But when it is viewed from the inside, by someone who lives on its terms, it can be seen as a field of life and practice, as a set of intellectual and imaginative activities, and, as such, far closer to the humanities than we normally imagine.

To take one crucial aspect of their work, lawyers, like humanists, are constantly concerned with the understanding and interpretation of texts that are made by others, in other cultural circumstances, and usually in the past; and the lawyers' interest is always in what these texts mean, or should be said to mean. Consider, for example, the passage from *Brown v. Board of Education*, to which I alluded earlier:

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Like the examples given earlier, this is a fragment of a larger text, and the lawyer's first task is to locate it in the larger whole of which it is a part. In this case the meaning of the phrase "in the field of public education" raises serious questions: Does the Court mean to limit its holding to public education, permitting segregation in restrooms, parks, and swimming pools, for example? Or is the educational aspect of this case really an accident? Or is there some other explanation for this language? Such questions will carry us both to the rest of the opinion and beyond it, to its larger context.

In law as in the humanities, the relevant "whole" thus expands to include not merely the single work of which a pas-

sage is a part but the range of contexts against which it is a performance, here including earlier cases relied on as authority for segregation by race, like the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson*; cases that cut the other way, like *Sweatt v. Painter*, which insisted that "equality" meant full educational equality and not simply similar equipment or facilities; the language of the Fourteenth Amendment itself; the debates about its adoption; the history giving rise to it; and contemporaneous debates in the public arena about states' rights and about the evils of segregation.

Like the poem, the church, and the painting, the opinion can only be read as a response to its preexisting world, against which it is a performance. This means, in turn, that the meaning of the opinion is, despite appearances, not essentially propositional but experiential in kind: It is performance against a background, and understanding the opinion requires attunement to that background.

... In both the law and the humanities, we are struggling with problems of meaning, of cultural difference, of the authority of different languages.

The difficulties of reading a case in its original context are greatly increased when we try to translate the meaning we are beginning to understand into the present, and thus into a world different not only from that of the case itself but from any that was then imagined. What does *Brown* mean today? The promise it held out, of an integrated society within a single generation and an end to racial hatred and contempt, can now be seen as a hollow one.

The question of present meaning that probably has the most bite at the moment is that of affirmative action: Is the promise of *Brown* fulfilled merely by forbidding the state to segregate by law, or does it require—or at least permit—affirmative state action to end the patterns of racial dominance and abuse that have characterized American society nearly from the beginning? Or does *Brown*'s hostility toward racial classification support the view that the state should be prohibited from drawing racial lines, even those that benefit the minority? These are questions *Brown* raises but does not answer; in finding or making answers to them, the law will seek simultaneously to be true to *Brown* and, of necessity, to give it new meaning in a new world.

When we look back to *Brown* and ask what it means for the present, it is not enough, then, for us to try to understand this gesture in the context in which it occurred; we must translate it from one world to another world, and, in translating, change its meaning.

To generalize quickly from this all too brief excursus, it is evident that, like the humanities, the law takes as its subject texts or artifacts made by others, in other cultural circumstances, and in some way in the past; that the law is concerned with their meaning, in the first instance to the lawmakers and the world they addressed, in the second instance to "us," that is, the present world; that this meaning is fundamentally performative and experiential in kind, inhering in a performance against a context; that this meaning cannot be reflected without distortion in our world and language; that its meaning to "us" is therefore a translation that entails a transformation, carried on under simultaneous and opposed fidelities to the original and to the world into which it is carried. The reading of texts in the law is thus an art in many ways like the art of reading humanistic texts.

Of course there is more to say on this subject, for the law has its own constraints and its own significances. But the most notable distinction—the fact that it is an exercise of official power—does not much affect the foregoing analysis, except to make it even more important that the process of thought and imagination by which legal texts are read be sensible, wise, and good. The main point remains, which is that in both the law and the humanities we are struggling with problems of meaning, of cultural difference, of the authority of different languages. One of my deepest beliefs is that to read the work of a mind engaged with one form of this struggle may help us to understand a mind engaged in another, and to confront our own languages, uncertainties, and translations as well. As lawyers, we have much to learn from the efforts of others in other forms; and perhaps it works the other way, too—that is, painters, poets, and architects have something to learn from their sister discipline, the law. ■

James Boyd White is Hart Wright Professor of Law, professor of English, and adjunct professor of classical studies at the University of Michigan. His two most recent books are Acts of Hope: Creating Authority in Literature, Law, and Politics, and "This Book of Starres": Learning to Read George Herbert. This article will be included in his forthcoming book, From Expectation to Experience: Essays on Law and Legal Education.

LIFE OUTSIDE ACADEME

By virtue of her frequent appearances as a political commentator on PBS's "NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" and other network TV panels, Doris Kearns Goodwin (ΦBK, Colby College, 1964) may well be one of Phi Beta Kappa's best-known members. Moreover, she just can't seem to quit writing best-selling biographies, from Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream in 1976 to The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys (1987) and No Ordinary Time (1994), the story of FDR and Eleanor, for which she won the Pulitzer Prize in History.

In her most recent book, *Wait Till Next Year*, an engaging memoir of her childhood in the 1950s, as well as a paean to her hometown Brooklyn Dodgers, she tells how her father nicknamed her Bubbles "because I seemed to enjoy so many things. Anxious to confirm his description, I refused to let my enthusiasm wane, even when I grew tired or grumpy. This excitement about things became a habit, a part of my personality, and the expectation that I should enjoy new experiences often engendered the enjoyment itself."

That irrepressible *joie de vivre* comes through in her public appearances (last winter she gave the Laureate Lecture, sponsored by George Washington University and the Phi Beta Kappa chapter there, in Washington, D.C.) and in an interview she gave the Key Reporter in May. Married since 1975 to Richard N. Goodwin (ΦBK, Trinity University, 1952), who worked in the White House for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Doris Kearns Goodwin lives in Concord, Massachusetts. The Goodwins have three sons.

Q. Did your major at Colby College foreshadow your career as a biographer?

A. At Colby, I majored in government, and took numerous classes taught by Al Marvinac, chairman of the history and government department. He was so inspiring—and so difficult to follow—that we used to imagine that if we could just understand fully what he was saying we would understand truth and justice . . . and God. In fact we felt like Plato, in the shadows, never quite understanding what was going on, but I used to write everything down and my classmates and I would pore over my notes, trying to discern his meaning.

This practice in taking good notes stood me in good stead later when I was assisting Lyndon Johnson with his memoirs. He wanted notes taken as he reminisced. Sadly, once he saw my first draft of the civil rights chapter in which I had faithfully recorded his colorful language (e.g., I told how he had predicted that Wilbur Mills "was so concerned about saving his face that someday he would end up on his ass"), Johnson said, "I can't do this. I have to be a statesman." Now that the White House tapes of the Johnson administration have been released, though, I wish that Johnson could have realized that he was missing his best shot at leaving his own version of history.

Q. You mention in the postscript to your Johnson book that his career "provides further evidence that the basic qualities of a leader do not change when he assumes new and larger responsibilities. It is more a metaphor than an accurate description to say, for example, that a man 'grows' in office."

A. What I meant is that certain attitudes toward power, habits of mind, and aspects of personality are embedded, but there is no doubt that sometimes a person can rise to meet a particular challenge and that the confidence one gains from dealing with it changes the person's ability the next time around.

LBJ, for example, felt extraordinary pride in the passage of the first Civil Rights Act in 1964, knowing that he had, by helping to break the filibuster and getting the Republicans to go along with him, achieved an act that not only desegregated the South but would stand the test of time. He told me later that the pride he felt in this achievement emboldened him to counter the normal tendency of a politician to move cautiously and make sure that the public is behind him. Hence, in his 1965 State of the Union Address he pushed for a Voting Rights Act, even though most of his advisers were saying that the country had to absorb the 1964 Civil Rights Act before they went on to the next big thing. He felt



Photo by Norris Church

Doris Kearns Goodwin

that the momentum was such that he had to keep going—and this feeling led him to push for open housing against the advice of people saying it was very unpopular.

