

Minutes of the Literary Club  
February 2018

Jack Davis is the Literary Club's Indiana Jones. Chasing priceless artifacts halfway around the globe, or more precisely, doing the governmental groundwork as well as the literal groundwork to unearth them, his paper "No Place for Old Control Freaks" shared his exploits over four decades drawing from an archeologist's travelogue.

As Jack recounted to 63 members and 7 guests, his life-to-date story started as many do, with the admission that if he knew what travails awaited him, he would have settled on a more financially remunerative occupation. Much like the books of the recently-passed Peter Mayle describing his move to Provence, Jack and his wife settled into Athens, the cradle of Western civilization, but as the nursery rhyme goes, "when the bough breaks, the cradle will fall." Here are two of his more fetching descriptions of his new home, and I quote: "Greece, after all, can be a confusing place for the uninitiated ... One-way street signs are only a suggestion and don't apply to cars that drive in reverse. Motorcyclists carry helmets on their arms, since the law says they must have one, without specifying that they must put it on their head." End quote

In a way, it's like hearing the dashing life of fellow Literarian Nick Clooney and his secondarily-famous (at least for us) son George. Who wouldn't want to live in Greece and gaze at the aquamarine Mediterranean? Who wouldn't like to do fieldwork at the Sanctuary of Zeus and the Grave of the Griffin Warrior? Who wouldn't want a chicken dinner for \$1? Who wouldn't want to dig a hole and find there gold, silver, bronze, ivory and precious stones? Who wouldn't want to see voluptuous women and know that in 20 years they'll have moustaches and facial hair? Ugh.

The two factors that seemed to affect Jack and his team's progress, or lack thereof, was an always-in-flux socioeconomic situation and government in crisis/chaos due to inept bureaucrats and military juntas. Then again, it was the 70s, so unrest was SOP. At the American School of Classical Studies, the social upheaval that swept through US universities post-Vietnam also bubbled up in Greece; likewise, resulting in regular fracas at the US embassy.

The only point which raises a question is Jack's assertion: "There are, after all, easier and more profitable ways of cashing in on a Ph.D. in Classics." The only suitable response to that claim is "Really, name two," and after waiting a respectable amount of time without napping, amending that to: "Name one." But there was a generosity of spirit throughout, along with an equal measure of genuine gosh-whiz humbleness as he understated his triumph over academic in-fighting and logistic quagmire.

Fran Barrett's "A Chance to Clarify" will get a titch more time here as it must include two papers for a full, fair review. A crucial bit of backstory was that Fran had been working dutifully on his paper for months prior...until he heard Ed Burdell's "A Tale of Two Old Dogs" on October 23. At the conclusion of Ed's story, one of the characters speaks of The Big Insurance Company. Although mention of the Big Insurance Company only appears in

3 out of 96 total paragraphs, they cluster at the end as part of the denouement. Obviously intended to reverberate, it was not innocent, just minor.

Fran's paper, in turn, sought to shine a major light on Western Southern, aka The Big Insurance Company, its role in the community, its custodial presence in the neighborhood, and especially the imbroglio involving the Anna Louise Inn. Fran's late shift in subject would be what business pundits call pivoting. In doing so, the 53 members and 6 guests learned a lot that evening.

From the start, it was made clear, many times, that Mr. Barrett did indeed have a dog in this fight. Although the English language vexes us with multiple meanings for the same word, here at 500 E 4<sup>th</sup> St. the term clubbable is used in context of a fraternal gathering, not a something done to a baby seal, nor an old dog, nor even the Big Insurance Company.

While it's debatable who won the PR battle between the Anna Louise Inn and Western Southern, Fran's paper detailed how the latter did provide for the enhanced welfare of the Inn's residents. Moreso, and this was an equally important part of the paper, Western Southern has performed many good deeds across decades, sometimes even anonymously shepherding neighborhood institutions and supporting the City of Cincinnati in time of need, be it for highway re-routing, civic stewardship, or simply funding.

As Historian Bob Vitz has shared, there have been numerous times when LC members put forth ideologically opposing views from the podium, especially during periods of national strife or impending war. So rebuttal is not new, nor unwelcome, at the Literary Club. But pressing on in such a way that the audience feels uncomfortable is not a choice outcome. We are not judge, nor jury, simply colleagues. We are grateful for all the examples of good works because we too have an interest in maintaining our neighborhood and we recognize the important role Our Big Neighbor has done to protect and maintain the area surrounding Lytle Park.

Through a larger, literary lens, we see that the emotional core of both papers is the evergreen power of family. Shakespeare was the master, but he had no monopoly on bloodlines and battles; readers can reach back to the Bible, from there into Greek and Roman history, through the Montagues, the Lears, the Macbeths, the Hamlets, and the Capulets, and end with contemporary versions courtesy of Mario Puzo and Arthur Schlessinger. So family has long provided fertile ground for discourse, and discord for ages. Remember, if you poke, expect response. To paraphrase JD Vance most recently in *Hillbilly Elegy* – “you can't say that about my family, only I can say those things.”

Therefore, to close, let's return to the where it began. This passage could be from either paper, but in this case, it's from Ed's: “As for the Anna Louise Inn and the Big Insurance company...they found a mutually satisfactory and beneficial solution. It called for construction of a new facility to carry on the work of the Inn and the preservation of the historic landmark as very upscale hotel.” It's nice to see both papers agree on this penultimate point. Perhaps the only human desire greater than an appetite for a little interfamilial drama is the yen for a happy ending – I hope that with this perspective writ by both authors, we're close to a happy ending here as well.

Richard Gass is an intrepid outdoorsman, notably a committed hiker. Richard has somehow convinced his family to take part in these adventures – an achievement akin to an Everest ascent – so with a few in to...to, sleeping in a cabin is almost always better than a tent. That assumes though that the cabin is a. up to code, b. uninhabited, and c. in working condition. In Poor Richard's case, that's better known as Strike One, Two and Three.

Liars and tires (bald) and bears populated Richard's stories in "Leak Directly Above and Mouse Shit in the Bed" with which he entertained 56 members and 5 guests on February 19<sup>th</sup>.

What sparks Richard's narrative is that there is humor running through the travail and woe. It's why reading Bill Bryson is a good tonic: we're all grumpy when displaced, even by our own volition, but having someone along who can make us laugh makes the gas lines repaired with discarded cans charming... but that's only if carbon monoxide is laughing gas.

