The Key Reporter

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Stanley Cavell of Harvard Receives Romanell-ΦBK Award in Philosophy

Stanley Cavell of Harvard University has been awarded the Romanell–Phi Beta Kappa Professorship in Philosophy for 2004–2005. He is the first Harvard professor to receive the award.

The Professorship is presented annually. It recognizes a philosophy scholar's distinguished achievement and past or potential contribution to public understanding of philosophy. Each recipient receives a stipend of $7,500 to present three lectures, open to the public, at his or her institution.

Cavell is Walter M. Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value, Emeritus, at Harvard. His major interests center on the intersection of the analytical tradition, especially the work of Austin and Wittgenstein, with moments of the Continental tradition (e.g., Heidegger and Nietzsche); with American philosophy, especially Emerson and Thoreau; with the arts (e.g., Shakespeare, film, and opera); and with psychoanalysis.

His colleagues consider him unique in making influential contributions to classic issues in analytical philosophy, such as the problem of skepticism, while also writing on subjects outside the usual philosophical canon, such as film, theater, and psychoanalysis. He finds intimate connections among these seemingly diverse fields, and he has helped to enlarge the conception of philosophy.

His popular course, "Moral Perfectionism," considered not only Plato, Aristotle, Milton, and Marx but also comedies from Hollywood's Golden Age, including "It Happened One Night," "The Philadelphia Story," and "Bringing Up Baby." He has argued persuasively for the recognition of such writers as Emerson and Thoreau as important figures in the American philosophical tradition. And he has expressed concern that "professional philosophy has become so specialized

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Photo by Cameron Curtis

ΦBK *Senators Pauline Yu and Burton Wheeler pause near the new bronze key at Society headquarters. It has attracted visits from members passing by. The round emblem is from the L'Enfant Trust, which helps preserve historic buildings.*

TKR Distribution to Change This Fall

Beginning with the Fall 2004 issue, *The Key Reporter* will be on a new distribution cycle. Twice a year, in the summer and winter, the newsletter will be sent to every Phi Beta Kappa member for whom the national office has an address, regardless of whether he or she maintains any other contact with the Society.

The spring and fall editions will be sent to all ΦBK members who assist in supporting Phi Beta Kappa's programs—including *The Key Reporter*—by participating in the Society's annual giving program. Members can ensure that they will receive all four issues annually by responding to the periodic invitations to contribute to the support of Phi Beta Kappa's programs, which honor and advocate excellence in the liberal arts and sciences.

Every issue of *The Key Reporter* will continue to be posted on the Society's website.

In This Issue

From the Secretary

American Scholars

By John Churchill
Secretary, The Phi Beta Kappa Society

In 1876, the Alpha of Massachusetts inducted Dr. Jerome H. Kidder, an 1862 Harvard graduate, into ΦBK as an alumnus member. The induction recognized Kidder's growing stature as a natural historian, including his works on the natural history of Kerguelen Island, a remote point of land in the southern Indian Ocean at 49˚ S, 70˚ E. Kidder went there as surgeon on an expedition, hoping to observe the transit of Venus on December 9, 1874. His fellow expeditioners included two astronomers, three photographers, a cook, a carpenter, and three stowaways. Their voyage was a four-month siege of rain, snow, and storms.

For Kidder the trip was a chance to collect plant and animal specimens, a major step in establishing his standing as a natural historian in Washington, D.C. By the mid-1880s he was prosperous enough as a naval surgeon to have a new house built for himself and his family in the developing Dupont Circle neighborhood. The address was 1606 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.

And so it turns out that the Society's headquarters are in a building whose first owner was a distinguished ΦBK member. There is something nice about connections like this one. They suggest continuity and recurrence, a sense that past meaning is not always lost but can turn up again, perhaps in a form made richer by the linkage to that past. And part of the point of study—all study, but in this case the research by ΦBK staff member Beata Foldenauer, who turned up these facts about Kidder—is to provide the raw material for structures of meaning. Sometimes facts just pile up. But sometimes they crystallize into patterns of meaning.

ΦBK itself is a richly patterned structure of facts, full of nested meanings. And one of the big facts about the Society is *The American Scholar*, our landmark journal of intellectual and cultural affairs. Since 1932, the *Scholar* has published intelligent essays on important topics for the general reader. It is not an academic nor, in the academic sense, a scholarly journal. From the beginning it has been written and edited for the nonspecialist who refuses to cede the right to an informed opinion to the experts. In this way the *Scholar* has helped to maintain in American life a community of shared discourse, a zone in which the jargon of specialization is dropped in favor of language aimed at encouraging, and not impeding, general communication.

Thus, sponsoring *The American Scholar* is one of the most important things that ΦBK does. We must be prepared to go to great lengths to support and sustain it. It is in the nature of things that such a magazine will not attract a mass readership. Our current subscribers' list, at close to 30,000, is quite good, though we hope to increase it. Still, a subsidy from the Society is required, and that is where some of the donations from members go. It is likely that *The American Scholar* will always require a subsidy. Or, to put the matter in plain business terms, it will always run a deficit. The question is, How much?

Given its other activities and obligations, each a source of meaning in its own way, how much should the Society devote to a subsidy for the *Scholar*? Staff and the Senate concluded that the current annual deficit of $250,000 is too much, is in fact unsustainable in the face of other claims on ΦBK's resources. The consensus was that a subsidy half that size is appropriate and sustainable. And so it became clear at ΦBK—after every aspect of the journal's operation was examined, and processes were re-engineered where possible—that the editorial staff structure that had been developed since Anne Fadiman's accession as editor in 1997 could not be sustained.

Ms. Fadiman brought prodigious skills as a writer and editor to her work on the *Scholar*. With a deft touch and an unfailing ear, she crafted her own "At Large and At Small" essays, exemplifying the careful work with this literary form that she promoted throughout the magazine. Her assiduous and minute attention to the work of others whom she drew to the pages of the

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Photo by Oscar Palmquist

Julie Hessler, vice president of the ΦBK *chapter at the University of Oregon, used the Society handshake to welcome new member Thomas Breaden in June. Originally called a grip, the handshake was a well-guarded secret until the middle of the 19th century.*

D.C. Association Wins New Members With Young Professionals Group

Ask any college or university alumni club: It can be difficult to attract and retain younger members. In addition to planning events that would interest them, simply keeping track of their addresses is not easy. The challenge may be even greater for regional Phi Beta Kappa associations, which lack the bond of shared campus experiences. But the Washington, D.C., Area ΦBK Association has found a solution: the ΦBK Young Professionals (YP).

The D.C. Association is the Society's second oldest, after New York City's. Last December it celebrated its 90th anniversary with a program featuring Dr. Thomas Jones, a ΦBK member and former astronaut. The association is also among ΦBK's largest, with more than 200 members.

But it required more than numbers to get the attention of graduate students and those just starting their careers. Christel McDonald, who recently completed her third term as association president, said that enlisting young members became a priority during her second term. She established relationships with eight area ΦBK chapters so she could attend initiation ceremonies, where she often spoke briefly about the D.C. Association.

This "recruitment" produced more young members, McDonald said, but they usually did not stay involved. Most association events appealed more to older members, and some were too expensive for young people on a budget.

When a program was announced last year on "The Military and the Media," Georgetown University graduate student Daniel Auld decided to attend. An alumnus of Lewis and Clark College, he invited Katie Tobin, a fellow alum and ΦBK member, to join him. "It was a really good program," she recalled, "but we were the only young people there."

"Katie, with her bright questions, caught my eye," McDonald said. "I asked if she'd be interested in forming a ΦBK Young Professionals group within the D.C. Association. She agreed and has followed through in earnest."

Tobin, 23, moved to Washington last year to work on a master's degree in international affairs at George Washington University (also McDonald's alma mater). Born in Fairbanks, Alaska, she grew up in Oregon, Virginia, and California. Her background is notable even in cosmopolitan Washington: During high school she studied in Finland and Switzerland; in college she studied in Munich, had two summer internships at the U.S. embassy in Vienna, and did research for UNESCO in Croatia. She is fluent in Spanish and German, and she speaks some French, Italian, Croatian, and Farsi.

