

Minutes of the Literary Club
October 2020

A Literary Club first occurred on Monday, October 5. Notable in part because there are precious few first's left for any institution over 170 years old. But also, or moreso, if we were able to somehow convey to our founders that this first would be a club meeting canceled due to technical difficulties, they would believe we had lost our sense and sensibilities; what next, would we suggest that man was going to walk upon the moon?

Yet somehow the elders had prepared us for this moment with a non-digital supernumerary. So while our computer screens were blacked out, we could switch to the Cincinnati Magazine article on the Literary Club which showed up in the mailbox that very same day. Written by literarian Polk Laffoon, it presented to Queen City readers a timeline and chronicle that's familiar to us, but news to anyone unaware of LC lore and legend. A fair summation of our his-story, it did share that we still don't include her-story, apologies if anyone else was likewise sleeping on the couch for a few subsequent nights.

On October 12, 2020, we were live once again when David Cave brought "Reading Goethe at 60" to 74 others via zoom broadcast. A standout paper in terms of scholarship, contemplation, and erudition, David drew upon many, many literary references to develop a set of scales upon which to weigh his life, contemplating how he purposed his life, including what he aimed to achieve in years still to come.

Formidable in its gathering of luminary insight, David opened with a Nietzsche ten-line quote that he's carried in his wallet for untold years. As I, and perhaps others, collect instead tiny strips of fortune-cookie wisdom there, this served to throw down the gauntlet for a stringent self-examination paired with a reading list that will last us until we're post-pandemic and gathered together in one room once again.

Via Goethe and other major authors in the Western canon, David examined his path to style an identity, how to strive but not settle, how to choose his path forward. To re-quote, that is to quote a quote which is like re-tweeting but not profane: "to create a life out of the materials that history has given you." This tenet and others cited transported us back to the college classroom where high ideals lead to deep contemplation. By invoking Goethe, who quote, "influenced more than one field of modern science, and whose philosophy integrated idealism with realism, how to channel, through the power of the imagination and through deeds, the ideal into the constraints of nature, circumstance, and duty" is a high bar indeed. Yet David maintained this rigorous application of knowledge and yearning, all centered around the principle of continual self-education, by tending to where he was planted, and ultimately, to become a flaneur "within the concept of urbanism to refer to a person who allows himself to explore his surroundings, his place, guided only by his curiosity and confidence to move into what is not known."

The Portrait and the Pots. The mystery, and the history, of our Literary Club surrounds us, but it's not uncommon to have this past hiding in plain sight, as revealed by Sam Greengus' paper, delivered on the 19th of October to 72 members. Specifically tracing the fascinating backstory of two clay pots that sit on the mantel in the reading room, these were gifts from Nelson Glueck, whose visage graces the Time magazine cover on the West wall. The two pots are the oldest objects

in the clubhouse (and that's saying a lot, all things considered), dating back some 4000 years. Glueck's past officially dates back to his Cincinnati birth in 1900. His interest in relics bloomed during childhood, manifesting into a 45-year career as archeologist, with the bonus, our bonus, of his membership as literarian for 30 years.

How the two pots came to be dated was through the diligent application of research by a Brit named William Flinders Petrie and Glueck's mentor, William Albright, archaeologists who worked independently at major excavations through the Mideast. Akin to geological stratification in sandstone that delineates centuries, Glueck was able to use their research to date the clay vessels back to the middle Bronze Age. Duty then called Glueck back to Cincinnati where he accepted the position of president of the Hebrew Union College and lived out his remaining years. Sam's paper, likewise, Nelson Glueck's life, was a metaphoric natural bridge between the previous week's classical discourse of David Cave's paper and Bob Vitz's historian's paper on Simeon Johnson which led off our Anniversary dinner the following week.

The Historian's papers in recent years are delights as they dive into the LC archives in order to grab one or two long forgotten literarians by the collar and yank them into the bright light of 2020, reviewing their palmares, and in the process, renewing our appreciation for their remarks and commitment to the club.