Perhaps he wasn't laughing when there was a threat of slipping into ice crevasses or backing away from bears, but when he tells those stories upon returning safely to civilization, that's the best kind of campfire anthology. With varmints scampering in the walls, across the porch, and under beds, it made Richard's days hiking the great outdoors simply splendiferous: viewing sea otters, sandhill cranes, ospreys, eagles and pelicans are just desserts for putting up with Delta, human trafficking proprietors, and bad wiring. Upon reflection, what the listener comes away with is that only when and where man encroaches upon wilderness do things go fubar fast. But when out in Nature's glory, it's paradise – we were grateful that we could be armchair companions as the Gass's explore Denali, King's Canyon, Glacier National Park, and Michigan's UP.

There is one absolute certainty after hearing Richard's paper: no one in will ever slip into a rented bed without turning on the lights and pulling back the sheets to first examine what fresh guano might await the unwary.

Emerson Knowles brought a budget entitled "50,419 or a Trilogy of Hope" on the evening of February 26<sup>th</sup>. It was a budget in name, although it might have been a paper in disguise as Emerson wrote all three pieces then enlisted Fred McGavran and David Edmundson as readers, so three voices were heard by the 51 members and 5 guests in attendance. It was especially fitting to have the trio as the essence of Emerson's papers were to give voice to three individuals, heroes and heroines, in their unsung devotion to directly saving the lives of over 5000 European Jews as they were targeted and marked for death by the Nazis.

The first hero's story was Gino Bartali, a Tour de France caliber cyclist who used his training rides to shuttle forged ID papers which were secreted in the frame of his bicycle. Nicknamed Gino the Pious due to his religious ardor, he was doing the Lord's work to help Italian Jews post-Mussolini evade the ever-tightening Nazi grip. Quote: "In the end, it is estimated that the network that Gino supported saved the lives of around 9,000 Jews. Over 80% of the Italian Jews survived the war through efforts like this one. Whole villages kept families in hiding where EVERYONE in the village knew, everyone understood the risks

and no one said a word. Gino was very humble and only became angry when people attempted to thank him for it. He felt he did so little, it was just not enough. 7,680 Jews were killed and he carried that burden like so many others. When pressed, he said the true heroes died, were tortured or imprisoned. End quote.

Irena Sendler was the heroine of the second budget, using her role as a social worker to slip past the German guards in Warsaw, Poland to help move children out of the Jewish ghetto then out of the country to safety. She had the perfect cover as the Germans trusted her presumed anger at the Jews since her father, a doctor, had contracted typhus and died while treating their population. As Emerson noted: “little did they know that her father’s death in the service of others gave her strength, not reservation.”

In the summer of 1942, Treblinka was complete, a camp that could exterminate 12–15,000 lives in a 14-hour day. This changed everything, as initially Irena and her team had focused on transporting orphan children. Now orphans were under order to be the first to go and families to follow right behind. A mother had the worst of all choices, give their child to Irena’s team to be hidden as Catholic orphans, or bring them to die with them at the camps.

Irena did not evade the Nazis as did Gino Bartali. She was taken to the infamous gestapo prison – Pawiak – where most never returned and those who did rarely fully recovered. She was tortured for days, but she never shared a name and was sentenced to be shot. On the way to her execution, a guard bribed by the Polish underground let her run away. She assumed a new identity; Irena, now Klara, continued her quest to protect the remaining families.

Our third hero: Nicholas Winton, a Brit by birth, German Jewish by heritage. A pacifist who was born to affluence, Nicholas became a volunteer ambulance driver in France, escaped through Dunkirk and joined the RAF. But his primary service was to forge passports, travel documents and accompanying documentation.

As Emerson revealed, Nicholas’ efforts were would have been lost to time if it were not for the curious eyes of his wife Grete. She found a scrapbook with the names and photos of the 669 children he saved from death. They had married after the war – and she knew nothing of what he had done. He had returned to war-torn Prague after the war only to move back into daily life never saying a word of what he did to anyone, not even his wife.

All three of the remarkable subjects are listed with their respective countrymen in Israel’s “Righteous Among the Nations” in remembrance of the lives they saved. Emerson closed each paper with this legacy, quote “each was a standard for the best of who we can be, in the most terrible of times.” End-quote. History is written by the victors, yet as we see in this case, even though the Allies won the war, many of the real heroes were not chronicled in history books where dates, places and military operations tend to crowd the page.

For those who lived by virtue of the bravery of Gino, Irena and Sir Nicholas, Emerson asks: How many walk this earth today because three dedicated souls broke the rules and risked so much to save a life, how many children and grandchildren know the

warmth of the morning sun? He asked a genealogist to guess at the number: a staggering 50,419.

Minutes of the Literary Club  
January 2018

“Surprise Me” seemed to be the underlying theme for Literary Club papers during the month of January. The revelation and hopeful retention of facts not previously known is one of the great benefits of attendance here at 500 E. 4<sup>th</sup> St. Along with camaraderie and the joy of authorship, learning something unexpected brightens our hearts and engages our minds long after the liverwurst has passed.

Eugene Rutz led off 2018 with “Three Tributes and a Touch of Hubris.” Surprising revelation #1 came right away: Eugene, our club archivist, has been running competitively for most of the past 45 years. The three tributes noted were prepared for men who carried significant influence on his running career...and as we know from our best coaches, these folks tend to also provide an outsized role in personal lives as well.

Eugene set the stage by recounting the small town where he was born and raised and how he came to find his future on a rural high school track. Robert Lawson, to whom he wrote his first tribute, was notable not because he was a black teacher in an almost universally white county, but because he showed Eugene how to work hard for a goal, learn the difference between pain and suffering (and how the former leads to success, while the latter leads to Buddhism), and finally, that success has many different definitions. Coach Lawson ultimately taught Eugene that each person deserves to be treated with respect, moreso how we treat others must not depend on their talent, their color, or their education.

Tribute #2 was for John Blakely, the individual most responsible for the running group at GE that Eugene joined post-college. John was the de facto coach for GE runners. As Eugene detailed, John was as much, if not more, a cheerleader, facilitator and convener rather than just a coach. In doing so, John invested greatly of his time to help others at GE be successful, be it while they were circling a track and rising up hills on a cross-country course, or circling the globe and rising up through corporate ranks.