The D.C. Association newsletter announced the launching of the YP group and its first event, a happy hour that drew nine ΦBKs. Tobin spread the word at her university and started to develop a mailing list. She soon discovered that this is easier said than done. "Some *professors* at Lewis and Clark," she said, "still haven't changed *their* mailing addresses from their parents' homes to where they live now! So you can imagine what the situation is like among recent alums."

The mailing list has grown to about 30 names, and there is no age limit. "If you feel young, you're young," Tobin said. "And members can bring their friends." She said many YP gatherings are free, and when there is an admission charge, members pay their own way and buy their own refreshments. Carpooling is encouraged. "Generally we have two activities a month," she said, "one social—happy hour, dinner, billiards, coffee, and so on; and one 'adventurous,' like hiking, a museum, or a film festival."

Among highlights this year was a free tour of the National Museum of Health and Medicine, which she said "has neat forensic artifacts like the bullet that shot Lincoln and leg bones shattered by Civil War cannons." Members also visited the National Cryptologic Museum and took salsa lessons at the Kennedy Center, which offers free entertainment every night of the week. "The people dancing were from age 10 to 70," Tobin said, "and it was lots of fun for everyone."

YPs continue to attend events of the D.C. Association. A highlight on its spring schedule will be a tour of the National Air and Space Museum's new Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, home of the space shuttle *Enterprise* and the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the

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An Initiation Call for Risk-Takers

Editor's note: *John D. Zeglis is chairman of AT&T Wireless and former chair of the George Washington University Board of Trustees. Here are excerpts from his address to new members of the* ΦBK *chapter at GWU.*

By John D. Zeglis

As I speak, I have to be careful because it's just possible that a room like this has my future boss in it, and I don't want to offend *her*.

What is the essential message on a day you reach a pinnacle of academic success? The good news starts with the word that sums up the characteristics of all of you: excellence. Excellence is a choice. As John Gardner put it:

"Very few people have excellence thrust upon them. They achieve it. They do not achieve it unwittingly by doing what comes naturally, and they don't stumble into it in the course of amusing themselves. All excellence involves discipline and tenacity of purpose."

You are here because you've made a habit of excellence. Occasional brilliance will not get you into Phi Beta Kappa. You are not one-subject wonders. You've established your intellectual credentials in a wide range of subjects. The excellence that brings you here is not accidental. You have chosen to pursue it and you have earned it. You've broken the code of how to get it done. And that stays with you for life.

A word of caution from a worldly wise old guy who was once in your shoes: There is a paradoxical thing about academic excellence. If you want to continue your habit of excellence after graduation, you will have to learn how to take risks—and to fail more often than you're used to.

If excellence is the word for today, the word for your future is achievement. They are not disconnected. But they're not self-executing either—it's not automatic that you can go from excellence to high achievement in "the real world." Many people who are excellent in school don't have the same success over their lifetimes. Locking in a formula for excellence early in life, as you've done in your academic work, often makes people risk-averse. They know how to be excellent, and they aren't about to start taking risks on being less than excellent. But sometimes a little less success and a little more failure is a good thing.

Students who are identified as "the best and the brightest" have wonderful choices coming out of college. There's the blue-chip law school, and later the blue-chip law firm. There's the silk-stocking investment bank. There's the Fortune 50 icon business enterprise. They are attractive choices. They offer great starting salaries, small risk, and the opportunity to work with smart students from generations past. The reward for your scholarly excellence is that you have the prospect of making a good living without having to take a great risk. But there's a potential trap here. And I speak from personal experience.

The really smart students continue their habit of excellence in the workplace: through comprehensive research and perfectly written papers, adapted exactly to the employer's style and methods. You get promoted. You become a partner in the firm or an officer in the business. You get tenure. And then what?

Well, for a lot of people, the prospect of job security, the need to pay the mortgage, and the corner office—they squeeze out a good part of the desire to take the kind of risk that changes things. And soon people who were A+ students have worked their way into a B– career track in middle age, and coast along into retirement. Peter Drucker, the 20th century's wisest student of

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Camille Robcis Wins Sibley Award

Camille Robcis of Paris has been awarded the ΦBK Society's Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship for 2004–2005. Established in 1934, the award is designated for young women scholars who have earned a Ph.D. or are completing their doctoral dissertations. This year there were 31 applicants. The Fellowship's fields of study alternate between French and Greek.

Camille Robcis

Robcis, a native of France, graduated *magna cum laude* from Brown University in 1999 with a double major in history and in modern culture and media. She earned an M.A. degree at Cornell University in 2003, focusing on European intellectual history, modern French history, and psychoanalysis and anthropology. As a doctoral candidate at Cornell, she is writing a dissertation entitled "Rethinking the Family: Psychoanalysis, Anthropology, and the Problem of Kinship in Post–World War II France."

Elected to ΦBK as a junior, Robcis won fellowships at both Brown and Cornell. At Brown she wrote an honors thesis, "French Identity in Question: The *Annales* School, the 'Crisis of History,' and the Politics of Historiography in 20th-Century France." In addition to French and English, she is fluent in Spanish, reads and writes Italian and Mandarin Chinese, and is proficient in Latin.

"Irony 101" Offers Compelling Lesson

Editor's note: *Sabrina Broselow was born in Michigan and grew up in Hickory, N.C. She was elected to* ΦBK *at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro in 1998. A doctoral candidate at UNC-Chapel Hill, she is currently conducting research in Stuttgart, Germany. Her dissertation, "Enlightened Gastronomy: Discourses on Meals and Mores in the Age of Goethe," is a study of eating and drinking habits in the German lands from 1770 to 1830.*

By Sabrina Broselow

It is a universally acknowledged truth that graduate students are a brilliant lot. On the first day of class, a group of us had climbed four flights up to our dingy offices in the Modern Languages Building to exchange sarcastic comments and bad puns about the class on irony, which was about to begin.

As I huffed into the office, backpack dangling from one shoulder, I was asked, "Are you here for irony, Sabrina?" This query was too tempting to resist. "No, just tell me the truth for once!" I replied. A comparative literature course called "Reading Ironies" is begging for trouble from the outset.

Our professor, an aging grand dame of the academy, proved to be fragile of figure but robust of mind. On this first day of the semester, she walked slowly into the room and situated herself with dignity at the lectern. Elegantly clothed in the Queen's blue, this wizened but bejeweled academic bent over course materials and roster sheets before calling the class to order.

Her opening lecture focused on the art of detecting irony. What clues do authors give to readers that their texts should not be taken at face value? What do context and personal prejudice have to do with discerning ironic intent? What is irony in the first place?

To open our discussion, the professor distributed a photocopied page from the "Letters to the Editor" section of *The New York Times,* circa June 1985, and directed our attention to a contribution entitled "Simple Tasks that Give Pleasure."

As I skimmed my handout, the words "Saginaw, Michigan" at the bottom of the page immediately caught my attention. It just so happens that I was born in the snowy enclave of Saginaw. Naturally, I quickly checked the contributor's name: Sally B. Carney. Sally B. Carney? "That's my godmother!" I blurted out.

Fifteen perplexed pairs of eyes looked at me. "Your godmother?" My fellow students were astonished at such a coincidence, but our professor seemed relieved: "Well, good, you can finally help clear things up then. But don't say anything until we've finished our discussion."

Now truly amazed, I grasped our mission. Sally's letter was a response to an article by a male contributor to the *Times* about the simple yet rewarding pleasure of lawn mowing. She had written to say that from her "female perspective," she had always found great pleasure in seemingly mundane tasks:

"There have been innumerable instances in my life," she wrote, "when a sink full of warm dishwater provided the backdrop for more profound thoughts. When a neatly folded sheet, taken down from drying in the sun, gave repose to hands fraught with worry over a sick family member. When everything in the freezer frosted over while I held the door ajar admiring the freshly made strawberry jam. I am glad to know there are men who experience similar feelings and want to write about them."

Was Sally's letter meant ironically?

A few chuckles from the back row broke the silence. Tentative remarks began the discussion. A jaded young woman from Romance Languages, with stringy black hair and faded jeans, got things rolling: "She couldn't possibly mean this seriously. I mean, unless she's June Cleaver or something."