Bob's subject for the 171st Anniversary was inspired – longevity. Call it what you may – tenure, fortitude, unquenchable thirst...for knowledge and camaraderie – but literarians no longer spry are nonetheless still indomitable.

Using the late Robert Smith's two score years as the yardstick, five current members already exceed that total: Bill Burleigh, John Tew, Ducky Wadsworth, Lew Gatch and Tuck Asberry leading that pack with 59 years of attendance on Monday evenings. Scrolling through the membership records of previous marathoners, Charles Wilby comes to light with 58 years, one less than Tuck, but remarkable considering his authorship of over 300 papers...which means he delivered, on average, at least 5 papers per year. That's a high bar for all of us who like to hang out at the bar.

Bob's winner is Simeon Johnson who was a Literarian for 72 years, a number that's almost unbelievable at a time (1859) when the average life expectancy was 45 years of age (which factors in relatively high infant mortality, but still...). A lawyer by training, he almost forsook the principles of fairness by becoming involved in local politics, at one point serving as vice-mayor, which doesn't necessarily mean mayor of those involved in vice, but one never knows. What we do know, thanks to Bob's research, is that as a lawyer Mr. Simeon employed both fisticuffs and whips. Suffice it to say, we're glad he was on our side. Thank you, Historian Vitz, for this life review of the only literarian to attend both the 50th and the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Literary Club. Perhaps his legacy, which he tipped to in a parody-filled presidential paper, will be "electrical wires attached to the chairs could now shock slumbering listeners into some level of alertness." For all the renovation that President Silberstein mentioned at the start of the evening, wise members will check their newly refurbished chairs for plugs and fuses before settling in.

Ted brought the Anniversary paper, framed (literally) by Gauguin's painting of Polynesian natives with three questions attached to it: Where do We Come From? What are We? and Where Are We Going? President Silberstein posed this trio as the questions we as club members must answer as well.

Where do we come from can be traced from our minutes, papers, and written histories. Sprung from the twelve Cincinnati men who declared on October 29, 1849 to meet regularly, maintain bylaws, and formalize their meetings as the Literary Club. Countless documents have been written and read in the 171 years since. Most have been gathered and protected in our library. Although there are some gaps, Ted's call was to reinvigorate the process of better maintenance of preserving our past. He even advanced the notion of each of us reviewing a different year's worth club papers to reinject their past life into our present. If my high school English required reading doesn't fail me, this sounds somewhat like what those individuals in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* who undertook memorizing the literature and stories of the day before these books were consumed by flames. We don't face the prospect of conflagration, thank heavens, especially for those of us who can't remember what we might have had for lunch, or if we had lunch. But to pledge for better record keeping is indeed a worthwhile endeavor.

The second question is What are We? Initially a debating club, we evolved to a singular paper (except for budgets) presented per meeting. We grew from twelve to a hundred. We've moved numerous times. As is often said, the only constant is change, but hopefully we can always be, quote, "men of attainment, sympathetic to the arts and scholarship, and not bored by serious discussion."

The final question: Where are We Going? Ted's words serve as best response to future literarians, quote: "We must examine, for our future membership, our attitudes and history for diversity, equity, and inclusion. These are not merely slogans; they are a call to action. There is no question in my mind that we will welcome creative candidates for Club membership who demonstrate their ability to write well, regardless of, in the words we have heard all our lives, "race, creed, or color." End quote. Well said, Ted, very well said.

Minutes of the Literary Club December 2020

Jim Miller brought “Dryin’ Up” on December 7, 2020 to 84 zoomers. Anticipating the yin of a tempered paper on sobriety, myself and other members considered having the yang, that is, a drink in hand. This is like flossing furiously before a dental appointment or swinging by church to atone with an overdue confession before a night on the town, thereby affirming the inherently marvelous contrariness of the human condition.