Eugene’s third tribute was for Tom Grogan, who created the training plan that both Eugene and fellow club member Richard Gass followed while they ran together as part of a larger group at UC. What’s curious is that for the most part, Coach Grogan was invisible, as his coaching posts were at Cincinnati State or Xavier, yet he always provided a printed workout that tested and developed the UC runners. It was via these workouts, notably on his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, that Eugene ran a tough course of Mt. Adams hills not once, but twice, because through his three mentors, and across countless miles, he knows via direct experience that if you are willing to “engage with life you can be a man of value.”

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, Jim Miller prepared and presented a fascinating paper to 64 members and 5 guests on the history of Cincinnati’s Contemporary Art Center. It’s probably little known that this institution which was founded by three women. As graduates of Smith and Bryn Mawr, Peggy Crawford, Betty Pollack and Rita Rentschler aspired to work in the East Coast art world. But in 1938, much of the country, and New York City in particular, was still in the dregs of the Great Depression. So they followed smart advice

from mentors connected to the Met and MOMA and lit out for Cincinnati, founding the Modern Art Society in the basement of the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Jim's role at Barlett & Co. connected him with what was by then called the CAC, via past club member Bill Friedlander's mother who was a charter member of the Modern Art Society. Jim's boyhood in Dayton has prepped him via the Dayton Art Institute to see local luminaries commit significantly to art museums; here in Cincinnati, the names of Rosenthal, Kaplan and Budig filled the roles that Kettering, Cox and Mead played 50 miles north along the Miami River.

Surprising revelations in Jim's paper included the fact that the CAC has no permanent collection, which then transfers energy and responsibility on to the curated exhibits to draw visitors and support. When the CAC was housed at the corner of Walnut and Fifth, over 400 by world-famous artists graced the walls, including Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Alexander Calder, Roy Lichtenstein, and many more.

Another CAC revelation in re: to the current home that is now part of our city's "face", the new building designed by Zaha Hadid was hailed by the senior architecture critic for the New York Times as "the most important American building to be completed since the end of the Cold War." The CAC also protected artistic works against protest, the first being lodged against Picasso for "Guernica" in 1940. The second protest, half a century later, was famously against 7 photographs which were part of the 100 on display from Robert Mapplethorpe. Jim's final two lines say it best: "It is a gem of a museum with its every-changing galleries and the soft parade of its visitors. It gives me the feeling that, indeed, something good is happening here."

Paul Sittenfeld shared a paper filled with collegiality and daunting determination on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January. If I had been able to be in attendance that evening, I fear I would have fainted like the fragile flower I am as Paul detailed his role as secretary for Princeton's class of 1969, a role that he has continued to fill for the past 43 years. Speaking for myself and previous secretaries of the Literary Club, 43 years is simply inconceivable. Paul wrote 18 columns per year for 43 years for the Princeton Alumni Weekly. He also memorized the names of his 857 classmates; fellas, I'll confess that I check the photos and names on our website regularly. Clearly, Paul either has a memory palace the size of a city block in comparison to our hallowed hall where membership tops out at one hundred. After being put in my place to either increase my daily supplements of B-12 and ginkgo biloba or decrease my consumption of bourbon, Paul's surprising revelations as to the multitude of lifetime achievements by classmates filled out the second half of his paper.

As Paul noted, "everyone has a story to tell. If you dig a lot, or even only a little, there is something remarkable about each life, particularly in how it is lived both within and without the control of each person. The biggest takeaway, perhaps no surprise, is how humbling life can be."

Last, on 1/29/18, the surprising revelation was that the City of Cleveland merited a budget all to itself. A triptych that attempted to capture this rich, beguiling, tropical spa of an enchanted city, the Mistake on the Lake is a veritable treasure chest of bling and glitz,

Disneyland meets Hollywood with a little Vegas boom-boom-boom thrown in for good measure. You could almost see the letters C-L-E-V-E-L-A-N-D spelled out in white block letters rising from the beach... but upon closer examination, those letters were carved from Lake Erie ice, framing burnt-out light bulbs, with the flames coming off the Cuyahoga River as the only source of illumination.

Nick Trelka was the hero of the day, first reading Ted Jaroszewicz's fine work "The Rise and Fall and Rise of Cleveland" which detailed the uneasy social interactions of blacks, Appalachians and Eastern Europeans during the volatile 1960s. Civil rights demonstrations were taking place across the country at that time, with Cleveland's race riots just as notorious as the more documented troubles in Chicago, Berkeley, Harlem and D.C. What Ted vividly described was how that period felt and sounded as windows were broken and lives threatened, with the violence so close at hand that Ted's family had to move at risk of injury or worse. His experience since has shown Cleveland to be a resilient and resourceful town, rebuilding from a legacy of America's first black mayor of a major American city to recognition, half a century later as one of the resurgent cities of the Midwest.

Ted also proved that he's a smart cookie by understanding that when the sauerkraut's about to hit the fan, get as far away as you can. In Ted's case, he was literally half a world away in New Zealand...which if Nick hadn't been there to save the day, probably wouldn't have been far enough from the second reader. One has to step carefully when reviewing a budget wherein the organizer's best contribution was recruiting the two other members. So the second reader...actually, let's come back to that. Nick also wrote and read the third budget paper, entitled "Sugar, Ashes and Dust" the history of the Cleveland mob. While set 250 miles northeast, a fair chunk of Nick's revelations are familiar; as the Mafia is often called a family business, the illicit activities taking place across the Ohio River were closer than cousins, but definitely not brotherly. As Nick ably researched and revealed, the Newport mob was an offshoot the Cleveland Syndicate, a hard-bitten gang of Cleveland toughs, seemingly every one of them named Big Joe, who were good with the babes, baseball bats, bets, and most of all, bombs. Starting in Murray Hill, the sons of Costa Nostra sang a deeper tenor than the Sopranos and pretty much had mopped up everything east of the Mississippi post-Prohibition. I'm seeing DeNiro, Tucci, Palmeri and Pesci all have starring roles in the film version of Nick's atmospheric, well-researched paper – who here's hungry for a calzone, with cannoli for dessert?

Nick's mob was also, obviously, into the ponies, so perhaps a horse metaphor will best sum up the evening. When judging the prospects of a horse, one examines the lineage, the teeth, but most of all, the strength and timber of the front and back legs...which in this case were Ted and Nick's contributions. The swayback of the evening was the middle paper, a non-researched tripping (over) the light fantastic of a youth wasted in more ways than one. Thank heavens for the kindness of the publishing business and the Literary Club that has lifted our author by the collar out of the beer-soaked waters of Lake Erie and let him dry out along the banks of the Ohio. It was an honest attempt to share a life, if not well-lived, certainly well-livered, but to use Jerry Springer as a compare and contrast is a low bar indeed. Perhaps most memorable from this offering was how frigid Cleveland can get. Even though this past January in Cincinnati was frosty, when compared to our neighbor

to the north, a couple weeks of sub-freezing feels balmy when compared to three months below zero.