"Oh, I don't know," came a noncommittal riposte from the back of the room.

Sabrina Broselow

"No, but listen," an outspoken blonde in the front row said adamantly. "It's the last line that really puts it over the top. The freezer frosting over? Who wants that? It's obviously an overt clue to her sarcasm." Various nods of agreement supported this logic before an earnest young man from Germanic Languages piped up. Maybe the irony of Sally's letter lay discreetly in the word "simple." "Making jam," he theorized, "isn't simple at all!" Heads were really nodding now.

"I wouldn't know. I've never made jam." It was the student with stringy black hair again. Then an advanced student decided to flaunt his learning by drawing on context. "Saginaw, Michigan, in the *'80s*? Anyone subscribing to the *Times* would have to be more sophisticated than the letter lets on," he reasoned. "Obviously, she didn't mean for us to read it straight."

"What do you have against Saginaw, Michigan?" I couldn't help myself.

Our professor intervened with an interpretation of her own. When she had stumbled upon this letter some 15 years ago, she told us, she had been at the zenith of her academic endeavors. As a rigorously educated Radcliffe graduate resolutely married to her career, she had found it inconceivable

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Among Our Key People

Editor's Note: *Mitchell Friedman, a native of West Islip, N.Y., was elected to* ΦBK *at Brandeis University in 1981. He is an accredited member of the public relations profession. Freidman teaches and practices public relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, specializing in nonprofit organizations.*

By Mitchell Friedman

Two decades ago I entered graduate school at Stanford University, expecting to earn a Ph.D. in modern European history so I'd be equipped to teach at the university level. My life took an unanticipated turn, however, and I opted to work outside academia after completing the requirements for a master's degree.

Fast forward to the present. I return to teach at Stanford and four other San Francisco Bay Area universities, albeit as an adjunct professor in public relations (the profession I ultimately chose) without either a Ph.D. or a full-time, tenure-track position. I'm the beneficiary of a trend at universities throughout the United States to hire part-time teachers, making us a "contingent workforce" that's vital to the education of undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education students alike.

My path to this occupation—which I pursue in addition to working as a public relations consultant to nonprofit organizations—bears telling, as I ponder the pros and cons of a full-time teaching career, and weigh this against other financial and professional goals.

Since starting school, I had an enormous passion for history that I wanted to share with others. So I enrolled in graduate school right after earning a degree in history at Brandeis University. The dream of deepening my understanding of a subject area and sharing it with eager young minds never died, but my professional path was to be different. After leaving graduate school, I eventually took a position with a public relations agency in Northern California.

I relished the energy and excitement of the business; the opportunity to apply my skills in a broad range of industries; the need to quickly get up to speed on a topic; and the challenge of effectively (and ethically) advocating for a product, service, or cause. I also enjoyed the camaraderie of working in an agency. But at the same time I bemoaned the superficiality of much of the work. Agency life led to a short stint handling public relations for a quasi-nonprofit organization, then self-employment.

I gradually built my business as an independent consultant, primarily sticking to what I was good at and, more important, what clients wanted—generating press coverage. At the same time I occasionally worked as a trainer and teacher of short classes, lasting from three hours to a day, at community colleges and other organizations with programs for working professionals.

In 1998 I met with the academic coordinator at Golden Gate University in San Francisco to discuss a scholarship program I was overseeing for a local public relations professional association. I mentioned my longstanding desire to teach at the university level. "How about teaching a class this spring?" my contact responded. I could barely contain my enthusiasm. Within weeks I signed up to teach a new class, "Public Relations on the Internet," to students working toward a master's degree in public relations.

Not bad, considering that I didn't have an equivalent degree in the field; had never taught at the university level; didn't have the slightest clue how to put together a syllabus or actually "teach"; could unearth very little literature on the course topic that was appropriate for the classroom—and didn't have a clue about the special challenges I'd face in teaching a student body consisting mostly of international students.

But I emerged from this initial teaching experience with high marks from the students, and a deepened appreciation for the subject matter. I'd already begun to prospect for other teaching opportunities, trying to take advantage of this knowledge and my existing university affiliation. My diligence paid off in 1999 when I landed a position teaching an Internet public relations class to international students studying for a certificate in marketing at the University of California, Berkeley Extension (UC Berkeley Extension).

I went into this experience with all the fervor I'd shown at Golden Gate. And the students mirrored my enthusiasm: They were eager to learn from a U.S. citizen who actually worked in public relations; many of them were from Central and South America. I quickly learned, however, that while I could achieve success comparable to my Golden Gate teaching in terms of high marks on student evaluations, there was a lot more to teaching than I had imagined.

First I needed to make the transition from speaker to teacher. The speaker certainly could survive, even thrive, as a presenter of thoughts and insights without end, particularly with students accustomed to furiously taking notes and considering the words of the instructor sacrosanct. But this approach wouldn't suffice over the long term. Adults learn best when they're involved in the process, whether that means group work, individual exercises, role-playing, or other educational techniques.

Variety is clearly the spice of life in the classroom. This is just as true for working adults as for undergraduates—although I still hear from at least one student each term who seeks a more "traditional" academic experience, consisting mostly of the professor spewing forth his or her wisdom for eager students to gobble up.

So I continue to read and study about teaching techniques to add to my repertoire of skills. I've done this primarily on my own because, for the most part, I've found little formal institutional support for individual instructors who want to grow. The optional seminars offered by the UC Berkeley Extension were helpful but

limited in scope. Fortunately I discovered a publication on teaching public relations, published by the Public Relations Society of America. This led me to belong briefly to an organization whose primary purpose is helping teachers in public relations and related disciplines: the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

The UC Berkeley Extension teaching experience also impressed on me the challenges of teaching public relations in a marketing context. In a program designed to teach students about marketing, my course was one of the few that didn't directly address that topic. So not only did I have to confront the students' marketing mindset, but I also had half as much classroom time as most of their other instructors. I approached the challenge with good humor, but didn't compromise my belief that if public relations is understood solely through a marketing lens, this is an incomplete view of the discipline. It also threatens to relegate it to second-class status in both the "real" world and academia.

Next, I realized that the camaraderie I'd fantasized about finding among educators, all dedicated to shaping adult minds, was a myth. I was sorely disappointed at the lack of interaction with other instructors. There's precious little face-to-face time because we're all part-timers with other responsibilities. The meetings that do take place are more about administrative issues than about how to work together to provide a better educational experience.

Other realities of adjunct teaching also hit me hard—low pay, slow-paying clients, erratic administrative support, and spotty marketing of public classes by some sponsoring educational institutions. Still I carried on, unable to get the teaching bug out of my system. In turn, I successfully marketed my teaching services to academic programs for working adults sponsored by San Jose State University and Stanford.

My growing teaching experience also inspired me to set new goals. In addition to approaching specific institutions, I decided to teach in different academic settings. I moved from graduate students at Golden Gate to international students at UC Berkeley Extension, then to working adults at UC Berkeley Extension, San Jose State, and Stanford. My involvement in these programs was sometimes steady—with classes every term—and sporadic in others, with assignments once a year or even less.

Mitchell Friedman

In 2002 I taught my first undergraduate class at the University of San Francisco (USF) and have continued this affiliation. I've added classes in public speaking and public relations campaigns, and I've reached out to a broad range of academic departments to identify new classes I might teach. I've had the opportunity to work closely with students in directed studies, and I've immersed myself in university activities. In short, I've found a "home" of sorts at USF that speaks to the latest phase in my evolution from teaching nomad to a more or less steady part-time instructor at one institution.

All of these teaching experiences have been a boon to my understanding of, and appreciation for, my chosen profession. I can delve into scholarly writings in the field of public relations (including its history) that escaped my reach when I was only consulting or working full-time for someone else. And this enhanced perspective has fueled my writing, training, and consulting work in a far more profound way than I could have imagined.

There have been amazing synergies between what I'm teaching and the types of clients for whom I consult. And I feel inspired to advocate for the public relations profession from my teaching pulpit. I argue for the beneficial roles public relations should play in a democratic society—and apply my critical energies to industry practices and cases that cast the industry in a negative light in the popular press.