Something had happened to him inside, I think, about civil rights. This was one area where he was willing to go out on a limb.

Q. You mention in your memoir that your parents took you to Hyde Park when you were assigned an oral report on Franklin Roosevelt in the third grade. Was this the origin of your interest in tackling him as a biographic subject?

A. After writing books about LBJ and the Kennedys, where men dominated the story, I wanted to tackle a woman. I had thought about working on Eleanor, of course, but so much had been done, including the great biography by Joseph Lash, I put the idea aside. By the time I'd finished the Kennedy book, however, I'd become so interested in World War II that I looked around for something to do in that period. Because so much had been done on the battles, I thought about the home front—and realized that would encompass Eleanor as a partner to FDR. After that it all just came together.

Q. How did you pick Lincoln for your next project?

A. After you finish a book like the one on Eleanor and Franklin—I felt enlarged in the presence of these extraordinary characters who filled space so gloriously for the six years I spent working on them—it's hard to go back and work on something small. Even though it's scary to try to deal with a biographic subject as large

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as Lincoln, I felt I'd like to be in the presence of Lincoln and in the time of the Civil War. I just hoped when I started that I'd be able to find some aspect of the story that I could make my own.

I am planning to concentrate on Lincoln's relationship with his cabinet—particularly Seward, Stanton, and Welles—which means looking at how Lincoln came into the presidency with all of those men who thought they were bigger and better known than he was, and yet somehow he understood them better than they understood themselves. And he emerges by far the best of them all.

For some lucky reason there has been no book on Lincoln and his cabinet since the early 1940s, and I'm hoping to use Lincoln's relationship with the cabinet—concentrating on the family and the extended family, as I did with the story of Eleanor and Franklin in World War II—to tell the story of the Lincoln presidency.

Q. At least two of your biographic subjects—FDR and LBJ—seem to have had very domineering mothers. How do you view this characteristic?

A. It has to be looked at in two ways. Both mother-son relationships were exceptionally complicated. The mothers did put enormous pressure on their children, but they also gave them the confidence to become what they did. Both mothers had extraordinary love for their children; as the children grew up, they felt bathed in that love, and that's what gave them the sense of who they were. Even though they both felt pressured to achieve, that love gave them a foundation that enabled them to do what they did.

Q. In your memoir you mention that your mother read you the entire Blue Biography series, among other stories about heroes, from an early age. Did this stimulate your interest in biography?

A. Certainly it made a huge difference. It was not just the pleasure of the reading and listening to the language, but the biography series did make me think that people could make a difference, and it made me want to learn more about what these people were like. I still love to listen, but when I do interviews now, I also find myself doing a lot of talking. I somehow feel guilty about taking the other person's time, but I like to establish a relationship with my interviewees. So

my interviews sometimes take a long time to accomplish.

Q. After your lecture at George Washington University, a member of the audience, in response to your description of LBJ as a lifelong workaholic, asked you how you managed so well to balance your time among work, love, and play. Do you have any advice for our younger readers, particularly for young women today?

A. I think the main thing to remember is that there are going to be certain times in your life when you're going to feel as though you're not doing what you want to do, especially when you have kids. There's that sense of wishing you had more time for the kids and yet not wanting your career to stagnate. It's most

important to be easy on yourself, and know that when you are under a lot of pressure, you just have to do the best you can and have patience to know that if you do take time off to be with your children, there's time for you to catch up later.

Also, during the period before you're married, it's important to find something that you really want to do, so that you can at least get started down a career path. It's easier to go back if you've started something.

People are living so much longer now—I still feel young, and my youngest child is a college sophomore. There seem to be so many more hours in my day now than there were before! So it's important to remember that you do have a chance to catch up later in your life on what you might seem to have given up. ■

Phi Beta Kappa in the News

Baltimore Sun Covers Installation of New University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Chapter

On May 26 the *Baltimore Sun* published a lively feature about the establishment of a new chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Staff writer Melody Simmons credited UMBC classics professor Jay M. Freyman (ΦBK, Amherst College, 1964) with leading the successful effort to get approval for the chapter, and quoted him as saying, "We look for students who will go on to pursue a well-rounded life."

A picture of three of the new ΦBK members—Anika Alfred, Nkhensani Nguyuza, and Tia Ragland, who were roommates—accompanied the article. Alfred, a 22-year-old biochemistry major, commented, "Having such intelligent people around you encourages you to go out of your comfort zone and try a little harder." Ragland, a math major who grew up impoverished in East Baltimore and plans to enter George Washington University's School of Medicine on a full scholarship in the fall, commented, "It's the biggest honor I've ever received in my life. . . . It shows that where you come from doesn't determine where you go."

University of Maine Graduate Gets ΦBK Invitation 12 Years Late

In an article titled "Mail Stalls Phi Beta Kappa Induction by 12 Years," staff writer Susan Young of the *Bangor Daily News*

(April 17) reported the saga of a 1986 graduate of the University of Maine at Orono—Sydney Daugherty Porelle—whose invitation to join Phi Beta Kappa was lost in the mail. The letter was originally sent to Porelle's childhood home, but the home had been sold and her mother had moved, so the letter rested in the Portland post office until last fall, when a cousin of Porelle, who works there, saw it and tracked her down. Porelle was inducted this spring.

The article noted that Porelle, a National Merit Scholar and a medical technology major, had "thought her grades were good enough to make Phi Beta Kappa" and "sometimes wondered why she wasn't asked to join." Two of the older brothers also were Phi Beta Kappa graduates of the University of Maine and "used to rib their sister about not making it into the Society."

Phi Beta Kappa In Classic Movies

In *Pillow Talk*, Doris Day's character, an interior decorator, appears at a party hosted by her latest client to show off a redecorated home. The client introduces Doris to "my son, Tony, who's graduating from Harvard this summer. He's Phi Beta Kappa, you know." Later Doris finds herself in a car with the 21-year-old, played by Nick Adams, who, predictably, makes a pass at her. Waving a petite fist in his face, she threatens, "I've never belted a Phi Beta Kappa."

Contributed by Barbara L. Klein, Cheyenne, Wyo.

Letters to the Editor

The 'Global Garden'

The essay by Joel Cohen ["A Global Garden in the 21st Century?"] in the Spring 1998 issue is incredibly upbeat in this time of environmental hand-wringing, and I wonder how accurate his predictions will prove to be. I refer you with respect to the article by Bill McKibben in the May issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Mr. McKibben gave the earth a window of not more than 50 years to even *begin* to act appropriately to preserve the *current status*, not to make the significant improvements he believes are necessary before irretrievable damage is done. It is worth noting that he did not even include population control among his essential elements; he believes that the major source of atmospheric degradation is the exponential increase in the use of offensive chemicals by the developed world, and the desire of the "emerging markets" to have the same access.

Miriam Null, Holliswood, N.Y.

I read with interest Joel Cohen's article on population trends in the 21st century—a subject I find fascinating. What is most intriguing, however, is that he makes absolutely no mention as to whether space travel will have any role in mitigating population pressures. Apparently he doesn't subscribe to the late Carl Sagan's assertion that we are star stuff; we came from the heavens and ultimately it is the destiny of our descendants to return. Mr. Cohen's view is entirely geocentric.

Thomas O. Potts, Harrisburg, Pa.

Joel Cohen makes the dramatic statement that "never before the second half of the 20th century had any human being lived through a doubling of the human population." One can rebut with mention of Adam and Eve producing Cain and Abel.

Richard H. Albert, Rockville, Md.