Jim served up that expectation on a silver tray, flashing back to the shiny platters that showcased hors d’voures at his parents’ cocktail parties. It was at those occasions where he learned to imbibe by polishing off the left-behind half-empty drinks of the adults. Effie, the housekeeper, entered the picture here (or the paper, as it is) at this point, and introduces Jim to his next fascination, the Cincinnati Reds. It was during this period that the local baseball team regularly hoisted championship trophies and spraying champagne bottles when celebrating pennant-winning seasons.

Jim graduated high school in Dayton, Ohio, then lit out on Robert Frost’s road (or expressway) less traveled, vamoosing up I-75 to the Univ of Michigan instead of east along I-70 to Ohio State. He somehow found abstinence in Ann Arbor whereas his buddies in Columbus found peace, love (helped by a dollop of aphrodisiacs) and cannabis. For those of us who might recall the film “The Big Chill” remember a tribe of free-love friends who tripped through a heady four-year stint at UM; perhaps Jim was perhaps a bit biased in drawing a hard line of distinction between OSU and UM. Jim self-described as a fuddy-duddy who didn’t drink, which is a curious about-face considering his boyhood head start. But onward we go, from undergrad to the Harvard Business School, back home to work at the family real estate firm, which returned him to the cocktail culture. Jim’s job was to manage with a few prime properties in Cincinnati, a position for which over time, his enthusiasm dried up and he switched over to financial services, another chapter of his career.

It is often said “You never know what life will bring you.” If that’s true, Jim did a fine job in capturing this wherever-the-wind-may-blow quality as we all wondered where the paper might go next. Eventually, he wound back around to where he started, confessing that he liked the botanicals a bit too much so he steered himself into programs that provided perspective on alcohol attachment, and measures of control, allowing him to trod the straight and narrow. Here, here for realizing how close one can be to the edge yet guiding oneself – with professional help – to a state of clarity.

On December 14, 2020 Jim Murray’s paper also took us up I-75 to Michigan, although his fictional flight shared little except that northern escape with Jim Miller’s. Perhaps it’s their same first names, an association with the late, great American novelists Jim Harrison and Jim Hemingway. Who’s to say? All we knew for sure – we were back in the Wolverine State.

As the first circle in a Venn diagram, “The Kalamazoo” overlaps in tone and content with the New York Times bestselling book, and major studio film release of “Hillbilly Elegy” – poor folks from the hollers of Kentucky escaping familial and economic abuse by following the North Star in search of a better life. This short fiction captivated club members with vivid details and visceral physicality that snapped back our heads to avoid collateral damage when the main character was slapped, pushed, or bullied. Redemption, or at least refuge, was found when our unnamed narrator left the trailer park trash, which had become his nickname, to venture out into the woods.

A solitary pilgrimage, he discovered an abandoned canoe under the snow which became his passage out of squalor. The seminal moment came during a high school football practice when revenge was meted out against the nemesis of his nightmares. With a literal and metaphoric blitz, our hero leveled his oppressor with a hit doubled by the force of shame and anger. Having prepared for his exodus, he spared no time in gathering up his few possessions and loading them into the canoe, never looking back as he put Comstock behind him as the paddle repeatedly pulled him forward. Where the river took him, we don't know, perhaps that's a future paper we certainly would welcome.

On December 21, our holiday celebration brought out the sugarplums. The evening started with a return trip to the finest drive-through window in town, located at the Queen City Club. Food buckled in safely on the passenger seat, we returned to our respective homes for that three-word phrase so often used this time of year: A Holiday Spectacular. Forty-five minutes of song and reflections, this pre-recorded program was again wonderfully created and directed imagined by Dave Edmundson. Add in the technical wizardry of Scott Silberstein, it could have been a Hallmark special. But bandwidth was the Grinch to literarians, but a perfect viewing experience is available to all who want to download and replay the hi-rez version. For those frustrated by frozen faces – not the kind with snowflakes on the eyelashes – and echoing voices like those bouncing off ice walls in the lair of the Bumble, the shift back to live versions of papers from the trustees was a welcome return to our disconnected digital existence.