I've also enjoyed some of the perquisites of a university instructor—copies of books I'm considering for classroom use, reduced fees to attend professional events, and especially the respect of my students and of clients and others outside academia.

While it's hard to predict where my professional interests will lead, I'm certain that teaching will be part of the mix, perhaps not in the tradition of many full-time academicians, but certainly with the same commitment to learning and the spirit of intellectual inquiry.

Romanell Winner

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in its techniques that, perhaps apart from its work in ethics, it has lost its audience in our culture at large."

Cavell graduated from the University of California-Berkeley in 1947 as a music major, and he earned a doctorate in philosophy at Harvard in 1961. A MacArthur Fellowship winner in 1992, he taught at Harvard from 1963 until his retirement in 1997. Among his many published works are "Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays," "The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy," "The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film," and "Emerson's Transcendental Etudes."

The Professorship is made possible by an endowment from the late Patrick Romanell, H.Y. Benedict Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas–El Paso, and his wife Edna. Candidates for the award are nominated by Society chapters but do not have to be ΦBK members.

"Irony 101"

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that any woman could have written such unabashedly domestic sentiments—and have meant them. "But," she conceded, "I am beginning to think today that I possibly misread that letter because of my own youthful prejudices."

Finally I was able to contribute to the discussion. "So, Sabrina," she asked me, "what can you tell us? Did Sally B. Carney mean what she wrote, or is this letter an ironic commentary on the mundane lives of middle-class women?"

As any good literary critic knows, the question of authorial intent is always a murky one. Aware of the quagmire I was entering, I cast my eyes down to my desk before answering: "Well, I haven't seen Sally since I was three years old and my family moved from Michigan to North Carolina. But I *can* tell you that for Christmas this year, she sent me a hand-sewn apron."

Needless to say, my godmother Sally did indeed write "Simple Tasks that Give Pleasure" in all domestic sincerity. And this ironic episode on the first day of class has since become a critical moment in my own literary training.

Who could soon forget, after all, the spectacle of disciplined academics fervently drawing on a host of semi-marketable hermeneutic skills and dutifully legitimating their claims by the text—only to come to such a gross misreading?

And what does such a misreading say about the legitimacy of our enterprise in the first place? Is literary criticism *per se* always jeopardized by the prejudices of its practitioners? And if so, should we, as wardens of fictional truth, be seriously concerned? Isn't that irony, after all?

As one of the most duplicitous and devious of literary devices, irony in its myriad forms serves as a crucial reminder that even the most scintillating wits of the academy should always be wary of taking themselves—or their endeavors—too seriously.

Zeglis on Risk

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business, likes to say: "I would never promote into a top-level job a person who is not making mistakes. Otherwise, he is sure to be mediocre."

Adlai Stevenson was once a partner in my law firm. When he first ran for governor, he went to the smartest man he knew for advice, asking "How did you get so smart?" Smartest man: "Being smart is just a matter of having wisdom." Adlai: "How do you accumulate wisdom?" Smartest man: "Wisdom is just the practice of good judgment." Adlai: "How do you gain good judgment?" Smartest man: "From experience." Adlai: "And how do you get experience?" Smartest man: "Bad judgment."

Folks without risk barely nudge the needle on society's achievement, growth, and innovation. It's only your willingness to persist in the face of failure that can take you beyond excellence and into achievement. Bill Gates dropped out of school. Amy Tan never succeeded as a technical writer. Woody Allen flunked filmmaking. Mother Teresa lost more patients than she saved. Lincoln lost more elections than he won.

I admit that I am not the best example for you. I went to a blue-chip law school and worked into a cushy job as a partner for a big law firm, and then general counsel for one of America's great business icons. It was the comfortable life of a competent attorney who could always say it was somebody else's fault. But then cataclysmic changes rocked my industry and my company. And I began taking the risks that led me to AT&T Wireless. It isn't exactly a start-up, but I now take more risks in a week than I used to take in a decade.

I don't "win" nearly as often, but I'm having a lot more fun, and I'm engaged in a business that can fundamentally change the way we live. And I love it. I came to this discovery late in life. My most fervent wish for you is that you get a jump on this earlier than I did. Stretch yourselves. Push your limits. Expand your horizons. Dare to fail. If you never fail, you'll never achieve your full potential.

Portrait of ΦBK Founder Goes "Home"

This summer a nonmember of Phi Beta Kappa, Priscilla Normandy Greenwood of Gainesville, Fla., asked the Society staff if a portrait exists of John Heath (1758–1810), one of ΦBK's founders and its first president. He also was an early member of Congress. It happens that the Society commissioned a painting many years ago that was based on an old picture of Heath. Today the painting hangs above the fireplace in ΦBK's boardroom.

A staff member took a photo of the portrait and sent it to Greenwood. She then explained that she wanted it for a childhood friend, Rocco Tricarico. She said he was raised in an Italian-American family that lived in public housing in Brooklyn, N.Y., and he went on to a successful career as a historical architect. They had been out of touch for 50 years until he found her through her website, and they had reconnected by e-mail.

Tricarico and his wife moved 15 years ago to Heathsville, Va., which is named for John Heath. They live in the house that Heath built around 1799. For years they have been looking for a portrait of him to hang over the fireplace in the parlor. Greenwood decided to help, and when an Internet search proved futile, she contacted the Society.

She surprised the couple with the photo and told them where they can visit the portrait. They decided to enlarge and frame the photo and hang it in Heath's old home above the fireplace mantel, which still has the original decorative carvings.

Greenwood is a genealogist. During her research she thought that Heath's name sounded familiar. She then discovered that her husband, Gordon Greenwood, is his third cousin, six times removed.

Photo by Cameron Curtis

John Heath was a student at the College of William & Mary when he helped establish Phi Beta Kappa in 1776. He fought in the Revolutionary War and later served in Congress.

Young ΦBKs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. This tour is being arranged by Valerie Neal, the Space History Division curator, who is an association member.

In order to "institutionalize" the YP, McDonald said, Tobin has joined the association's executive committee. Several YPs also serve on a new advisory council, she said, and may become committee chairs for such activities as the Book Project, in which members read to second graders in a low-income neighborhood. She said this effort has special appeal for the YPs, "who are eager to get involved in community projects."

McDonald explained that the project leaders use special donations to buy 25 books. They put the association's bookplate inside each one, and they add the name of a student who will take the book home at the end of the reading session. "For many children," she said, "this was their first book at home, in the whole household. They share it with their siblings and parents. We also buy a few audiotapes for parents who cannot read English so they can listen to the story at their own pace" as their child reads it.

Large cities like Washington have unique attractions to help lure young ΦBKs, but these may not be necessary for success. McDonald said D.C. Association members of all ages "prefer small salon-like events: no more than 20 people, on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, with refreshments, and discussion of a chosen topic. These get-togethers blend the traditional ΦBK attributes of the intellectual with the social on a small scale and leave everyone richer and happier than any of our larger events.

"Washington, with its steadily changing membership coming and going, has so much to offer. But what we in our association can offer, in addition to all the lectures and so on, is friendship among compatible and intelligent members. 'Small' is 'in.'"

Photo by Daniel T. Auld

A skeleton caught the attention of Katie Tobin, left, and Jessica Burt when members of the Young Professional ΦBKs of Washington, D.C., toured the National Museum of Health and Medicine. The D.C. Area Association was founded in 1913.

From Our Book Critics

Humanities: *Svetlana Alpers, Rebecca Resinski, Eugen Weber*

Social Sciences: *Rick Eden, Jan Ellen Lewis*

Anna J. Schwartz, Larry J. Zimmerman

Natural Sciences: *Germaine Cornélissen, Jay M. Pasachoff*

By Germaine Cornélissen

The X in Sex: How the X Chromosome Controls Our Lives. *David Bainbridge. Harvard University Press, 2003. $22.95*

After enjoying David Bainbridge's "Making Babies," I eagerly looked forward to this book. The author takes us on a fascinating tour of the X chromosome, differences between the sexes, far-reaching implications relative to disease risk, and some potential remedies. The principles by which sex is determined may appear simple at first. Bainbridge shows just how rich in history, evolution, and philosophy the story is, going back to Aristotle, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles.