Joel Cohen seems to have enlisted the poet Matthew Arnold in the cause of, however cautiously, celebrating the future. Professor Cohen's brief citation from Arnold's long poem "Dover Beach" draws strength from the pessimistic and antiquarian context whence it was so untimely ripp'd (perhaps by the editor of some compendium of useful quotations for overworked undergraduates and other practical people):

Ah love, let us be true

To one another! For the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new.

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Kate Talev, Rockville, Md.

Joel E. Cohen replies:

Near the end of his article in the May 1998 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Bill McKibben wrote: "The next fifty years are a special time. They will decide how strong and healthy the planet will be for centuries to come." Earlier in the same article, McKibben quoted from my 1995 book, *How Many People Can the Earth Support?*: "The possibility must be considered seriously that the number of people on the Earth has reached, or will reach within half a century, the maximum number the Earth can support in modes of life that we and our children and their children will choose to want."

It sounds to me like Bill McKibben and I are trying to push the same cart up the same hill. His article in the *Atlantic* describes what could happen if we (collectively, not only Bill McKibben and I) stop pushing, or don't push hard enough, and let the cart run out of control back down the hill. My article, "A Global Garden in the 21st Century?" describes the beautiful view we could have if we push hard and long enough to reach the top of the hill. There is nothing automatic about the world envisioned by either one of us.

I deal with fantasies about mitigating population pressures by space travel on page 447 of my 1995 book. To quote note 21: "Let me dispense once and for all with extraterrestrial emigration. To achieve a reduction in the global population growth rate from, say, 1.6 percent to 1.5 percent would currently require the departure of 0.001×5.7 billion = 5.7 million astronauts in the first year and increasing numbers in each later year. To export this number of people would bankrupt the remaining Earthlings and would still leave a population that doubled every 46 years. Demographically speaking, space is not the place."

I hope that the fratricidal relationship of Cain and Abel is not a precedent for what happens when the human population doubles in a single lifetime.

The beautiful language of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" has given me solace since I memorized it in high school. It is for us, individually and collectively, to choose whether we shall live in a world where ignorant armies clash by night, or in a world of joy, and love, and light, and peace, and help for pain.

A Reminiscence

I have read with interest the "reminiscences," as well as the ongoing debate about the role of the Society today. If there is any further "proof" needed of the significance of Phi Beta Kappa membership, I would like to share my mother's story with you. My mother, now 84, has recently been confined to a nursing home because of dementia and blindness. On "good" days when she remembers me, she always introduces me to her fellow residents in the same way: "This is my daughter; she is a Phi Beta Kappa lawyer from Saint Louis University."

She has always been proud of my achievements, and my election to membership in the Society in 1975 was one of her proudest moments. The moment was made even more proud by the fact that my family is not a "multigeneration" Phi Beta Kappa family—my mother graduated from the eighth grade, while my father left school in the sixth grade to care for younger siblings after his father's death at a young age. Even though personal academic achievement was not something my parents were able to claim for their own, they both, in their own ways, imparted to me the importance of an education—not necessarily for the material rewards that might come, but for the importance of being a well-informed person.

I am proud to be a member of the Society, and although I do not wear my key daily, I do wear it for important occasions, such as my first argument before the Supreme Court of Missouri, or any other occasion on which I need a little reassurance of my abilities.

Sandra A. Mears, Jefferson City, Mo.

Tie Tacks and Bolas

I've followed with interest the debate about how to wear the key. Tie tacks wreck good ties, and the chains are passé. My solution is to solder the key onto a plain silver tie bar. I suggest that Phi Beta Kappa adopt some variant of this in its marketing.

Barry Wellman, Toronto, Canada

We had my husband's pin made into a bola. The key rotates freely in its gold setting, and makes a handsome piece of neckwear.

Carey B. Wilcox, Carefree, Ariz.

The Talmud and the Internet

By Jonathan Rosen

The idea that nothing is ever lost is something one hears a great deal when people speak of computers.

NOT LONG AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER died, my computer crashed and I lost the journal I had kept of her dying. I'd made diskette copies of everything else on my computer—many drafts of a novel, scores of reviews and essays, and hundreds of articles—but I had not printed out, backed up, or copied the diary. No doubt this had to do with my ambivalence about writing and where it leads, for I was recording not only my feelings but also the concrete details of her death. How the tiny monitor taped to her index finger made it glow pink. How mist from the oxygen collar whispered through her hair. How her skin grew swollen and wrinkled, like the skin of a baked apple, and yet remained astonishingly soft to the touch. Her favorite songs—"Embraceable You" and "Our Love Is Here to Stay"—that she could no longer hear but that we sang to her anyway. The great gaps in her breathing. The moment when she was gone and the nurses came and bound her jaws together with white bandages.

I was ashamed of my need to translate into words the physical intimacy of her death, so while I was writing it, I took comfort in the fact that my journal did and did not exist. It lived in limbo, much as my grandmother had as she lay unconscious. My unacknowledged journal became, to my mind, what the rabbis in the Talmud call a *goses*: a body between life and death, neither of heaven nor of earth. But then my computer crashed and I wanted my words back. I mourned my journal alongside my grandmother. That secondary cyber loss brought back the first bodily loss and made it final. The details of her dying no longer lived in a safe interim computer sleep. My words were gone.

Or were they? Friends who knew about such things assured me that in the world of computers, nothing is ever really gone. If I cared enough about retrieving my journal, there were places I could send my ruined machine where the indelible imprint of my diary, along with everything else I had written, could be skimmed off the hard drive and saved. It would cost a fortune, but I could do it.

The idea that nothing is ever lost is something one hears a great deal when people speak of computers. "Anything you do with digital technology," my Internet handbook warns, "will leave automatically documented evidence for other people or computer systems to find."

There is, of course, something ominous in that notion. But there is a sort of ancient comfort in it, too.

"All mankind is of one Author and is one volume," wrote John Donne in one of his most beautiful meditations. "When one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated." I'd thought of that passage when my grandmother died and had tried to find it in my old college edition of Donne, but I couldn't, so I'd settled for the harsher comforts of Psalm 116—more appropriate for my grandmother in any case. Donne's passage, when I finally



Photo by Mark Berghash

Jonathan Rosen

found it (about which more later), turned out to be as hauntingly beautiful as I had hoped. It continues:

God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that Library where every book shall lie open to one another.

At the time I had only a dimly remembered impression of Donne's words, and I decided that as soon as I had the chance, I would find the passage on the Internet. I hadn't yet used the Internet much beyond e-mail, but I had somehow gathered that universities were all assembling vast computer-text libraries and that anyone with a modem could scan their contents. Though I had often expressed cynicism about the Internet, I secretly dreamed it would turn out to be a virtual analogue to John Donne's heaven.

There was another passage I wished to find—not on the Internet but in the Talmud, which, like the Internet, I also

regard as a kind of terrestrial version of Donne's divine library, a place where everything exists, if only one knows how and where to look. I'd thought repeatedly about the Talmudic passage I alluded to earlier, the one that speaks of the *goses*, the soul that is neither dead nor alive. I suppose the decision to remove my grandmother from the respirator disturbed me—despite her "living will" and the hopelessness of her situation—and I tried to recall the conversation the rabbis had about the ways one can and cannot allow a person headed toward death to die.

The Talmud tells a story about a great rabbi who is dying. He has become a *goses*, but he cannot die because outside his hut all his students are praying for him to live, and this is distracting to his soul. A woman climbs to the roof of the rabbi's hut and hurls a clay vessel to the ground. The sound diverts the students, who stop praying. In that moment the rabbi dies and his soul goes to heaven. The woman, too, says the Talmud, will be guaranteed her place in the world to come.