Minutes of the Literary Club  
December 2017

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 54 members and 4 guests gathered for Anderson Cobb's "Life is But A Short Walk on a Long Journey." Over the thousands of papers written during our 168-year history, it's likely that the biographical material we heard from the podium that night had never been shared before.

In a soft voice that described a hard existence where clothing, shelter and education opportunities were patchwork at best, Anderson's family's circumstances certainly didn't provide for sports equipment. So he and his friends who gathered at the dusty field made do with castoff gloves, waterlogged baseballs and splintered bats.

If first base was Anderson's recollection of his neighborhood pickup games, second base was a compacted history of blacks within the pantheon of professional baseball. Remarkably, it was a chronicle that went backward as time marched forward: post-Civil War, there were many black teams, white teams, and integrated teams, but for almost a century thereafter, the major league baseball excluded blacks.

Third base, a corner of the diamond where few players reach provided a wider perspective, a view from the inside out. The frustration of working hard yet having so little drove Anderson to seek guidance at church, where the deacon didn't necessarily provide answers but did say that listening, learning and understanding are acquired skills which in turn can lead to peace, insight and finding a higher ground, even when doors are closed and opportunities denied because of the color of one's skin. That is the ultimate hard place: hard to get to, hard to make do, and hardest of all to accept. Finally making the turn and heading for home, this time home in a literal sense, Anderson's base path was alongside the Ohio river; his words evoking a chorus in a song, repeating a few lines for effect and rhythm as a might poet close every stanza. It was not lost upon the audience that our fellow club member closed by recollecting a journey beside the waterway which once marked the border between slavery and freedom.

Anderson circled the bases with his memoir and musings, in doing so he gave the Literary Club as a full-circle achievement as well. To the best of my recollection, and I'll rely on Historian Vitz to correct me if I'm wrong, the only time this organization was shuttered was during the Civil War when Club members mustered to fight on the side of the Union. So to have a sharecropper's son deliver reminiscences of a childhood where blood-soaked battlefields finally yielded a change in constitutional rights, nonetheless, on this Martin Luther King Day, time has revealed that legal freedom hasn't released blacks from the chains of racism, poverty or injustice for over a century and a half since, and sometimes, still counting.

Sam Greengaus presented "The Rebuke" on December 11<sup>th</sup>. The secretary was unfortunately unable to attend so there isn't an audience count, but hopefully the membership was in force for Sam's illuminating and wise paper. As an administrative aside, our clerk has many duties including the scheduling of papers, and so far this year,

either luck or coincidence has given us the good fortune to hear papers over successive weeks that nicely complement and amplify the message of the previous week. It's one thing to have budgets deliver different elements of a shared theme, but to have full papers line up which offer a different topics illuminating parallel circumstances, perhaps Clerk Cuni should buy a lottery ticket tonight as his roster is on a roll.

Much like Anderson's depiction of black communities within America, Sam's story of an older man and young girl offered a look into Cincinnati's Jewish community in the 1900s. Ostensibly the tale of a structure which had originally built as the community's synagogue undergoing renovation, moreover, Sam's paper is essentially a parable for viewing building as a living history and a instructive lesson on leadership.

The unnamed narrator (who this reader thinks just might be is Sam) tells his granddaughter that the rabbi of the synagogue was his grandfather, hence the young woman's great, great-grandfather. Rabbi Kohlberg served his congregation of Eastern European immigrants for over thirty-five years, working hard to keep Old World customs alive while incorporating some new customs of the New World. Yiddish, and English, were spoken. Religious ceremonies were maintained as were honoring traditions from their faith. But as the children, some born in Europe, some here, grew up, they moved out of the old neighborhood and change descended in many forms and faces.

When Rabbi Kohlberg's health took a turn for the worse, his wife and son focused on his care while wondering what would happen if he passed, i.e. who would provide for the widow. A new member of the congregation began a loud whisper campaign, fuming talk about closing the synagogue and dividing the assets among the members. Finally, the narrator's father steps up to the pulpit -- which he previously avoided following in his father's footsteps by choosing a professorial path instead -- to speak to the congregation during the Feast of the Tabernacle, a religious observance that follows five days after Yom Kippur. But his Uncle Zelig did not use a bully pulpit, but instead shared the homily of plants that are measured for their taste and fragrance, each representing a different sector of the congregation, and ultimately, showing how the malcontent newcomer was neither nurturing nor caring, only self-centered. As the message settled into the crowd, the realization of the right path was gained by the congregation and the disrupter never returned.

Although we no longer live in a time where courtesy is extended even to people one disagrees with, it is restorative to reflect back to when and where letting the bad hombre save face by using metaphors as the fists in velvet gloves, Sam reminded us that invoking traditional practices that allow communities to stay intact even during immersion into a new world is perhaps the best test of one's faith.

The Holiday Observance filled the room with 64 guests and rattled the window casements with the usual wassailing. Led by Dave Edmundson, musical impresario extraordinaire, the Literary Club choir and band distinguished themselves in fine fettle with a program of instrumentals and carols. Thanks to all who had the gumption and vocal pipes to serenade the rest of us. Special mention must be made to Gif Blaylock

who provided a stirring tuba solo or two, again something never before seen or heard in this hallowed hall before.

As there have been many references to tradition and synchronicity, the custom of having the Trustees deliver short holiday addresses rounded out the evening, after Nikko, and their fine staff were saluted by the membership for their service and good cheer.

Ted Silberstein led off with “Who Put that Partridge in my Pear Tree” a paper which gave insight into how the 7-day Roman celebration of Saturnalia (Saturn being the god of agriculture, hence fertility) was re-tooled by organized religion to magically become the story of the Nativity of Christ; prior to being co-opted, Jesus’ birth had moved around in the month of December, long, long before shopping seasons and football games anchored the day on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Ted also shared the history of Christmas carols, which often had their musical roots as pagan round dances. Folklore picked up on carolers visiting front doors, filled with cheers and expectations of being rewarded for their songs. In some ways, it felt more like an early version of Halloween’s trick or treat.