The book starts with an account of Hermann Henking's studies of fly testicles in 1890. He discovered a lonely chromosome that ended up in only half the sperm, rather than being equally divided between the progeny cells. He called it X. The much smaller Y chromosome would not be discovered until 1905, in another insect, by Nettie Stevens. She keenly observed that female cells always have 20 full-size chromosomes, whereas males have 19 large chromosomes and one tiny one. Her theory that chromosomes exist in pairs was central to her discovery of the chromosomal basis of sex, the presence or absence of Y determining a male or female. Also cited is the work of Alfred Jost, who showed in 1940 that the testicle is the key organ involved in the embryo's decision about its sex.

Bainbridge's clear explanations of complex concepts make the book easy to read for the noninitiated, helping them understand how modern techniques in molecular biology have produced the newest findings about the X and Y chromosomes. From the fact that human babies are initially made female but can be modified into males, the author concludes that men and women are made in fundamentally different ways, more different than they need to be from the viewpoint of reproduction alone. Bainbridge notes that once Y acquired the ability to determine the sex of children, it was destined to fade into a shadow of its partner, the X chromosome, which controls our lives in thousands of ways. The book's other chapters examine how men cope with just one X chromosome, and how women cope with two.

With much British humor, Bainbridge recounts the story of the Duke of Kent's testicles to explain how a damaged X chromosome can lead to X-linked recessive disorders such as hemophilia. This disease plagued Europe's royal families through several generations, afflicting only the males. The reason is that XX girls get two copies of each gene, including those tacked on the X chromosome, whereas XY boys get only one, the chances of inheriting two damaged X chromosomes being extremely low.

The evolution of chromosomal sex determination has thus introduced a divisive disease discrepancy between boys and girls. Human males have lost the backup gene-duplication method of coping with damaged genes on their X chromosome. Muscular dystrophy and color blindness are other examples the author uses to illustrate that while men are more affected than women, women are not totally immune to the ravages caused by a damaged X chromosome. The symptoms are only milder, not totally absent. The fact that both sex chromosomes are seemingly packed with reproduction-related genes suggests that they may also play an important role in latent sexuality. For instance, sperm-related genes are so abundant on the X chromosome that it is now thought likely that some forms of male infertility may be caused by damaged X chromosomes, as are some inherited sex-linked diseases.

Bainbridge attributes to the double X the idea that women are somehow more complex than men. Except for the germ cells, which later develop into eggs, cells in the female embryo switch off one of their X chromosomes, apparently in a random fashion. An XX woman is thus a mixture of two different sets of cells using different X chromosomes. This "double life of women," as the author puts it, has far-reaching effects on their health, sexuality, and behavior. Excess chromosomes are a serious and often deadly matter.

X inactivation solves women's X chromosomes problem by performing an important function: It protects women from the toxic effects of their own chromosomes. This process explains why identical twin girls are never as identical as identical twin boys, since "identical" girls can differ considerably in the extent to which they use their two X chromosomes. It also accounts for the discordance of X-linked genetic diseases that can affect twin girls, while providing a unique opportunity for treatment not available to males. Because a woman's cancer always has the same inactivated X chromosome, tumors result from the uncontrolled replication of a single cell. The fact that women get autoimmune disease more often than men may also be a strange side effect of the X inactivation process. Because girls with Turner syndrome (XO) show ovarian activity, and produce apparently normal eggs that disappear only after puberty, Bainbridge raises the possibility that eggs could be harvested early and preserved for later use.

"The X in Sex" is a wonderful book—easily accessible and beautifully written.

By Jay M. Pasachoff

The Man Who Changed Everything: The Life of James Clerk Maxwell. *Basil Mahon. John Wiley & Sons, 2003. $27.95*

When those in the field are asked who are the greatest three physicists of all time, the answer is almost always Newton, Einstein, and Maxwell, and not necessarily in that order. Yet James Clerk Maxwell, who unified electricity and magnetism in the late 19th century, is little known to the general public. This is one of many aspects of his life covered by Basil Mahon in a delightful, readable, short biography.

I started out holding Maxwell in high esteem and wound up with an even greater respect for him. His discoveries led to radio, radar, and television, and he took and displayed the first color photograph. His encouragement and results led

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The Key Reporter announces with regret the retirement of book critic Josephine Pacheco after many years of significant contributions to these pages. And we welcome her distinguished successor, Jan Ellen Lewis.

A professor of history and chair of the department at Rutgers University-Newark, Lewis graduated from Bryn Mawr College and earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Michigan. She is the author of "The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia," and co-author or co-editor of "The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race and the New Republic," "Making A Nation: The United States and Its People," "Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory and Civic Culture," and "An Emotional History of the United States." She is writing an interpretive history of the United States, 1760–1840, for the Penguin History of the United States, and completing a book for Cambridge University Press with the working title, "Women, Slaves, and the Creation of a Liberal Republic."

Lewis is a member and former chair of the New Jersey Historical Commission. She serves on the *American Historical Review* board of editors and the advisory board of the International Center for Jefferson Studies, and she chairs the American Historical Association's Committee on Women Historians.

From Our Book Critics

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Michelson and Morley to their discovery of the constancy of the speed of light, and the distribution of velocities of particles in gases is still named for him. His idea of what we now call "Maxwell's demon," a tiny construct empowered to sort out faster molecules from slower ones, led to further thought experiments and the foundation of information theory. He was the first to work out that Saturn's rings aren't solid, something vividly illustrated in the close-up pictures taken by NASA's Cassini spacecraft in June (*http://ciclops.org*).

Maxwell was not only a great scientist but also a good man, widely respected inside and outside science. As the first director of the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge University, and the person who conceived of its building and direction, his work even led to Watson and Crick's discovery of the DNA double helix at that institution decades later.

Mahon nicely weaves in the events of Maxwell's life. For example, in 1860 alone, he was fired from his professorship in Scotland, rejected from another professorship there, nearly died from smallpox, and was appointed professor at King's College, London. We learn earlier of his broken heart when he was not allowed to marry a cousin, and subsequently of his long, happy, but childless marriage.

Wearing the widely available T-shirts with the elegant, compact equations of Maxwell's Laws stenciled onto them is not enough. We should all make pilgrimages to the small museum set up only a decade ago at 14 India Street in Edinburgh, his birthplace. And we should all become acquainted with his work and life by reading this wonderful book.

Galileo's Pendulum. *Roger G. Newton. Harvard University Press, 2004. $22.95*

Physicist Roger Newton uses the motif of the swinging pendulum that, legend has it, Galileo observed in Pisa swinging with a constant interval of time. He enlarges his field of view to timekeeping of all kinds, starting with circadian and other biological rhythms. He moves into water clocks, pendulum clocks, and other timekeepers, overlapping eventually with John Harrison, in Dava Sobel's "Longitude," who provided a timepiece sufficiently accurate to keep ships off the rocks. Did you know that "before the installation of a large motor to perform this chore automatically, it took three men five hours to wind Big Ben in London, and they had to do it three times a week—45 man-hours of work performed 52 times a year"? I wish, though, that he had used the accepted lower-case unit name of "hertz," with only its symbol Hz taking the initial capital letter.

Newton goes on to describe his namesake, Isaac Newton, as well as Maxwell (see above), Faraday, Einstein, and a handful of other historical figures. He winds up by showing briefly how harmonic oscillators are used in quantum mechanics and quantum electrodynamics. I recommend this slim (137 pages), readable book.

The Transits of Venus. *William Sheehan and John Westfall. Prometheus Books, 2004. $28*

In the Spring 2003 *Key Reporter*, I reviewed four books about past transits of Venus. June 8, 2004, saw the first such transit since 1882 and provided people across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and the eastern half of the United States with a good view. William Sheehan and John Westfall's book about the past transits, their scientific importance, and their expeditionary history was published later than the rest, but it should be on the honor roll. Its substantial scholarship offers an interesting survey of what has been known.

Magazines like *Sky & Telescope* will present the results of this year's transit. I hope that book publishers will allow their authors to update their efforts. You can find links through *http://www.transitofvenus.info*. Whether or not you saw this year's event, don't miss the one on June 5–6, 2012, or you'll have to wait until 2117. Will some child of today live to see his or her third transit of Venus?