This story, suggesting the virtue of letting the dead depart, was comforting to me, even though I know that the Talmud is ultimately inconclusive on end-of-life issues, offering, as it always does, a number of arguments and counterarguments, stories and counterstories. Not to mention that the Talmud was codified in the year 500 A.D., long before certain technological innovations complicated questions of life and death. Was I retelling the story in a way that offered me comfort but distorted the original intent? I am far from being an accomplished Talmud student and did not trust my skills or memory. But for all that, I took enormous consolation in recalling that the rabbis had in fact discussed the matter.

Contemplating the Talmud

"Turn it and turn it for everything is in it," a Talmudic sage (who never said anything else the Talmud deemed worth recording) famously declared. The phrase, a sort of verbal Ouroboros, describes the Talmud and appears in the Talmud, a tail-swallowing observation that seems to bear out the truth of the sage's comment. The Talmud is a book

and is not a book, and the rabbi's phrase flexibly found its way into it because, oral and written both, the Talmud reached out and drew into itself the world around it, even as it declared itself the unchanging word of God.

Though it may seem sacrilegious to say so, I can't help feeling that in certain respects the Internet has a lot in common with the Talmud. The rabbis referred to the Talmud as a *yam*, a sea—and though one is hardly intended to “surf” the Talmud, there is something more than oceanic metaphors that links the two verbal universes. Vastness, a protean structure, and an uncategorizable nature are in part what define them both.

When Maimonides, the great medieval commentator, wanted to simplify the organization of the Talmud and reduce its peculiar blend of stories, folklore, legalistic arguments, anthropological asides, biblical exegesis, and intergenerational Rabbinic wrangling into simplified categories and legal conclusions, he was denounced as a heretic for disrupting the very chaos that, in some sense, had come to represent a divine fecundity. Eventually, Maimonides was forgiven, and his work, the Mishnah Torah, is now one of the many sources cross-referenced on a printed page of Talmud. It has been absorbed by the very thing it sought to replace.

The Mishnah itself—the legalistic core of the Talmud—is divided into six broad orders that reflect six vast categories of Jewish life, but those six categories are subdivided into numerous subcategories called tractates that range over a far more vast number of subjects that are often impossible to fathom from the name of the order in which they appear. The Hebrew word for tractate is *masechet*, which means, literally, webbing. As with the World Wide Web, only the metaphor of the loom, ancient and inclusive, captures the reach and the randomness, the infinite interconnectedness of words.

I have often thought, contemplating a page of Talmud, that it bears a certain uncanny resemblance to a home page on the Internet, where nothing is whole in itself but where icons and text-boxes are doorways through which visitors pass into an infinity of cross-referenced texts and conversations. Consider a page of Talmud. There are a few lines of Mishnah, the conversation the rabbis conducted (for some 500 years before writing it down) about a broad range of legalistic questions stemming from the Bible but ranging into a host of other matters as well. Underneath those few lines begins the Gemarah, the conversation *later* rabbis had about the conversation *earlier*

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rabbis had in the Mishnah. Both the Mishnah and the Gemarah evolved orally over so many hundreds of years that even in a few lines of text, rabbis who lived generations apart give the appearance, both within those discrete passages as well as by juxtaposition on the page, of speaking directly to each other.

The text includes not only legal disputes but fabulous stories, snippets of history and anthropology, and biblical interpretations. Running in a slender strip down the inside of the page is the commentary of Rashi, the medieval exegete, on the Mishnah, the Gemarah, and the biblical passages (also indexed elsewhere on the page) that inspired the original

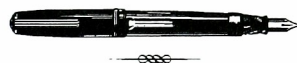
conversation. Underneath Rashi, and rising up on the other side of the Mishnah and the Gemarah, are the tosefists, Rashi's descendants and disciples, who comment on Rashi's work, as well as on everything Rashi commented on himself.

The page is also cross-referenced to other passages of the Talmud, to various medieval codes of Jewish law (that of Maimonides, for example), and to the Shulkhan Arukh, the great 16th-century codification of Jewish law by Joseph Caro. And one should add to this mix the student himself, who participates in a conversation that began about 1,500 years ago.

Now all this is a far cry from the assault of recipes, news briefs, weather bulletins, library catalogs, pornographic pictures, Rembrandt reproductions, and assorted self-promotional verbiage that drifts untethered through cyberspace. The Talmud was produced by the moral imperative of Jewish law, the free play of great minds, the pressures of exile, the self-conscious need to keep a civilization together, and the driving desire to identify and follow the unfolding word of God. Nobody was trying to buy an airline ticket or meet a date. Moreover, the

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Have the Talmud and the Internet ever been mentioned in the same sentence before? Jonathan Rosen's meditation on their similarities, reprinted in this *Key Reporter*, is the kind of provocative essay you can expect to find in each issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. Forthcoming articles include Cynthia Ozick on the Book of Job, Peter Gay on his boyhood in Nazi Germany, and Phyllis Rose on Sicily.

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THE TALMUD & THE INTERNET

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Talmud, after hundreds of years as an oral construct, was at last written down, shaped by (largely) unknown editors, masters of erudition and invention who float through its precincts offering anonymous, ghostly promptings—posing questions, proposing answers, offering refutations. One feels, for all the Talmud's multiplicities, an organizing intelligence at work.

And yet when I look at a page of Talmud and see all those texts tucked intimately and intrusively onto the same page, like immigrant children sharing a single bed, I do think of the interrupting, jumbled culture of the Internet. For hundreds of years, *responsa*, questions on virtually every aspect of Jewish life, winged back and forth between scattered Jews and various centers of Talmudic learning. The Internet is also a world of unbounded curiosity, of argument and information, where anyone with a modem can wander out of the wilderness for a while, ask a question, and receive an answer. I find solace in thinking that a modern technological medium echoes an ancient one.

Searching for Donne

For me, I suppose, the Internet makes actual a certain disjointed approach that I had already come to understand was part of the way I encounter both books and the world. I realized this forcefully when I went looking for the John Donne passage that comforted me after the death of my grandmother. I'd failed to find it in my Modern Library edition of Donne's *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*. I knew the lines, I confess, not from a college course but from the movie version of *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road*, starring Anthony Hopkins and Anne Bancroft.

The book, a 1970 best-seller, is a collection of letters exchanged over 20 years by an American woman and a British book clerk who sells her old leather-bound editions of Hazlitt and Lamb and Donne, presumably bought up cheap from the libraries of great houses whose owners are going broke after the war. I suppose the book itself is a comment on the death of a certain kind of print culture. The American woman loves literature, but she also writes for television, and at one point she buys Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* so she can adapt it for the radio.

In any event, I checked out *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road* from the li-

brary, hoping to find the Donne passage, but it wasn't in the book. It's alluded to in the play that was adapted from the book (I found that too), but it isn't quoted. There's just a brief discussion of Donne's Sermon XV (of which the American woman complains she's been sent an abridged version; she likes her Donne sermons whole). So I rented the movie again, and there was the passage, read beautifully in voice-over by Anthony Hopkins, but without attribution, so that there was no way to look it up. Unfortunately, the passage was also abridged, so when I finally turned to the Web, I found myself searching for the line "All mankind is of one volume" instead of "All mankind is of one Author and is one volume."

My Internet search was initially no more successful than my library search. I

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had thought that summoning books from the vast deep was a matter of a few keystrokes, but when I visited the Web site of the Yale Library, I discovered that most of its books do not yet exist as computer text. I'd somehow believed the whole world had grown digital, and though I'd long feared and even derided this notion, I now found how disappointed and frustrated I was that it hadn't happened.

As a last-ditch effort, I searched the phrase "God employs many translators." And there it was! The passage I wanted finally came to me, as it turns out, not from the collection of a scholarly library but simply because someone who loves John Donne had posted it on his home page. (At the bottom of the passage was the charming sentence "This small thread has been spun by . . ." followed by the man's name and Internet address.) For one moment, there in dimensionless, chilly cyberspace, I felt close to my grandmother, close to John Donne, and close to some stranger who, as it happens, designs software for a living.