First, wassailing. Foreshadowing Monty Python’s raucous “Holy Grail”, the wassailing we now embrace had its roots in feudal wars, with the King of the Britons seducing a fair damsel and touching off a battle which raged from the 12<sup>th</sup> Century forward for decades, probably continuing long after everyone involved forgot what sparked the fighting in the first place. Next up, “The Twelve Days of Christmas” as a covert Catechism song to keep alive the out-of-favor rites which were at that time outlawed. Then “Come, All Ye Faithful” as a musical code for France to invade England. “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” and “Joy to the World” likewise had nefarious backgrounds, as did countless carols through the ages. No wonder the Europeans love heavy metal music.

Steve Strauss then delivered “Truce.” Befitting an organization that harkens to history like flies to sweetbreads and holiday treats, Steve set the scene depicting the ravages of brutal trench fighting in the Great War. The toll of human lives lost was staggering. The opposing forces dug in, literally, separated by “No Man’s Land”, often no further apart than one hundred feet, in a pitched fight to the death.

Except, that is, on Christmas Eve, 1914. First the Germans sang “Silent Night.” The English answered with “The First Noel.” Promises were made across the battlefield that neither side would fire one upon the other. Christmas Day dawned to decorations by the Germans with Tannebaums topping their parapets. Soldiers from both sides climbed out of their trenches, meeting in the middle, sharing schnapps, cigars and souvenirs; spontaneous soccer games and boxing matches ensued. Of course, the generals swore no kindness to the enemy, but they postured and pontificated far from the front lines. But on that night in that place, like a great Hollywood film, peace broke out; a Christmas miracle indeed.

The final trustee, Joe Dehner, presented what might be the most amusing thoroughly modern Millie, or in this case, Maria, version of the Bethlehem birth over two millennium ago. Perfectly PC for these times, Joe knit minorities into his fable for the New Age, introducing not only Maria as a single parent with manservant duties from Josiah, and midwife Gabriella standing by. Of course this had to be an in vitro fertilization, modern times equivalent of a virgin birth.

Providing a contemporary version of each detail we remember either from church services or Charlie Brown, lo and behold, with AI assistance and all the support of modern medicine, Josiah delivers a Maria-in-labor not to the hospital as planned, but to a church ablaze with light, and Christmas carols being sung by a choir...and folks dressed up like, well, church folks. But Joe's twist, as the choir moves through various songs that first cover the groans of delivery then salutes the miraculous birth, but in this tale, it is a baby girl. A perfect ending, and I quote: "Tonight was not about the brokenness of the world. Tonight was about hope. Tonight was holy."

The coincidence of the calendar had Christmas and New Year's Day land on the following Monday evenings, so the club was on holiday break. Time to wax up the toboggans and break out the hot chocolate. Calling out rounds of holiday greetings and Happy New Year's, the Cincinnati Literary Club retired for the remainder of 2017.

## Minutes of the Literary Club November 2017

It's hard to maintain balance midway between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Two weeks ago, we were fighting off a tryptophan-induced post-turkey coma. Two weeks from now, holiday gatherings will force us to walk the tightrope between gastronomical delight and gluttony. It does no good to resist, so we'll go with the flow-ho-ho. Cue the figgie pudding aromatics and let's put a Yule log on the fire. 2018 New Year's resolutions will come soon enough. Remember though: there's no such thing as an eggnog detox cleanse.

To expedite the minutes this evening, we'll be appropriating the literary license of a Mr. C. Dickens, author of a few books including the novella "A Christmas Carol in Prose; Being a Ghost Story of Christmas." A historical note: while it certainly seems that Ebenezer, Marley, Cratchit and crew have been around forever, this classic tale was in fact, published in 1843...which makes it only six years older than our dear Literary Club. Notably, Chuck Dickens, as I'm sure his chums called him, visited Cincinnati in 1842, so applying publishing math, he may have been working on this beloved manuscript during his time here on the banks of the Ohio River. Perhaps Scrooge himself is Dickens' crystal ball version of Nelson Peltz.

In this evening's production, the role of Marley is played by Monteverdi in John Tew's paper: "The Creator of the Work," which was shared with 49 members and 5 guests. As Marley's presence had a multi-tonal component with chains a-draggin' and money boxes a-clangin', Monteverdi, the creator of the operatic form as we know it, used sounds, glorious, heavenly sounds, to vault onto the world's stage and gave this new art form of opera proper homage to Greek drama. High praise, as countless nights at the Florentine opera house where Monteverdi's arias and strophic songs set the stage for the next 450 years. In John's words, the score "reached a complete maturity, with words and music inseparably intertwined to convey story and emotion." He opened the door to music's highest achievements and countless fans around the world owe him a debt of gratitude – Bravo!

Dick Hague's raucous paper entitled, "Three Ings" entertained 55 members and 6 guests with a memoirist's view of the halcyon days of youth, the same way the Ghost of Christmas Past replayed for Scrooge his rare moments of happiness. Garrulous is perhaps the best way to describe Dick's upriver lexicon. His unabashed love for the way words fit together poured from the podium as a remarkable vocabulary was tapped to reveal the rascal. Detailing the many variations of ing's, he followed the Bard's lead of gaming, drinking, swearing, fencing, quarreling, drabbing (this quaint term should put to good use in polite conversation with the unenlightened) then Dick added "self-surveilling, ruminating, divagating, digressing, plumbing, discovering, apologizing, explicating, and avoiding." The paper explored in detail Cussing, Cursing, Making Music and Misnaming. But even with the wizardry of his words, the beastly subject of male bravado was best defined by his wife, who by virtue of being COO of, and I quote "a household with a male cat, a male dog, two sons, and, of course, one husband, once blurted, with minimal irony, after a typical day of shouting, dirt, scraped flesh, stanced blood, and sweating rambunctiousness, that 'testosterone is poison.'" End quote

The second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, cast a formidable shadow in Bill Sena's paper "The Looming Disaster With Peoples Capitalism." As Bill aptly detailed the Scrooge-like influence of the Super Rich getting richer, and the People getting Poorer in our current society, so too was the case in Victorian London. As with John Tew's paper, the history preceding market conditions of 2017 stretched back centuries when religion, education, and birthright into a royal family established the foundation for culture and commerce. One only needs to skim newspapers to read about the rise of the 1% and the sinking of the other 99. Bill's paper, like Ebenezer, focused on wealth management and how holding capital as the ultimate measure of a man portends a dearth of society and the death of democracy as every working-class family will struggle to keep a roof overhead and a holiday meal on the table like the

Cratchits. Money, like power, corrupts absolutely too. As Bill's and Dicken's papers should be cautionary tales for those of us mired in today's world wherein averages, funds, and market are held in higher esteem than charity and family. 48 members and 4 guests emerged into the night air richer, at least, in knowledge.