The Book Nobody Read: Chasing the Revolutions of Nicolaus Copernicus. *Owen Gingerich. Walker and Co., 2004. $25*

Two years ago, I mentioned here the publication of Owen Gingerich's "Census of Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus*," his presentation of details of about 300 copies each of the first and second editions, from 1543 and 1566 respectively. Now Gingerich has described his travels around the world to see these books, and how he has discovered so much about the history of science from analyzing them.

He shows that the statement that Copernicus's epochal volume—which, by concluding that the sun rather than the Earth was central, brought us into our modern scientific age—was a "book that nobody read" is far from accurate. His stories, told in a slim volume brought out by the publisher of Dava Sobel's bestseller "Galileo's Daughter," are delightful.

Correction: In the Winter 2004 *Key Reporter*, I wrote that "The Universe in 365 Days" was written by two scientists at a NASA center. While Jerry Bonnell is at NASA's

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Letters to the Editor

Counting the Votes

Teresa Hommel [Spring *Key Reporter*] is a good American! We've gotta have paper! Two issues: First, the U.S. government should get elections right and fund this process, or they won't have taxpayers to fund it with. Can you imagine contributing a dollar to the presidential election campaign fund when you can't be sure which candidate gets elected? Second, what process do we have even with the paper ballot? There is no effective recount, as the Gore election showed in 2000.

What now? Unfortunately, things like election monitoring are deemed too expensive in the current fiscal climate. But it may be a bargain whatever its cost. We can pay too little for our government, leaving special-interest groups to pay only marginally more for the ability to control it. I can imagine the United Nations offering election monitors to ensure the legitimacy of our process.

W.F. Bloxom, Seattle, Wash.

Teaching Values

In reading the interview with Ron Scapp [Spring *Key Reporter*] on teaching values, I am struck (again) by the obvious premise that what needs to be "thought about critically" are always those values more than a few decades old. We accept this almost out of habit by now. I mean not to defend such values, but to point out their profound significance. A century ago, essentially *all* white Americans were white-supremacist, racist, and believed in racial separation. Mark Twain wrote with such venom of the Amerindian that modern reviewers assume he must have been joking! Those values, for evil or for good, were what made American history for centuries. Fifty years ago, at least 90 percent of the population would have regarded gays and lesbians as deviant *and* immoral. Those values also established our history.

In fact, were it not for broadly defined chauvinism of one kind or another, there would never have been a joining of once-culturally distinct delta Egypt with river Egypt; north China with south China; no Roman Empire; no spread of Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam; no western European settling of the Western Hemisphere; no Homer, no Medicis, no Alexander, no Napoleon—and no such thing as African-Americans. Without an element of chauvinism, Man would never have walked on the Moon, and the World Trade Center would not have been built. Do not aggressive conflict and even hate form both new societies and new cultures? Is such chauvinism now judged passé, wasteful of human resources and, perhaps henceforth, always to be seen as evil? Or are such values, rejected by intellectuals of every 21st-century stripe, fundamentally more history-making than others?

Would a world society of thoughtfully tolerant-of-all-but-intolerance, social-communalist near-democracies even have a notable history when viewed from afar? I wonder if anyone in academia really intends to "critically" present *all* values, present and past, as potentially equal ... in future value.

James A. Swanek, Silverado, Calif.

It is important for our society to be circumspect in examining educational values. Ron Scapp's values seem clear enough. Many of them are telegraphed in his photo and embodied in the lack of balance in statements like: "The 'givens' of conservative values are being scrutinized and challenged." These are the same canards that have rightfully been booed at college commencements this year.

Perhaps public education believes that we should question and challenge only what Mr. Scapp considers conservative values, but the public it is intended to serve does not appear to be in complete agreement. Public education's record of revising history leftward, moving the cultural discussion away from the motto of the United States, and advancing moral relativism, might better spark a debate at ΦBK on the rise of home schooling and public education's apparent opposition to it.

Steven S. Smith, Los Angeles, Calif.

While I have to withhold judgment on how clear and "reasonable" Professor Scapp's book is until I have the opportunity to read it, I did find a humorous—and hopefully unintentional—juxtaposition in the Q&A with him. In his final answer are the two following *consecutive* sentences: "But the values we hold dear must never be so fixed that they remain uncontested. The values of justice, mutual respect, compassion, love, and generosity must be strong and ever present in our democracy."

So, which is it? Must our values "never ... remain uncontested" or must they be "ever present"?

Robert G. LeMay, Downers Grove, Ill.

The Ron Scapp article was interesting. It was a bit dismaying, however, to note the air of condescension with which it referred to "social conservatives" more than once. I am a social conservative, and I would assume that many ΦBK members are also. While I enjoy articles about "social liberals" every now and then, I'd really enjoy ones by conservatives (social or otherwise!) too.

Susan Braun, Fort Wayne, Ind.

The Key Reporter welcomes submissions representing all ideological viewpoints. They can be mailed to Society headquarters or sent to bryan@pbk.org.

A Picture's Meaning

I would like to comment on the photograph on page 1 of the Spring *Key Reporter*. Is there some sort of academic or intellectual connection between the Central Carolinas ΦBK Association and the 82nd Airborne Division's museum?

I suspect that there isn't. If we were to step back and reflect a moment, we would regard that photo as one more indication that American society is permeated with glorification of war. If you find my argument surprising, your response would provide one more indication that military uniforms and weapons are a given in the fabric of our everyday lives.

I ask you and my other fellow Americans to consider the tremendous expense—figurative and literal—of that mindset.

Sam Coleman, Fountain Valley, Calif.

Phi Beta Kappa associations schedule a variety of activities for members, not all of them directly related to the Society's mission. The museum visit offered an opportunity to learn something new about—and to reflect on—part of our nation's military history. To see the photograph as a "glorification of war" is a subjective interpretation. A senior ΦBK *colleague has observed that "some might go to the museum to celebrate, some to mourn."*

Reviewing a Reviewer

Eugen Weber, in his book review "Camembert: A National Myth" [Spring *Key Reporter*] has perpetrated a very common error by referring to Camembert as "ruling the roost." The correct quotation is to "rule the roast," referring to the ancient office of the individual in charge of the food at a medieval banquet. Ref: "I never strove to rule the roast, She ne'er refus'd to pledge my toast." Matthew Prior (1664–1721) in "Turtle and Sparrow."

W.S. Gilbert got it right in "Princess Ida": Act II, lines 561 ff.:

Melissa: Now wouldn't you like to rule the roast
And guide this University?
Blanche: I must agree
'Twould pleasant me.
(Sing hey, a Proper Pride!)

Aside from his insightful comments on university governance 120 years into the future, Gilbert is well worth reading for his incredible command of the English language, not to mention his encyclopedic knowledge of literature,

Letters

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history, and mythology. In fact, I learned the quotation "rule the roast" from Gilbert, not from Matthew Prior, a writer of whom I had no prior knowledge.

Paul F. Zweifel, Radford, Va.

Zweifel noted in a P.S. that he re-read James Joyce's "Ulysses" before going to Dublin for the 100th anniversary of "Bloomsday" on June 16: "Strangely enough, in Chapter 16, line 1328, Joyce uses the term 'ruled the roost' (referring to Parnell). This explains why the book was banned for a long time. The 'Purity in quotation' censors refused to approve it. [Wink!] But despite what Joyce did, I stick to my guns."

Others consider "rule the roost" an accepted idiom in modern English. One dictionary defines it as "To be in charge; dominate: 'In this house my parents rule the roost.'" Another cites its derivation from Old and Middle English words meaning "base."

I am distressed that in "From Our Book Critics" [Spring *Key Reporter*] Eugen Weber chose for praise Richard Pipes's memoirs and "The Survival of Culture," edited by Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimbal—works of the hard right. The book of Messrs. Kramer and Kimball especially: Both authors have been flogging the same horse for years. At least it could be argued that Professor Pipes's book has the interest of a life lived.

I am not arguing that there should be some kind of "balance" in the selection, but surely there are many worthier works of history written recently to recommend to the ΦBK membership.

Burton Pike, New York, N.Y.