The lines I sought were from Meditation XVII in "Devotions upon Emergent Occasions," which happens to be the most famous thing Donne ever wrote, containing, as it does, the line "never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." My search had led me from a movie to a book to a play to a computer and back to a book. (The passage was, after all, in my Modern Library edition, but who could have guessed that it followed from "No man is an island"?)

I had gone through all this to retrieve something that an educated person 30 years ago could probably have quoted by heart. Then again, these words may be as famous as they are only because Hemingway lifted them for his book title. Literature has been in a plundered, fragmented state for a long time.

Still, if the books had all been converted into computer text, and if Donne and Hemingway and *Eighty-Four, Charing Cross Road* had come up together and bumped into each other on my screen, I wouldn't have minded. Perhaps there is a spirit in books that lets them live beyond their actual bound bodies.

This is not to say that I do not fear the loss of the book as object, as body. Donne imagined people who die becoming like books, but what happens when books die? Are they reborn in some new ethereal form? Is it out of the ruined body of the book that the Internet is growing? This would account for another similarity I feel between the Internet and the Talmud, for the Talmud was also born partly out of loss.

The Talmud offered a virtual home for an uprooted culture, and it grew out of the Jews' need to pack civilization into words and wander out into the world. The Talmud became essential for Jewish survival once the Temple—God's pre-Talmud home—was destroyed, and the Temple practices, those bodily rituals of blood and fire and physical atonement, could no longer be performed.

When the Jewish people lost their home (the land of Israel) and God lost his (the Temple), then a new way of being was devised, and Jews became the people of the book and not the people of the Temple or the land. They became the people of the book because they had nowhere else to live. That bodily loss is frequently overlooked, but for me it lies at the heart of the Talmud, for all its plenitude. The Internet, which we are continually told binds us all together, nevertheless engenders in me a similar sense of Diaspora, a feeling of being everywhere and nowhere. Where else but in the middle of Diaspora do you need a home page?

The Talmud tells a story that captures this mysterious transformation from one kind of culture to another. It is the story of Yochanan ben Zakkai, the great sage of the first century, who found himself living in besieged Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction by Rome. Yochanan ben Zakkai understood that Jerusalem and the Temple were doomed, so he decided to appeal to the Romans for permission to found a yeshiva outside Jerusalem. In order to get him out of Jerusalem without being killed by the Zealots—the Jewish revolutionaries—Yochanan's students hid him in a coffin and carried him outside the city walls. They did this not to fool the Romans but to fool the Zealots, who were killing anyone who wasn't prepared to die with the city.

Yochanan wasn't prepared to die with the city. Once outside its walls, he went to see the Roman general Vespasian and requested permission to set up a yeshiva in Yavneh. Vespasian consented, and it is thus in Yavneh that the study of the oral law flourished, in Yavneh that the Mishnah took shape, and in Yavneh that Talmudic culture was saved while Temple culture died. In a sense, Yochanan's journey in his coffin is the symbolic enactment of the transformation Judaism underwent when it changed from a religion of embodiment to a religion of the mind and of the book. Jews died as a people of the body, of the land, of the Temple service of fire and blood, and then, in one of the greatest acts of translation in human history, they were reborn as the people of the book.

I think about Yochanan ben Zakkai in his coffin when I think about how we are passing, books and people both, through the doors of the computer age, and entering a new sort of global Diaspora in which we are everywhere—except home. But I suppose that writing, in any form, always has about it a ghostliness, an unsatisfactory, disembodied aspect, and it would be unfair to blame computers or the Internet for enhancing what has always been disappointing about words. Does anyone really want to be a book in John Donne's heaven?

Recovering My Files

A few weeks after my computer crashed, I gave in and sent it to a fancy place in Virginia, where—for more money than the original cost of the machine—technicians were in fact able to lift from the hard drive the ghostly impression of everything I had written on my computer during seven years of use. It was all sent to me on separate diskettes and on a single inclusive CD-ROM. I



RECOMMENDED READING

BOOK COMMITTEE

Humanities: Svetlana Alpers, Michael Griffith, Simon McVeigh, Robert P. Sonkowsky, Eugen Weber
Social Sciences: Louis R. Harlan, Thomas McNaugher, Anna J. Schwartz, Larry J. Zimmerman
Natural Sciences: Ronald Geballe, Russell B. Stevens

Michael Griffith

Finding a Form: Essays. William H. Gass. Cornell, 1997. \$14.95.

William H. Gass can be abrasive, curmudgeonly, willful—but he wields a style so supple, and commands a mind so playful and yet so rigorous, that only a determined reader can resist his wiles. Few writers can boast such a variety of subjects (imaginative writers from Pound to Robert Walser to the Latin American magic realists to Danilo Kis, exile, Nietzsche, cosmology, Hobbes, autobiography, the history of the book “as container of consciousness”), and Gass is, as always, a prose virtuoso. True, his judgments are sometimes cranky or perverse, and he may kvetch too much (present tense is overused in contemporary fiction; prizes voted on by committees tend

immediately found the diskette that contained my journal and, using my wife's computer, set about printing it out.

As it turns out, I'd written in my journal only six or seven times in the course of my grandmother's two-month illness. Somehow I'd imagined myself chronicling the whole ordeal in the minutest recoverable detail. Instead, I was astonished at how paltry, how sparse my entries really were. Where were the long hours holding her hand? The one-way conversations—what *bad* I said? The slow, dream-like afternoons with the rest of my family, eating and talking in the waiting area? Where, most of all, was my grandmother? I was glad to have my journal back, of course, and I'd have paid to retrieve it again in a second. But it was only when I had my own scant words before me at last that I realized how much I'd lost. ■

This article is reprinted from the Spring 1998 American Scholar. Jonathan Rosen (Yale, 1985) is the culture editor of the Forward. Rosen's essays have appeared in the New York Times Magazine, the New York Times Book Review, and elsewhere. His novel, Eve's Apple, was published in paperback in May by Plume.

to go to mediocrities; pop culture is too powerful for anybody's good), but in this fifth book of nonfiction, as in those that came before, Gass writes sentences of nearly unsurpassable music and sinew.

Another Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments. David Foster Wallace. Little, Brown 1997. \$23.95.

Wallace's nonfiction grab bag confirms much of what both proponents and detractors of his novel *Infinite Jest* have said. This is a writer of enormous ambition and skill, one who resists easeful hipster irony and embraces complexity wherever he finds it, but also one who's prone to indulge his every whim of style and subject matter. The most polemical essays here—manifestos about David Lynch's films and the link between television and new American fiction—are entertaining and thoughtful, but disorganized and overlong.

On the other hand, Wallace excels at journalism, where the discipline of observation provides a kind of counterweight for his explorations of his own blooming and buzzing consciousness. His deepest interest is in how his mind works—every vagary, whim, twist—and Wallace's relentless questioning of everything that falls under his gaze often pays off in fresh phrases and sharp insights. The title piece, a comic account (replete with footnotes) of a sea cruise, is glorious, as is his dizzying tour of the Illinois State Fair. This is an uneven book, but one in which the author's gifts are amply displayed.

The Tetherballs of Bougainville. Mark Leyner. Harmony Books, 1997. \$22.

Leyner's most recent novel is as bizarre and hyperkinetic as its predecessors. It's a blisteringly paced jaunt through the ruins of the American attention span: The author's stores of energy are nothing less than astonishing as he riffs on everything from failed executions to obscure guitarists to the invented world of professional tetherball. The book won't be for everyone—Leyner has scant interest in plot, character, or coherence—but it has a

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RECOMMENDED READING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

manic, headlong appeal, and one's scruples give way, at least temporarily, to this high-voltage jolt of wit and satire. *The Tetherballs of Bougainville* may not be high literature, but it provokes the same amazement one might feel at encountering a working car assembled from popsicle sticks: In nearly equal measure, one wonders *why* it was done and marvels *that* it was done.