Rich Lauf read two papers, his entitled “Cultural Appropriation” as well as Steve Straus’ “The Most” since Steve was sadly unable to participate in the holiday program (gladly, reports of Steve’s recuperation were relayed last week and we send our best wishes for a full recovery).

Rich’s thesis is that, quote, “cultural appropriation leads to the enrichment of both cultures” end quote, instead of the seesaw of over-sensitivity and societal reproach. Rich’s father served as organist and choir director of the Swedish Lutheran Church, but the Lauf family attended services at a different church because his father’s church, quote, “lay far too far from our house to walk, and my mother didn’t drive. If we all rode with my father, we five kids would have been captive for both services that my father played and the hour between services. Neither parent thought it was even remotely a good idea for us hellions to spend that much time there. Thus, my mother took us to the only protestant church within walking distance.”

The Swedish Lutherans had a holiday tradition of painting Advent candles. Rich’s dad took his gift candle home and the rest of the Lauf were so smitten that they, in turn, created a production line for painting their version of Advent candles for the German Protestant congregation. They too swooned. Yes, strictly speaking, this is appropriation, i.e., taking a from one culture/faith and introducing it to another, one might say, but certainly with a joyous heart and best wishes for a bright new year. A fine Yuletide reminiscence indeed.

Steve’s paper told us the backstory of America’s most popular holiday song: “White Christmas” Composed by Irving Berlin – a Jewish Russian immigrant— “White Christmas” is pointedly not religious – no angels, wise men, nor Santa. Instead Berlin’s lyrics stirred a nostalgia for hearth and home which Berlin overheard from others when serving in WWI. He turned that tour of duty into material for many, many hits. White Christmas was first publicly performed by Bing Crosby, just weeks after Pearl Harbor was attacked. As they say, it was an instant classic.

John Brackett, our newest trustee, brought the final paper of the evening: “The Legend of Saint Nicholas, a.k.a. Santa Claus, a.k.a. Kris Kringle.” We are, as Rich, Steve, and then John pointed out, a multi-cultural society. Many races, many cultures of origin, many traditions, all rolled up in pierogis, fruitcakes, cookies and downed with egg nog.

As a youngster, John was grounded in practicality when questioning Santa’s mysteries. Why, how, why, where, why and why, his mother was queried when she walked through the door after work. Later finding his calling in research, writing and history, John found answers in the stacks and computer files where his beleaguered mother was denied access. The Santa archetype’s first evolution was Odin of Norse mythology. It’s a richly imagined heritage that includes the best of tales dreamed up in the very, very cold and dark place as winter seems to be a year-round season for civilizations founded that close to the Arctic Circle. Noting his appearance and supposedly powers, Odin transformed into Father Christmas, then Santa Claus, later prospered as Saint Nicholas with the story of Christ’s birth, as if he was refining his legacy to become the male lead in the Christmas pageant. There was a captivating digression that tied street walkers to ol’ St. Nick, but we’ll sanctify these minutes with allusion instead of examples. Certainly, there’s enough scandal tied to famous father figures so we can note, nod and move on to the most important, and enduring element of Santa Claus, quoting John: “Giving freely to innocents—children, the old, the various needy—is still a valuable attribute in an often violent, self-centered, and uncertain world. To me, it really doesn’t matter whether he lived or not. It is what the story keeps alive in us.”

We’ve come to the end of a year destined to be remembered as a number – 2020 – now forever cast as the numeric iteration of “uh-oh” a poisonous timestamp and moniker of mortality, the updated brand of 666, the expiration date for crowds, concerts, and the smiles of strangers.