Tell me—please, please tell me—that the reference to "the Hypocratic Oath" [Weber review of "The Survival of Culture," Spring *Key Reporter*] was made with tongue in cheek.

D.J. Smith, Meadville, Pa.

Unfortunately it was not. Apologies to Hippocrates.

Phonetics

Byrna Porter Weir [Letters, Spring *Key Reporter*] feels that "e-mail users are lowering literacy with poor spelling and grammar, and initials used for phrases and sentences." I have the opposite opinion.

E-mail users are creating new language, but no language has ever been static. The evolution of American English may be speeding up now that people communicate by keyboard as much as by voice, but that is not necessarily bad. In fact, I have great hopes that increasing computerization will result in improved literacy. Children who previously had no motivation for learning to read and write should be motivated to do so in order to share the benefits of the Internet and e-mail.

A person's inability to spell or write "properly" does not result from being an e-mail user. An e-mail user who spells poorly did so before. The fact that people are reading and writing more often (even poorly) is good. If we consider the ability to spell words properly as "literacy," the problem is not in e-mail usage but in our educational system. I see far more errors now in published books than I did as a (literate) child. The downward trend in proper spelling and grammar started long before e-mail became popular.

We will continue to have an intellectual elite, recognized by their ability to spell and write "properly," but we will also have a higher literacy rate (the ability to read and write, even "improperly") among the non-elite. I hope that the flood of information on the Internet may begin to teach the critical thinking skills our educational system overlooks, but that subject is an entirely different one.

V. Wensley Koch, Loveland, Colo.

With respect to the letter by Byrna Porter Weir, I would like to take exception to her conclusion. She writes, regarding her phonetics, "We omit most inside vowels and some syllables, use '2' and '4' in place of words, 'u' for 'you,' etc." Later she writes, regarding e-mail users (whom she accuses of "lowering literacy"), they use "poor spelling and grammar, and initials for phrases and sentences." I fail to see the difference. If "years from now we ... have a very low literacy rate and a very literate intellectual elite," Ms. Weir and her correspondents may make the same contribution to this result as we e-mail users.

George B. Salley, Jr., Savannah, Ga.

Re Ronnie Seagren's letter [citing] the 1946 essay "Meihem in ce Klasrum" by Dolton Edwards, [this] has also been an enduring influence on my views about the futility of all attempts to "control" and "rationalize" the English language, its spelling, diction, syntax, and evolution. Definitely a classic: see *http://www.ecphorizer.com/Articles1/meiheminceklasru.html*.

The Robert MacNeil series "The Story of English" on PBS was also wonderfully instructive. One imperfectly remembered factoid that sticks out: The American southern dialect developed from an influx of Scottish and Irish immigrants, and the argot and sonic qualities were possibly influenced by their interactions with African slaves. The videotapes and book are still available: *http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/6302892058/ref=ase_sharedvisionsunlA/103-3311478-0003044?v=glance&s=video*.

One can scarcely imagine anyone even suggesting an analog of the Academie Française in this country. The notion would be ludicrous. The sprawling, dynamic, democratic, constantly evolving, overlapping, free-form, word and construct-borrowing, however confusing, is the strength of our tongue (and our vibrant culture), not its weakness.

James Keller, Spring Valley, N.Y.

ΦBK *President Niall Slater, right, spoke at the Coastal Georgia–Carolina Association's spring meeting. From left are officers Kelly Applegate, George Pruden, and Sherry Leblang.*

The Key Reporter *welcomes letters to the editor. Those that are published may be condensed. Please send letters to Barbara Ryan by e-mail at* bryan@pbk.org, *by fax at (202) 986-1601, or by postal mail to the Phi Beta Kappa Society.*

From the Secretary

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Scholar made them, by their own testimony, better writers. Under her leadership the *Scholar* won multiple National Magazine Awards, was honored by the *Utne Reader* and *Mother Jones*, and published several essays later picked up, year by year, in *Best American Essays*. Like her distinguished predecessors, Ms. Fadiman has served ΦBK very well indeed.

The issue for Autumn 2004 will be her last as editor. She goes to a prestigious position in the writing program at Yale, and we all wish her well. Meanwhile, a search committee of ΦBK Senators and friends of the Society from the world of magazines and publishing has undertaken the task of identifying the next editor of the *Scholar*. The journal is strong and well respected, and ΦBK is committed to supporting it at a level that will maintain or even increase its stature in American letters. We will find new linkages that enrich the future by contact with an already rich past.

Readers of the Patrick O'Brian novels might remember that in one of them, Lucky Jack Aubrey's frigate is chased down the Atlantic and into the Indian Ocean by a giant Dutch man-of-war intent on sinking the English vessel. Driven east by the relentless gales of the Roaring Fifties, Jack finally gets off a shot that sinks the Dutchman. But he is hulled and practically dismasted, so he heads for a rumored spit of cold, wet rock, said to exist at about 50˚ S, 70˚ E. Of course he reaches it, accomplishes his repairs, and sails on to new adventures. Jack's refuge in fiction is the real Kerguelen Island. Better yet, Jack's friend and companion, the ship's surgeon Stephen Maturin, uses the layover to conduct research and make collections of the island's flora and fauna. Naval surgeon, natural historian, and Kerguelen Island? Our Dr. Kidder. Continuity, recurrence, and a sense that past meaning is not lost but will enrich the future? Our Society, and *The American Scholar*.

From Our Book Critics

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Goddard Space Flight Center, Robert Nemiroff is at the Michigan Technological University.

By Rick Eden

On the Natural History of Destruction. *W.G. Sebald. Translated by Anthea Bell. Random House, 2003. $23.95*

Even in translation, this collection of essays by the German novelist W.G. Sebald is beautifully written. They are nuanced yet lofty, unflinching yet compassionate. Sebald shows himself fully equal to the depth and severity of his topic, the firebombing of German cities in World War II, chiefly by the Royal Air Force, and the German response at the time and in the following decades.

The scale of the civilian slaughter in those firebombings exceeded even what the United States inflicted on Japan with the twin atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (The U.S. also firebombed dozens of Japanese cities in 1945, including Tokyo, where 100,000 died in one night.)

A total of 131 German towns and cities were attacked. Three and a half million homes were destroyed. Seven and a half million people were made homeless. You may recall that Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse Five" is based on his experience as a survivor of the firebombing of Dresden, where about one third of 1.2 million people perished in what is considered the worst single massacre in history. By one reckoning, fully one third of British military industrial production was devoted to the bombing of German cities.

A somber question that Sebald considers briefly is why the British leadership persisted in the extraordinarily costly effort to "exterminate" the German people—Churchill's word, used in private correspondence—even after they realized how little military utility the strategic bombing campaign offered. Sebald doesn't dwell on the destruction, but he provides a detailed description of the horrific demise of one city, Hamburg.

Sebald's true interest is not in the firebombings, though he considers them still underdocumented; nor in what preceded them, their motivations, though he considers these to be misunderstood; rather, his focus lies in what followed. The title alludes to the re-emergence of nature—the return of insects, plants, animals, and finally of people—to a devastated landscape.

But the allusion is ironic. Sebald is intent on exploring the psychological response to destruction, the rehabilitation of the spirit, especially through literature. German writers after World

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Initiation Poem Tradition Continues

Three ΦBK chapters replied to a query in the Spring *Key Reporter* about maintaining the tradition of including a poem at initiation ceremonies.

The chapter at Alfred University invited Ben Howard, a professor of English there, to give the keynote address at its initiation. In response he presented a poem, "Expecting Nothing." Howard was elected to ΦBK at Drake University. His fifth collection of poems, "Dark Pool," was published in Ireland this summer.

Ohio Wesleyan University's chapter re-instituted the tradition three years ago with a new poem, "Faster than Light," by Marilyn Nelson, the poet laureate of Connecticut.

In 2003 the chapter commissioned a poem by Dick Davis, professor of Persian at Ohio State University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He has published many volumes of poetry and is an acclaimed translator of Persian literature into English.

This year's ceremony at Ohio Wesleyan featured a new poem by Rafael Campo: "Toward A Theory of Memory." A practicing physician at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, Campo has received major literary awards and fellowships. His poems, essays, and reviews have appeared in national publications.