Russell B. Stevens

Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge. Edward O. Wilson. Knopf, 1998. \$26.

Wilson has, unquestionably, invested a huge effort in examining the possibility of achieving, eventually, a seamless fabric of interplay—a unity of knowledge—that unites the physical sciences at one extreme with the arts at the other. The careful reader, from whatever background, must surely find the commentary and background information here well worth serious consideration. Whether one is convinced of the attainability of a general consilience is a different matter indeed. Early in the book, the author hazards his own guess, suggesting that “the great majority of scientists do not care about complexity theory,” whereas at the other extreme is a small band of fervent advocates. At present, Wilson finds himself at some point in between, yet wishing he were with the advocates.

In a final chapter, titled “To What End,” I find what is to me the most powerful statement in the book, paraphrased as follows: If negative population growth can be obtained, there are grounds for hope; if it is not attained, humanity's efforts will fail and the impending bottleneck will close to form a solid wall.

Passionate Minds: The Inner World of Scientists. Lewis Wolpert and Alison Richards. Oxford Univ., 1998. \$25.

If, as I believe, it is critically important that the general public have a better knowledge of how science is done, so to speak, and what makes scientists tick, then *Passionate Minds* is a significant resource to that end. Some two dozen senior scientists, initially as participants in BBC radio interviews, are profiled in a question-and-answer format as to their backgrounds, how and why they chose science as a career, whence came the inspiration leading to key research discoveries, and so on. It turns out, as the authors soon realized, that “science seethes with diversity.” Understandably,

most of the persons chosen for this series of profiles were more than ordinarily successful and well recognized. But it is also likely that should another and different group be similarly interviewed, the resulting insights would differ but little from those described here.

Ronald Geballe

The Large, the Small, and the Human Mind. Roger Penrose, with Abner Shimony, Nancy Cartwright, and Stephen Hawking. Cambridge Univ., 1997. \$19.95.

In these few (185) pages, Penrose sets out the original and provocative ideas—about the large-scale physics of the universe, the still-puzzling aspects of quantum physics, and his view of their relation to the mind—that he dealt with in more detail in his two earlier works, *The Emperor's New Mind* and *Shadows of the Mind*. The treatment here is simpler, accessible, and good-humored. His views are challenged by the other three authors, and he rebuts their arguments. Because Penrose has made so many important advances in physics and mathematics, his ideas are not easily ignored.

Life at Small Scale. David B. Dusenberry. W. H. Freeman, 1996. \$32.95.

The laws of physics dictate that many processes and phenomena take different forms at microscopic scale than at our usual one. Thus, in Dusenberry's chapters, “Locomotion without Legs,” “Catching a Ride,” “Navigating through a Chemical Sea,” “Vertical Migration,” and “Communicating without Sound,” for example, we see how life at small scale faces challenges imposed by the physics of its environment and how complex even the smallest organisms have to be. We, of course, are made of cells, both stationary and mobile, and they are subject to the same constraints; hence we have learned about ourselves through studying microscopic life. As is usual in this Scientific American series of books, the illustrations are superb.

The Cambridge Quintet: A Work of Scientific Speculation. John L. Casti. Addison-Wesley Longman, 1998. \$23.

C. P. Snow, Erwin Schrödinger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. B. S. Haldane, and Alan Turing meet (only in Casti's imagination) at Snow's invitation for a seven-course dinner and conversation in Christ's College in 1949. The discussion swirls around the question of whether it would be possible to build a machine that could duplicate human cognitive processes. Casti has caught the diverse personalities and viewpoints, as he sees

them, of Snow and his guests as they argue over the many facets—technical, biological, and philosophical—of the nature of consciousness and intelligence. In an “Afterwards,” the author brings us to the present state of the puzzle, and finds that we are no closer than was the Quintet to the answer. This is an instructive and highly entertaining work.

André-Marie Ampère: Enlightenment and Electrodynamics. James R. Hoffmann. Cambridge Univ., 1996. \$52.95.

“In 1881 the Paris Congress of Electricians stipulated that the unit of electric current should be known as the ampere, thereby establishing the primary means by which Ampère's name is still known to electricians and the general public.” Initially defined as a current that would deposit a certain amount of silver per minute, the unit in 1948 was recast in more accurately measurable terms as the force between two parallel currents—commemorating one of Ampère's important discoveries. He lived in a time when French science was flourishing, despite the depredations of the Terror, which took his father's life. With no formal education Ampère made original contributions to mathematics and chemistry, but it was for his creation of electrodynamics that we know him.

Following Oersted's 1820 discovery of the magnetic effect of an electric current, Ampère laid the foundations of this subject in the space of a few weeks of almost unparalleled, intensive experimentation. It took him a few years of additional experimentation and mathematical analysis (before the simplifications of vector calculus) to settle the form of the force between current elements and to dispose of the need for a special magnetic fluid.

Hofmann treats Ampère's active, troubled life; his religious and philosophical inclinations; his disagreements with establishment figures such as LaPlace, Biot, Gay-Lussac; and his unhappy family experiences.

Women in Mathematics: The Addition of Difference. Claudia Henrion. Indiana Univ., 1997. \$39.95; paper, \$16.95.

This book is based on interviews with nine prominent living woman mathematicians selected for diversity in their ages, ethnic and racial backgrounds, geographic locations, personal and professional situations, and fields of mathematics. It deals with the practices and ideology of the mathematics community and the ability of these women who love mathematics and are strongly motivated. Professional obstacles persist, although

less blatantly than in the past. To the extent that strong examples can overcome apprehension, this book should encourage young women who share the love of this intellectual pursuit.

Larry J. Zimmerman

Reading Faces: Window to the Soul?
Leslie A. Zebrowitz. Westview, 1997. \$22.

At least once a year for the entire three decades I've been wearing a beard, someone has asked me what I'm trying to hide. The question used to irritate me, but after reading this book, I understand the reasons they asked. In a work that is fascinating and fully accessible to a wide audience, Zebrowitz develops a solid, systematic, scientific case for the fact that we humans associate certain facial qualities with particular character traits. If we cover our faces with beards, masks, or clothing, people believe we are apparently concealing a wealth of "information" about who we are. In other words, people do "judge a book by its cover" when it comes to personality and character.

Using a wide range of disciplines from anthropology to social psychology, Zebrowitz examines both "babyfacedness" and "attractiveness" in this study, but also looks at other facial "cues" in terms of how sex, age, ethnicity, emotion, deception, and fitness are read. As an anthropologist, I was especially fascinated by how many of these cues seem to be cross-culturally interpreted. Babyfacedness, for example, is readily identified by many cultures, with personalities characterized in much the same way. Interpreting this trait gets more complicated as a person ages because people are confused by the younger-than-expected looks. Babyfaced people are seen as submissive, naive, relatively dependent, and less likely to know right from wrong. Attractiveness is more dependent on cultural standards and changes through time, but core characteristics of facial profile, symmetry, and youthfulness seem universal. The "halo effect" of attractiveness provides many advantages to people who are judged to be "good looking," such as being seen as more pleasant or more competent, and often translating into better treatment.

The problem, of course, is that the face is not necessarily a good provider of clues to a person's character, personality, or competence. Zebrowitz offers suggestions on how the effects of face can be phased out, addressing both individual actions and cultural issues. Simply recognizing our tendencies to read faces is a major step.

Creating Born Criminals. *Nicole Hahn Rafter. Univ. of Illinois, 1997. \$36.95.*

The quest to provide biological explanations for social behaviors, or, in this case, misbehaviors, has a long history in the United States. Rafter provides a social history of biological theories of crime, looking at both their origins and their substantial influence on control of crime.