Gibby Carey's budget, loosely titled "It Seemed Like a Good Idea" brought the month to a close in the same way that the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come picks up the threads of Bill Sena's paper to show the untimely and unfortunate end of our days if we do not renounce the notion of money over all else. Paul Franz led off with "The Impetuous Lawyer," (I didn't know there were any other kind of lawyers) the story of a young striver working in the litigation department of a large firm which felt like an amalgamation of P&G and Eli Lilly, the latter a tip of the hat to the story's Indianapolis setting. The premise: Jack, the main character, gets "volunteered" by the managing partner to head up the firm's 100-year anniversary. As our former president's story is a third cautionary tale, it stepped lightly across the travails of modern corporate life, delivering wise insights and witty reposts to offset the gravity of when colleagues engage, not bare-fisted, but barely dressed –pursuing that drabbing Dick Hague touched upon – in a grove of trees in a graveyard. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come likewise delivers the coup de grace in a graveyard when pointing out the headstone with Scrooge chiseled into the granite; if only the spirit was also there to point out the poison ivy, which grew not only in the wild but also in the wild, white-shoed hallways.

Gibby's paper revealed how his family's inheritance of a share of a silver mine generated much more excitement and illusions of grandeur than it did income. Yet Gibby, as is his nature, seemed to relish as much in the good-hearted chase cross-country to examine the familial windfall, and didn't seem too put out when the payout was a modest amount which led to a few good dinners and one fine paper. Ebenezer, now fearfully at the side of Christmas Yet to Come begins to grasp that there must be meaning beyond a ledger; Gibby

Carey too would be a good guide to usher Scrooge into this realization.

Rich Lauf's "The Risks of War" may have veered a bit off the Christmas Carol storyline, but it works nicely as closing wisdom of how to survive the holidays. First, though, let it be noted that there has probably never been a paper delivered in the history of the Literary Club about sanitary services in the armed forces that didn't end up, well, let's just say, in the mud. Rich delivered a funny yarn about lack of latrines along the front lines that you really don't want to think about very long, much less visualize. Unfortunately, Rich's descriptive skills made it very hard to turn off the image, and the stench, of disposing of human waste by lighting it on fire, stirring it like Martha Stewart in the prison canteen, and then adding first, diesel fuel, and later, bags of gunpowder, to the mix to "enhance" the process.

It is not too far a stretch to compare some holiday festivities to military exercises – be they the notorious office party or a family affair, with both the in-laws and out-laws gathered round. So as we move through the month of merriment, mingling and too much food, since we now know from Rich's paper what truly happens when the shit hits the *flame*, dear brothers, keep your head down, your mouth shut, don't talk politics or religion, and try to maintain the remarkably optimistic visage of Tiny Tim – God bless us, every one.

Minutes of the Literary Club  
October 2017

Tom Bennett opened October with “Adam’s Other Book” delivered to an audience of 54 members and 4 guests. Tom clearly has an affinity for, and hands-on expertise, with Adam Smith’s economic principles which served him well during his time on Wall Street and carries benefits for the club as our treasurer. The first half of his paper interspersed Smith’s masterwork with Tom’s biographical reflections, almost succeeding to inject life to the massive tome. Tom then showed the depth of Adam Smith’s thoughts on man’s conflicts and aspirations – the *Moral Sentiments*. While it has a more beguiling title, it’s hardly a light read. Tom’s paper was rich in contemporary questioning – which ties to his second career as hospice chaplain. It is always illuminating to have scientists, especially social scientists, offer up their views on man’s inner essence; likewise, the spiritual leaders views on science. Very often, those grounded in science have almost hallucinatory spiritual beliefs; Tom brought together the best of both.

The next two papers of the month were debut efforts, both well writ and delivered like old pros. Bill Killen was first, on October 9, presenting “A Will with No Way.” Timely and revelatory, Bill’s real-life history of freed slave settlements in the Miami River Valley could serve as a historical coda to Colson Whitehead’s much-heralded recent novel *The Underground Railroad*. One of the great joys of the Literary Club is to hear a paper about a subject that was previously unknown, yet so stirring and inspiring in the telling that it’s unforgettable. Having never heard of John Randolph prior, he’s now a bit of a hero to myself, and possibly the other 56 members and 3 guests who were fortunate to hear Bill’s paper.

With a flashback, Bill sketched Randolph’s early life, education, and subsequent career in politics. Resigning from public service to ill health, his weakened state made him consider his legacy and carry through on creating a will that freed his slaves... certainly a more open mindset than his Virginia plantation homestead would at first suggest. It was not easy edict to carry out – first opposed by his heirs who contested his sanity by virtue of essentially giving away the family farm. Then it was the physical challenge of moving 383 men, women and children across 500 miles to the 3200 acres Randolph had acquired for the resettlement of his freed slaves in Mercer county, across the river from Piqua where Bill grew up. Finally, it was the resistance by a mob of whites in New Bremen that proved his expansive thoughts of equality were not shared by the new neighbors.

The freed slaves were more than field hands, for Randolph had provided them an education so most could read and write; moreso, many were skilled tradesmen. Nonetheless, the angry party that met them was definitely not a welcome wagon. The resisting populace had even drafted resolutions to make certain their opposition to Randolph’s plan was clear as white and black and white.

William Leigh, the executor of Randolph’s will, whose job it was to legally clear way for the freed slaves, didn’t arrive for three days afterwards by which time the contingent had already been sent packing. When Leigh finally assessed the situation, he realized that the now abandoned former slaves would never be allowed on the parcel originally secured for

their settlement, Leigh went about finding new land, namely in Rossville, Marshalltown and Hanktown. The freed slaves settled across the region, still without an open-arms welcome, yet in time, took up arms for the Union in the Civil War. When reading our history books in grade school, perception of the Emancipation Proclamation as sweeping and immediate acceptance of racial equality, but as Bill detailed, virtually every step forward was contested, both in daily relations as well as judicial litigation. To illustrate just how slow society can move, it took 84 years and dozens of court cases to finally settle ...with the verdict rendered not in favor of the Randolph heirs who had contested the will. As Martin Luther King later reflected, “change comes through continuous struggle.”