The tradition was introduced in 1997 by the ΦBK chapter at Queens College of the City University of New York. Marie Ponsot, who received the 2002 ΦBK Poetry Award in Washington, D.C., read a poem at the chapter's ceremony that year. She was inducted as an honorary chapter member in 2003.

This year Maria Terrone, an administrator at Queens College, was invited to read her poetry. She selected two poems from her first published book, "The Bodies We Were Loaned": "Madame Curie" and "The Idea Is to Have Hearts on a Shelf." She was elected to ΦBK at Fordham University.

ΦBK in Popular Culture and Literature

From Tom Brokaw's memoir, "A Long Way Home" (Random House), in recalling his days at the University of South Dakota: "In fact, if I had pursued my studies with just half of the fervor I dedicated to girls and good times, I would have been Phi Beta Kappa."

Contributed by Thomas R. Graham, Greenfield, Mass.

From "They Shoot Canoes, Don't They?" by Patrick F. McManus (Holt, Rinehart & Winston): "Retch and I were chatting with some of the boys down at Kelly's Bar & Grill and the talk turned to first deer. It was disgusting. I can stand maudlin sentimentality as well as the next fellow, but I have my limits. Some of those first deer had a mastery of escape routines that would have put Houdini to shame. Most of them were so smart there was some question as to whether the hunter had bagged a deer or a Rhodes scholar. I wanted to ask them if they had tagged their buck or awarded it a Phi Beta Kappa key."

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

A columnist in the *Baltimore Messenger*, after suggesting the installation of speed bumps on a residential street, wrote that one morning "I noticed two Phi Beta Kappas from the city sitting in their car on Sedgwick Road. They were reading the paper, drinking coffee and clocking speeders who wouldn't be arriving for another eight hours."

Contributed by James C. Dusel, Jr., Baltimore, Md.

From "Vernon Can Read" by Vernon Jordan (PublicAffairs): "… A chapel service was held to recognize the members of Phi Beta Kappa.The names of all members of the society were read aloud in celebration of their achievement. After the ceremony, Professor Jomé … came up to me agitated. 'Vernon, I am so worried,' he said. 'Why?' I asked. 'I didn't hear them call out your name in chapel today.' I said "Professor Jomé, there are people who graduate Phi Beta Kappa, Summa Cum Laude, and Magna Cum Laude. And then there are those who just graduate. I'm one of those.' Professor Jomé was taken aback. 'All the colored students graduate Phi Beta Kappa,' he said. He was so upset that there were actually tears in his eyes."

Contributed by Michael Davis, Chicago, Ill.

"The Oxford Book of American Literary Anecdotes," edited by Donald Hall (Oxford), quotes from Malcolm Cowley's "Remembering Allen Tate" in *The Georgia Review*: "His mother once said, 'Son, put that book down and go out and play with Henry. You are straining your mind and you know your mind isn't very strong.' Was it a delayed rejoinder that he wore a Phi Beta Kappa key conspicuously on his vest? I liked him at first glance, but I said severely, 'We don't wear our Phi Beta Kappa keys any longer.'"

Contributed by Priscilla Taylor, McLean, Va.

A Commencement photo caption in a *Seventeen* magazine feature on mothers and daughters: "I finally do Mom proud (the weird thingy is my Phi Beta Kappa key—haven't seen it since)."

Contributed by Martha Greene Eads, Valparaiso, Ind.

In "In Silence: Growing Up Hearing in a Deaf World" by Ruth Sidransky (Ballantine), the author tells her parents in sign language that she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Hunter College.

"'I win a prize, Momma, I earn a gold key for my college work. Name of key is Phi Beta Kappa.' I spelled each Greek letter for her; there are no signs for the letters of the Greek alphabet.

"It is important prize. It is honor for daughter? You work hard many years. I proud on you.'"

Sidransky's father comes home and his wife tells him the news. He signs: "Momma not spell right. Funny language. What she talk about?

"She spelled the words right.

"Okay, okay, you both smarter than me."

The author writes that she valued her father's love of learning, and she gave him her key.

Contributed by Mary Whisner, Seattle, Wash.

A song on David Bromberg's "How Late'll Ya Play 'Til?" album ("Sweet Jelly Roll Music"), "Will Not Be Your Fool," includes the lines:

"I graduated Phi Beta goddamn Kappa from that school.

I could be your lover or your friend, darling,

But I will not be your fool."

Contributed by Peter Prims, Oak Park, Ill.

From "Slander: Liberal Lies about the American Right" by Ann Coulter (Crown): "After working her way through college (48 hours a week in an ammunition plant, test-firing machine guns) where she earned straight A's and graduated (a year early) Phi Beta Kappa, [Phyllis] Schlafly won a scholarship to Harvard graduate school."

Contributed by Ted Purnell, Hammonton, N.J.

The *Vero Beach* (Fla.) *Press Journal*, announcing a lecture series, quoted the coordinator: "The topics we selected, we think, are very timely. I think they're all topics that you don't have to be a Phi Beta Kappa genius in the subject (to understand)."

Contributed by Lois W. Kaufmann, Vero Beach, Fla.

From Our Book Critics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

War II faced the challenge of coming to terms with their country's role in the war, both as the perpetrator of horrors and as a victim. Sebald analyzes the lives and works of several writers who succeeded, within the limits of their talent, in demonstrating the necessity to move past the war with courage, clarity, and integrity. He also exposes a few who failed, and thus offered false models for the public. The result rises above literary criticism to become a meditation on the best and worst in human nature.

Dismantling the Big Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. *Steven L. Jacobs and Mark Weitzman. KTAV Publishing. $36; paper $23*

The so-called "Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion" purports to record two dozen meetings of a Jewish cabal set on world domination. *The London Times* exposed the book as a slanderous fraud in 1921, yet it remains popular reading among anti-Semitic publics throughout the world. The earliest versions are in Russian and date from about 1905. These plagiarize a French political satire, written about 40 years earlier, that has nothing to do with Jews, and it may also incorporate other unidentified source material. The perpetrators of the fraud remain unknown. The book is often described as a forgery, but that term is misleading because there are no authentic protocols that it attempts to imitate.

Jacobs and Weitzman's goal is to enumerate the slanders against the Jews that are implied by "The Protocols" and to refute them in a methodical fashion, protocol by protocol. They do so by way of reference to the Torah, the Talmud, to other writings by Jews, and to historical facts. For example, because "The Protocols" implies that Jews hate liberty, Jacobs and Weitzman cite passages and events to show that in fact the Jews cherish liberty. It is distasteful that such a defense should need mounting, but someone had to do it, and I thank the authors for undertaking the task.

Jacobs and Weitzman include an English translation of "The Protocols" as an appendix, and if you have not read it before, I recommend starting there. Unfortunately, reading "The Protocols" is torturous. Aside from occasional sound bites, such as "Might is Right," that reflect its origins in political satire, the book is remarkably clumsy and incoherent, at times almost ludicrously so (as in an allegation regarding Vishnu). Perhaps to anti-Semitic eyes, the awkwardness is attributable to translation or antiquity. Regardless, "The Protocols" is taken seriously by millions of people predisposed by their own anti-Semitism to believe such a book could exist. So it must in turn be taken seriously by those who know its false nature.

I would guess that "The Protocols" has been so enduring because it replenishes some of the wellsprings of anti-Semitism. It appeals to the fearful belief that Jews wield too much power and influence. More specifically, "The Protocols" implies that the Jews are to be feared because they are both superior and inferior: They are caricatured as a brilliant yet cunning and morally corrupt people who will use any means to achieve their nefarious ends. Jacobs and Weitzman do a good job of countering this stereotype with an accurate description of Jewish religious belief and social action.

As many have noted, the paranoid logic exemplified by "The Protocols" can lead quickly to a conclusion that Jews must be identified, isolated, and destroyed in order to ensure the safety of non-Jews: The line from "The Protocols" to the Holocaust was both short and straight. It is sad to consider how influential the nasty hoax remains, despite the many good efforts to discredit it.

"I've read reviews of everything she's ever written."

Courtesy of the artist, Marc Tyler Nobleman (ΦBK Brandeis 1994), www.mtncartoons.com

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