Until the mid-1800s the intellectually impaired and institutionalized were often criminalized because no one really knew how to help them, but sympathizers rescued retarded people from poorhouses, jails, and homes, redefining them as innocent victims. The country shifted toward the establishment of eugenics institutions, based on an idea that criminality could be caused by inherited biological defects that could be curbed by reproductive controls. The enthusiasm for science, widening social class divisions, and the popularity of degeneration theory late in the last century may explain why reformers in the mental retardation system turned toward eugenics.

Eugenic criminology lost impetus in the 1920s, but has continued into the present day. In the 1930s, for example, Harvard anthropologist E. A. Hooton published explicitly eugenic works linking race, intelligence, and criminality, and the Nazis used eugenic ideas in their attempts to eliminate criminals, retarded people, and other "degenerates." Herrnstein and Murray's recent work, *The Bell Curve*, suggests that "IQ is substantially heritable" and that low IQ and crime are associated.

Rafter's entire book is compelling, and her afterword turns the volume into a cautionary tale about contemporary efforts to account for human behavior using biological explanations, with biological theories of crime once again in vogue. New genetic screening, genetic therapies, and reproductive technologies have restored some eugenics to respectability. Some believe that these technologies will free us from inherited diseases and social problems, while others fear a return to a kind of "scientific" racism.

Reader in Archaeological Theory: Post-Processual and Cognitive Approaches. *Ed. by David Whitley. Routledge, 1998. \$24.99.*

The dominant paradigm in archaeology for the past 30 years has been a "processual" archaeology, with an emphasis on discovering general laws about human behavior using explicitly scientific approaches. Processual archaeology's epistemology was founded on the largely positivist notion that a "real" past was knowable by studying artifacts in their context, that is, their distribution in

space and their connections to environmental and social systems. About 15 years ago, a general disquiet with the paradigm surfaced because processual archaeology failed to recognize that its approaches were, for all the rigor they imposed, still products of the present, interpreted by archaeologists who were products of their own society. At the same time, issues of colonialism and gender bias in the discipline caused many people to question whether the past was actually being constructed rather than reconstructed. Under the rubric of "post-processual" archaeology, a more eclectic series of theoretical and methodological approaches has attempted to broaden perspectives on the past, looking at a range of issues including gender, ideology, social theory, and archaeology's relationship to today's society and politics.

The first group of articles in this volume describes many of these approaches and provides examples of how they might work. Michael Shanks and Ian Hodder give an excellent overview of the differences between processual, post-processual, and interpretive archaeologies. Most of the remaining articles are case studies, many of them specific to the Americas. Especially interesting are papers by Patty Jo Watson and Mary Kennedy on the role of women in the development of horticulture in eastern North America and by Randall McGuire and Dean Saitta on the dialectics of prehispanic western Pueblo social organization. An article by Gary White Deer on spirituality and the scientific imperative is especially useful in examining the continuum of opinion about archaeology held by American Indians. The media inaccurately portray the relationship as science versus religion, profane versus sacred, and us versus them. Although there is a gulf between archaeology and Indians, it can be bridged by an archaeology more sensitive and accountable to Indian concerns.

Whitley has selected a fine series of articles to demonstrate both the range and the limitations of postprocessual archaeology, and he provides an excellent introduction to each section of the volume. Although this book will be of greatest interest to specialists and students of archaeology, much of the book's content is accessible to nonarchaeologists. In fact, it might be a good volume to scan for those who still somehow believe that archaeology is just digging for treasure from the past. Certainly, readers will come away with an understanding that archaeology needs to be both scientific and humanistic.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

RECOMMENDED READING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

After Pomp and Circumstance: High School Reunion as an Autobiographical Occasion. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi. *Univ. of Chicago*, 1998. \$39; paper, \$18.

On a day-to-day basis, most of us think little about who or what we are. We function normally and securely within our identity, with little assessment of having met life goals we might once have had. We rarely concern ourselves with what we have become, or even what we look like. Few occasions give us pause to consider these things, and most of them are traumatic, such as funerals or crises of one kind or another. For many Americans, however, one occasion tends to force such an assessment: the high school reunion. For some it is a terror to be avoided at all costs, while for others it becomes a chance to show that we have become "somebody." For many it is a chance to renew friendships with people with whom formative experiences were shared. In any case, it is a moment of heightened self-awareness and public presentation in which we have to give an account of who we are in a way that will satisfy both others and ourselves.

Vinitzky-Seroussi considers reunions to be an autobiographical experience in which we examine our own "life narratives," the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and how we got that way. Reunions, however, threaten the integrity of the autobiography because we encounter others who have memories of us and who we were that can be altogether different from our own. The reunion is a confrontation among self, others, and social standards of accomplishment or success.

The author's approach is excellent, qualitative sociology in which she used several hundred questionnaires, interviewed reunion attendees, and observed what actually takes place at reunions. She also assessed casual conversation, interactions between spouses, the reunion site itself, even the examination of old yearbooks and memorabilia. If you've ever been to a class reunion, you'll find the author's descriptions dead-on target. Conclusions about the construction of identities in contemporary America are less compelling, but certainly thought provoking. Vinitzky-Seroussi questions postmodernist claims about the disappearance of a single and coherent life story across time and space in favor of a "situated" identity. She suggests that the reunion shows that Americans go to great

lengths to construct continuity, consistency, and coherence between past and present. Finally, for all its sociological content, the study is also an enjoyable read.

Robert P. Sonkowsky

Ideology in Cold Blood: A Reading of Lucan's *Civil War*. Shadi Bartsch. *Harvard*, 1997. \$45.

Lucan's *De Bello Civili* has in recent years been regaining critical reputé and even the popularity it had in previous centuries. Ralph Johnson, in his *Momentary Monsters*, led the way, and now Bartsch builds on many of Johnson's conclusions, finding not only many new perspectives, as is characteristic of her writing, but an ever more precise and detailed genre identification.

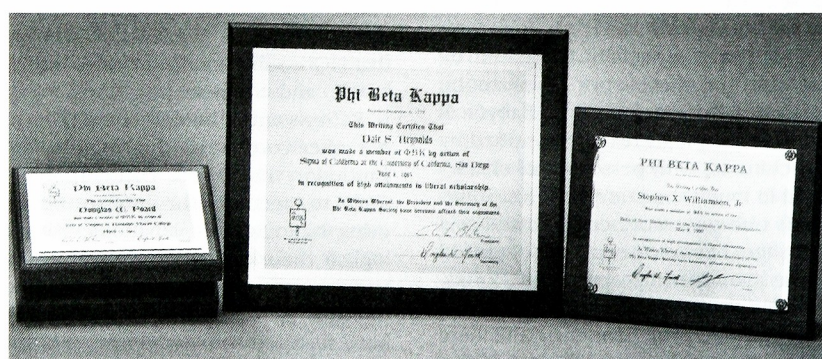
Using the lenses of critical, historiographical, philosophical, political, and anthropological theory, she locates the poem in the complex literary conventions of the "Grotesque." This identification eliminates the necessity that some scholars have felt to apologize for Lucan as if he lacked control or purpose in his choice of horrific hyperbole, and raises our understanding of Lucan's variety and subtlety. Bartsch also advances our ability to see the relevance of the poem to our own generation and sheds light, if one

may use the word with a kind of Lucanian dark irony, on the poem by bringing in comparisons from Vietnam War poetry and from the expressions of Holocaust survivors. But ultimately she sees, underneath Lucan's presentation of Pompey against Caesar, a new poetry of hope against hope. Bartsch accompanies this exquisite account with extremely helpful notes and bibliography. All Latin in the text, though not in the notes, is translated into English.