Stephen Schweller’s “Vicars and Tarts” was a rollicking tale of a clergyman who possessed more than just a wandering eye. 56 members and 6 guests were in attendance. Harold Davidson, the paper’s protagonist, had a hard upbringing – son of poor vicar in a backwater parish, haphazard student, fledgling thespian – but when there are 27 family members who took Holy Orders, you have a sense of where your future lies.

Here’s a paraphrased excerpt which sets the stage as to the offbeat nature of our subject: “Davidson solemnized his first wedding with the union of Gladys Sutherst and the 6th Marquess Townshend. Gladys, an eighteen year-old beauty with ambitions, had set her sights on marrying the Marquess, who was twenty years older, owned very little land, and appeared a bit unstable. For his part, Townshend was all in favor of the match, believing that he was marrying the daughter of a millionaire and not, as it turned out, a bankrupt with over a quarter of a million pounds of debts. To complicate matters, the Marquess’ family threatened to have him certified as insane if he went through with the marriage. Undeterred, the couple married with Davidson officiating.” What holy mess is still to come...

By virtue of his officiating the marriage, Davidson was appointed rector of a small Norfolk parish, granted an 800 pound stipend for life, plus a 20 room Georgian rectory and 60 acres of land - not bad for a couple hours’ work. With this financial windfall, Davidson married Molly Saurin, an actress, four children followed, and all sorts of hell broke loose.

It seemed that Davidson couldn’t get the theater out of his blood, spending six days out of the week tending to the spiritual needs of aspiring actresses faraway in either London or Paris. Davidson’s erratic and unwanted advances against the very flock he shepherded cast him as a possible role model for Harvey Weinstein a hundred years hence. Davidson was barred from a number of theaters because of his habit of barging into the showgirls’ changing rooms. He also chaperoned newly recruited dancers to the Folies Bergere. Then during WWI, he was arrested during a police raid on a brothel in Cairo. A man of the cloth, indeed, well, at least the frilly undergarment kind of cloth.

Soon he was in cahoots with John Arthur Gordon, a nefarious businessman who was best at bilking investors, with Davidson being one of his first marks. Perhaps a match made in heaven, the two moved monies back and forth in an early version of a Ponzi scheme which only served to double down the subsequent charges of immoral acts or conduct. A church investigation led directly to one of the more salacious trials in the Consistory Courts. Definitely fodder for the tabloids, every action, then subsequent defense thereof, rendered Davidson’s claims of innocence beyond the pale. Defrocked, Davidson became a

sideshow attraction (spending time in a barrel, a glass coffin, and a lion's cage) as he frantically tried to stay one step ahead of creditors, policemen, and the lion that ultimately caught him by the neck. One could easily imagine the Monty Python troupe having a field day with the people and proceedings of this fine paper – as often said about the best non-fiction: you can't make this stuff up, every detail and incredulous twist rich with irony and ribaldry.

Most fiction writers claim that only a novel affords the space for an author to chronicle a character's lifetime. On October 23, Ed Burdell took up the challenge of capturing a life in a short story entitled "Two Old Dogs." George Brown, native of Michigan, went east to college where he met, and later married, Margaret, whom he calls Maggie. The tides of life took them from a vacation in Paris to a first job on Wall Street to moving to Cincinnati. It was a fast forward through his career at an insurance company where his corner office might have been a perk, but was also a cul-de-sac. There were mid-life crises – the vintage Mustang never arrives, the boys seem too busy for his birthdays, work becomes routine – but the biggest change from age 50 to 62 was what's called a shaggy dog story, and in this case, the canine went by the name Leroy.

In addition to the regional touches that establish the piece, it is the relationship between man and dog that forms the heart of Ed's story. A touch of Steinbeck's "Travels with Charlie" and the numerous other tales about the connection between we males and the four-legged beasts better known as man's best friend, George and Leroy carry the story forward from a shared viewpoint of watching time go by. Daily walks and inter-species conversations spice up the Updike-esque saga of the insult of early retirement. Feeling removed from life deepens the bond between the two old dogs, but things turn interesting when Maggie, now better known as Margaret, engineers a move from a suburban my-home-is-my-castle to a downtown condo. With an ending reminiscent of "101 Dalmatians" wherein the two dogs bring their respective owners together, Leroy and Grace bring George to Joy in a cliff-hanger of an ending, and who knows where Joy will take him.

On October 30, 58 members celebrated our 168<sup>th</sup> anniversary with papers delivered by Historian Bob Vitz and President Tom Murphy. The evening was burnished to a gleam with dignified dress and delicious dining. Thanks to Nikkos and his staff for making the occasion one of the highlights of the club's year.

Fittingly for a commemoration tagged to longevity, both papers looked back. In "The Visitors' Register, Revisited" Bob shared the voice of former Club president and historian Robert Ralston Jones, whose day job was supervising engineer for the lock and dam system along the Ohio; on the side, he published a history of Ft. Washington, a site commemorated with a plaque across Lytle Park from where we sit.

It feels like a time warp to hear Bob quote Jones speaking on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1899, with an address by Ainsworth Rand Spofford. Robert Ralston Jones also noted that Ralph Waldo Emerson visited during the first fiscal year of the club's existence. He also mentioned Moncure Daniel Conway, William Howard Taft, George Washington Cable and Walter Johannus Damrosch. Perhaps next year's historian's paper will turn up the year when membership no longer required having three names.

Equally impressive to the names of famous guests were the global ports of call represented in the register: Dublin, New York, Zurich, London, St. Petersburg, Dresden and countless more remarkable locales. Considering the hardship entailed by travel in the 1800s, getting here was no small feat so the Literary Club obviously had some gravitational pull once our guests hit the banks of the Ohio. Bob did a wonderful job mixing short bios of luminaries with the descriptions of events over a hundred years ago. In the end, Bob's paper not only enlightened us, moreso, he aptly spun a web of names and places that anchored here at our weekly home away from home, 500 E. 4<sup>th</sup> St.

President Tom Murphy followed by reflecting back a century to the Club's sixty-eighth anniversary. What's rather remarkable is that at the fiftieth anniversary, Bob had uncovered a tradition wherein the anniversary was called the Historian's Evening, an occasion at which the President didn't speak; eighteen years later, Tom's paper revealed that the historian didn't participate for the anniversary but there was a budget of eight papers presented by seven individuals. To both of our researchers, I extend this bit of timeworn advice: be careful what you wish for...