2020 also stands for perfect vision, yet to say the least, we sure didn’t see this one coming. We’ve all read stories about the blackouts in seaside towns and major cities during the two World Wars, a government edict to darken telltale targets that kept buildings and citizens from being bombed into oblivion. This time, we evaded extinction by hunkering down at home. Shut down, locked down, hidden in a dark place lit only by the screens of our computers and cell phones. Coronavirus, pass us by.

Imagine if this were the 1800s, or even the 1900s, and that the Literary Club would not, could not have met for a full calendar year. Initially, a flurry of letters would certainly have ensued...but could they have continued long enough to keep our group together? A century later, it would have been phone calls, but even with a telecommunications advance, it’s hard to imagine a switchboard with enough wires to keep us all connected in the same way that zoom has. We witnessed on our little glowing screens the high dives and technological foibles of fellow members, we saw their home screens, heard their spouses’ voices, saw the name of their computer set up by their sons and daughter, or perhaps grandkids. The internet became our safety net, the silky strands of world-wide web binds us together. While the New Year will be rung in from an empty Times Square, it seems certain that life will get a literal and metaphoric shot in the arm and rebound.

The Literary Club is now more than ever unorthodox, if not anachronistic – a group bent on gathering (lions) – shaking hands (tigers) – close talking (bears), plus drinking (oh my). A dapper crowd dedicated to the stripped-down entertainment of listening to a lone speaker at a lectern without a green screen behind him. It seems incredulous – simply man standing stock still behind a lectern in a hall where sixty seated men raptly listened or sonorously slumbered.

In the end, it was the year of a stutter – 2020. Work, travel, dreams all stuttered. For over a quarter million individuals and families, life inconsolably stuttered, then stopped. We can consider the eerie echo of 1919, when our Club went on hiatus when the Spanish flu ravaged society. While we know that none of us will be here for the next stutter – 2121 – nonetheless, we can imagine that a group which existed for 171 years can surely coast through the next, mere 101 years. While we wish to have the razor wit of Dorothy Parker’s epitaph, i.e., “Pardon my dust” carved on her headstone, likewise our dust will have blown away by then. But we will not be erased.

A single calendar year bridges two literary seasons, so here we must thank both past President Dehner and current President Silberstein for keeping us apart, therefore still together. By staying united while separated, we honor our beginnings, the very heart of the Literary Club’s conception, constitution and continuing traditions. In a line, we hope that our words will stir, provoke response, and most of all remain, in some form or fashion, for that is all we have. Our words are what we offer up weekly (sometimes weakly, but most often, well-crafted) as the best of us, meditations and musings that we’ve pondered, drafted, polished, revised (hopefully), also hopefully practiced, before sharing with our brethren. These words, we believe, are the best of our being, surviving the past year and flourishing again in years to come.

Minutes of the Literary Club February 2021

February 1, 2021. One of the many delights for Literarians is the range of papers we are treated to. Whether listening when first delivered, or reading them later, the diversity of subjects, styles and circumstances never ceases to impress upon us how lucky we are to learn by virtue of a 45-minute assimilation. To wit, in “The Horse Breeder’s Tale” by Phil Diller, the paper begins by enumerating the many facets of his family story, hence we learn many things fast: an Ohio farm story, a love story of a hard-working couple, a story of innovative technology plus medical science and businesses that went bust. But most captivating, he foretells an ominous story, one not told to the children, or if mentioned, is shared in hushed tones or in code.

Phil’s great-great-grandfather David was a first generation American, a disciple of the Mennonite faith which then, as still now, is a way of life wedded to the family farm. After his son Henry’s marriage to Anna, seven children followed, plus establishing a farm on 20 acres given to them by David. The farm added an orchard and livestock, the couple diversified in duties and offerings. Henry became a horse breeder of note.