Monterey Institute Again Offers Scholarships to Phi Beta Kappa Members

For several years the Monterey Institute of International Studies has been offering half-tuition, two-year scholarships to Phi Beta Kappa members who are admitted to a degree program at the institute. Last year 21 ΦBK members received scholarships.

To obtain an application form for the 1999-2000 academic year, write to the Admissions Office, 425 Van Buren Street, Monterey, CA 93940, or telephone (408) 647-4123, fax (408) 647-6405, or e-mail admit@miis.edu.



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More Multigeneration Phi Beta Kappa Families

[People who have reported three or more members of Phi Beta Kappa in their family.]

Charles Buckley Tenny, University of Rochester, 1897; his daughter, Ruth Tenny Hall, Mount Holyoke College, 1929; Ruth's daughter, Gretchen Tenny Hall, Mount Holyoke, 1960; Gretchen's daughter, Sarah Leonard Tucker, Trinity University, 1985; Sarah's paternal grandfather, Rexford S. Tucker, Harvard University, 1918; and Sarah's father, Richard P. Tucker, Oberlin College, 1960.

Alba Curtis Kendall, Vanderbilt University, 1924; Ann Kendall Ray, Florida State University, 1964; and Bradley Elizabeth Ray, University of Richmond, 1997.

Three sisters, all at Florida State College for Women (now Florida State University): Evelyn Uhrhan Irving, Ruth Jeannette Uhrhan, and Jane Anna Uhrhan, 1940, 1941, and 1942.

Henry F. Gallagher Jr. and his wife, Ann R. Gallagher, Pomona College, 1957; and their children: Nancy Woodworth Gallagher and Thomas Henry Gallagher, Carleton College, 1983 and 1986.

Vincent Heath Whitney, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1936; his daughter, Caroline Whitney Simons, and her son, Craig Whitney Simons, University of Pennsylvania, 1967 and 1996.

Milton V. Freeman, City College of New York, 1931; his daughter, Nancy Freeman Gans, University of Rochester, 1965; and Nancy's daughter, Rachel Marie Gans, Brandeis University, 1996.

Three at the University of Alabama: Eleanor Packer McCarvey Johnston, honorary member, 1919; her son, George Burke Johnston, 1929, and George's wife, Mary Tabb Lancaster Johnston, 1935; George and Mary's daughter, Elizabeth C. Johnston Lipscomb, Sweet Briar College, 1958; and Elizabeth's son, William Henry Lipscomb, Duke University, 1986.

Catherine Bushnell Jones Babcock, Smith College, 1925; her son, William S. Babcock, Brown University, 1961; and her grandson, Andrew W. Kirby, Vassar College, 1994.

Charles E. Warner, University of Florida, 1954, and his wife, Julia Drane Hart Warner, Duke University, 1956; and their sons, Charles H. Warner, Washington and Lee University, 1980, and Harrison F. Warner, University of Virginia, 1989.

Thomas Jefferson Hugus, Marietta College, 1871; his daughter, Eleanor Hugus Schlabach, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1908; Eleanor's daughters: Anne Schlabach Burkhardt, Margaret Schlabach Dalzell, and Marian Schlabach Ramlow, all at Ohio Wesleyan, 1937, 1938, and 1941; Margaret's son, Charles R. Stewart Jr., University of Wisconsin, 1961; Marian's daughter, Elizabeth W. Ramlow, Oberlin College, 1969; and Elizabeth's daughter, Megan Corinne Bathory, Smith College, 1996.

Margaret Malone Wray, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, 1927; her sons, Cecil Wray Jr., Vanderbilt University, 1956, and Taylor Malone Wray, University of the South, 1962; and Cecil's daughter, Kathleen Malone Wray Baughman, Princeton University, 1990.

Lewis Morton, University of Minnesota, 1929; his daughter, Elaine Leslie Morton, Stanford University, 1959; and her daughter, Caroline Diane Krass, Stanford, 1989.

Mary Royce Ormsbee and her daughter, Mary Ormsbee Whitton, Smith College, 1907 and 1938; and Mary Whitton's grandchildren, Elizabeth Whitton Storey, Washington and Lee University, 1994, and Benjamin Whitton Storey, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1996.

THE KEY REPORTER

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On September 1 Phi Beta Kappa will move to the fourth floor of this building, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, on the corner of 18th Street and Massachusetts Avenue, a few blocks from the Society's current Q Street location. The new address is: Phi Beta Kappa, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036.

Phi Beta Kappa to Present Program for National Honor Society Meeting in St. Louis

As part of Phi Beta Kappa's outreach to high school students, the Society will, for the fifth year in succession, present a program at the annual meeting of the National Honor Society (NHS) in November. The event is expected to attract some 1,500 students and their advisers.

On Saturday, November 14, the students and advisers will visit the Missouri Botanical Gardens to hear a presentation by Washington University professor Walter Lewis on "World Ecology and Research" before touring an indoor rain forest housed in a geodesic dome.

The next day a panel will discuss

the general theme of the conference, "Exploring New Frontiers." Panel participants will include three Washington University professors: Ray Arvidson, on "The Space Frontier"; Andy Clark, on "The Mind and the Brain"; and Jean Ensminger, on "Frontiers of Intermingling Cultures." Also participating will be former U.S. senator John Danforth, on "The Urban Frontier," and Philip Needleman and J. Gordon, on "Frontiers in Pharmaceuticals: Cooperative Efforts between University Researchers and Industry." Small-group discussions will follow the panel presentations.

LeClerc to Speak at Associates' Fall Banquet; Lander to Receive Annual Associates' Award

At the Phi Beta Kappa Associates' fall banquet on Saturday, October 24, Paul LeClerc, president of the New York Public Library (NYPL), will be the principal speaker, and Eric Lander, director of the Whitehead Center for Genome Research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will receive the annual Associates' Award to a person whose achievements exemplify the ideals of Phi Beta Kappa. The banquet will take place in the McGraw Rotunda of the NYPL.

Other events planned for the day include a demonstration of how electronic advances have affected librarianship in the Science, Industry, and

Business Library, a branch of the NYPL; a special exhibit of treasures from the Pushkin and Hermitage collections at the J. Pierpont Morgan Library; and a luncheon at the Union League.

The Phi Beta Kappa Associates were organized in 1940 to provide significant financial support to the Society. At present there are some 600 Associates, about evenly divided between regular members and life members. To obtain more information about the Associates, write Anthony McIvor at the national office of Phi Beta Kappa, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036.

Society Invites Nominations for Two Triennial Awards

The Phi Beta Kappa Society invites nominations from chapters, associations, and individual members for the fourth Sidney Hook Memorial Award, to be presented at the triennial Council meeting in Philadelphia in 2000. The award was endowed in 1990 by a grant from the John Dewey Foundation in memory of Hook (ΦBK, CCNY, 1945), the internationally recognized philosopher who died in 1989. The recipient gives a lecture at the Council banquet.

The \$7,500 Hook award recognizes demonstrated leadership in the cause of liberal arts education, distinguished undergraduate teaching, and published research that has contributed significantly to the advancement of the recipient's academic discipline. The award was presented in 1991 to Leon Lederman, in 1994 to historian John Hope Franklin, and in 1997 to Carolyn Heilbrun.

The Society also invites nominations for the Phi Beta Kappa Award for Distinguished Service to the Humanities, which was awarded jointly in 1990 to John E. Sawyer and Sidney R. Yates and in 1997 to Joseph Epstein.

Inquiries about both awards and nominations, consisting of a one-page letter of nomination and a résumé or biographical sketch of the person nominated, should be addressed to the Sidney Hook Memorial Award or the Phi Beta Kappa Award for Distinguished Service to the Humanities, 1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Fourth Floor, Washington, DC 20036. The deadline for each is December 1, 1998.

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