As the US had entered WWI half a year prior, it's no surprise that over half of the eight budget papers featured a military theme. A few of the others centered on poetry, again no surprise as nothing brings out the fighting spirits in Literarians more than a rousing debate on the merits of free verse. If one is lucky, fisticuffs will follow. The outlier paper was about evening dress, hence this somber garb as an attempt to fit in to what was described as the democratic mien.

Finally as we commence our 169<sup>th</sup> year, thank you, Tom, for sharing the one title to which all those who will orate from this podium this year can aspire: benevolent tyrant. Good night.

Minutes of the Literary Club  
September 2017

Tom Murphy, new president of the Cincinnati Literary Club called the membership to order to start the 2017-18 season on September 19<sup>th</sup> 2017; commencing our 168<sup>th</sup> year as menfolk spinning wool, with a nod to past president Paul Franz for providing the catalyst to that notion in last year's anniversary address.

In terms of format, Joe Dehner started the new season just as the previous season had closed, with a work of fiction. Hence the same literary high bar in assessing his commendable short story entitled "Heart of Lightness."

I would add that this is a paper that can be relished while read as much as while listening, as many of the names were wordplay. The narrator is never named, but he is met first by Wolram, where he hears of Mr. Ztruk who works for Retcorp & Elbmag. If looking metaphorically in a mirror, the characters are Marlow and Kurtz, the latter having worked at Procter & Gamble. Not content with those creations, Joe also rendered the diseases of internetitis and iphoneria. The "heart" of the story is the search for Ztruk who disappeared into the Colombian rain forest in search of a billion-dollar brand, appropriately named Aahhh, a concoction of coca leaf and lime. It was at this moment of drafting the minutes that 60s nonsense song about "mix de lime with de coconut" lodged itself in my head – thanks, Joe.

But if the story's title wasn't enough to tip you off, this was Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness re-cast as a satire of modern-day marketing and product placement...although when Wolram crossed the Indiana Jones shaky bridge in the sky a thousand feet above a plunge to certain death, it seems they've entered the Willie Wonka factory as the guards' heads are topped with hats shaped like Hershey's kisses.

It's an adventure tale deep into the heart of picaresque parody. Wolram's dialogue is akin to Yoda's philosophical mutterings. Ztruk, once found, is almost Obi Wan-Kenobe like in his instruction that the narrator must become The Messenger. And when Ztruk is about to expire, instead of "The horror, the horror" the line of deepest despair becomes "The money, the money." You say tomato, I say tomato.

The only element of Joe's story that I might question is the ability of anyone to sit in a full lotus pose while aboard a plane. Granted I'm not flying Medallion, but I can barely wedge my backside into the airline's version of a chastity belt. I think poor Dreyfuss from Fred's story might have had a more restful flight in leg irons than modern travelers. Then again, this was fiction.

On September 26, 2017 Peter Briggs brought a budget to 51 members and one guest. Although relying here on seven years of memory rather than consulting the archives, in this case I believe this budget was the most contemporary, daresay I, even cutting edge, in terms of subject materials received by the members of the Literary Club. Peter led off by re-introducing the notion of mandatory service for Americans post-high school. As the concept has been debated and discussed for decades, in light of a society roiling with class differences, divergent and divisive politics, and polemic world views, finding a way to instill camaraderie and defense of country, hearth and fellow man is a noble intention.

During his time at the podium, Chris Milligan not only presented a punctilious paper, but also demonstrated how important the other elements of delivering a paper can be aside from the writing. A pregnant pause, an arched eyebrow, a wink and a nod each communicated as much as *le mot juste*. In his paper, "All Atwitter", Chris documented the recent and remarkable rise of social media worldwide.

It would be akin to shooting fish in an empty barrel to hazard a guess as to how many Literarians boast a thriving Twitter following, but we're all here to learn, and Chris was an insightful and entertaining teacher. We learned that most of these social media companies have been around for perhaps a decade, not much more. Still wet behind the ears, we'd say. We learned that out of the 24 individuals that fill Twitter's top 30 list, only 4 graduated from college. Goes to show you, we'd say. But then we learned about the breadth and depth of social media influence, as if we didn't know already, and to quote Linus and/or the Bible when speaking of shepherds in the field – we'd say..."and they were sore afraid."

The switch from we to they in the previous sentence was intentional to intro Tom Murphy's "Sticks and Stones," a witty and timely examination of how personal pronouns are losing the ground war in the new world view of sexuality. For example: the non-binary generation means that an individual identifies with multiple genders, not simply male or female. Hence, they like to be referred to as they. Wait, that's incorrect, it's a he or a she that would prefer

to be referred to as they. But because it's a he or she (singular) who would prefer to be called they (singular, although every single one of us in this room have been schooled that "they" and "we" are plural), oh, bugger this. To quote with this line from the Beatles, "I am he as you are he and you are me and we are all together." No they's there, and I checked, but every other pronoun was used.

Let's convert this from a grammar fubar to a math problem. There are 50 of us in this room tonight – we've all had at least 12 years of education, many with advanced degrees. So let's say there's an average of 15 years per member times 50 members. That means that 750 English teachers just turned in their graves and said, together, as they I might add, "NO." Does this mean that every English test going forward will have to be multiple choice, and the only correct answer will always be: all of the above. For those of us who thought that long-ago club visitor Mark Twain might have been on thin ice with racial pronouns and such in "Huck Finn," all I've got to say is beware, otherwise Generation WTF will have our heads on pikes because their SJAs can kick our LWA (LW = Lily White) all the way back to Strunk and White.

Compounding the minefield of gender grammar is parenting, as Tom then regaled the audience with more befuddling examples of gender misidentification in what might still be called the new millennium (as all of us here still remember the old one). After the dust settled, all I knew for sure was this: that difficult period the club went through a couple years ago when debating whether to allow women, the issue would either be moot or a deathtrap if we called everyone 'they.' Who's in, who's out and who's on first? I hear an Abbot-and Costello mash-up with Lewis Carroll's Alice at the tea party on the turntable, and my head is spinning.

This budget might be the one, with authors' permission, could be read aloud over every dinner table at the holidays for the merriment and high ideals of all gathered. But be ready, the younger generation will not be amused. But as we've learned...they are never amused, at least not when we're in the room.