Here is where Phil’s familial tale turned dark: tractors supplanted draft horses, economic distress followed World War I, followed by the stock market crash in 1929. Gored by a bull and never the same thereafter, Henry Diller sunk into depression, suffered delusions and was institutionalized. The surviving family members did the best to pitch in, but with their own lives to lead, Henry essentially wasted away until he took his own life in the very barn that once served as the center of the family enterprise. To end where we began, quote: “Dark stories include social behaviors that are morally unacceptable, an embarrassment, featuring the fearful side of humanity rooted in our fallen angels.”

8 Feb, 2021 The meeting commenced with a memorial for Doug Maundrell.

Bill Pratt then brought “Soul Food” a paper which proposes that feeding the body, while perpetuating life, is a nutritional process that does nothing to feed the soul. Quote: “The soul, if we read about it in the works of a philosopher like Aristotle, has never been physical. He called it metaphysical, meaning beyond the physical, and taught that it comes not just from thinking but from believing.” And then this, which gets to the heart of Bill paper: “What our minds hunger for is knowledge. The mind craves to be educated, and education comes from reading books and from listening to those who have read more of them than we have. Good books are as essential to a healthy mind as good food is for a healthy body.” End quote. The luminary Robert Penn Warren cut to the quick when he stated that it was poetry that served as food for the soul. And that to nourish the soul, poetry must be widely read and appreciated.

The table was thus set for a metaphoric day of soul food. Gerald Manley Hopkins’s “As Kingfishers Catch Fire” was the first dish upon which to dine; in this sonnet, the poet affirms the unique identity of each person and thing in lyric form. The second bite for breakfast was John Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning.” Perhaps the most sophisticated metaphysical love poem ever written, Donne composed it for his wife before commencing a long journey. Lunch was served first with Emily Dickinson’s “There’s a Certain Slant of Light” which carries a finely detailed description of a moment, a look, an observation of nature looking from inside out. The second mid-day offering came from T. S. Eliot with “The Journey of the Magi.” While known best for his

epic “The Waste Land” this poem shares Eliot, and the Magi respectively, reconsidering their religion, in Eliot’s case when he converts to the Anglican church. Finally, for dinner, Professor Pratt served two entrees – “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” by Ezra Pound and “When You are Old” by William Butler Yeats. These six courses sated the group while proving that poetry sated and seasoned our appreciative palates.

On February 15th, Ted Striker brought “Bill and Siggy” a dual profile of William James and Sigmund Freud, the two leading minds of the emergent study of psychology as it evolved from literary subject to a medical science. With a title like that, though, these charter members of the grave countenance crew seemed very chummy, but as we learned from Phil’s paper the week prior, while doctors can accurately estimate how long it will take a body to heal, psychiatrists tussle years with uncertain recovery.

William James was born into a luminary American family of letters (which notably extended via his younger brother, the novelist Henry Adams). His life muddled in his 20s, but he eventually settled at the Harvard Medical School where he focused on physiology. Later, when teaching at Harvard College, he pioneered with insights into psychology, which led to his being labeled the Father of Psychology. His notable publication, *Principles of Psychology*, detailed his understanding of the new science based on four pillars: Stream of Consciousness, Emotion, Habit and Will.

Freud, 14 years younger, was born half a world away into an unsettled childhood where the family often moved due to anti-Semitism. A favorite quote re: his early childhood was this: “Freud’s mother, the third wife of his father, and twenty years his junior, was younger than some of her stepchildren. The family had a complex make-up especially after she bore eight additional children. Sigmund, however, was always the light of his mother’s life.” As Isaac Newton would say, this apple didn’t fall far from that tree.

Freud focused his education in the hard sciences, then sharpened his study into psychology. Freud’s pioneering theories included identifying the Id, Ego, superego in the structure and function of the mind. These developing theories led to his landmark work “The Interpretation of Dreams” and his exploration of the unconscious mind.

Coincidentally, nearing the end of their careers, James and Freud followed psychology into religious philosophy, therein offending many who felt strongly that religion was an area into which the tentacles of psychology should not extend. Who’s to say? Or otherwise, God knows?

A parallel reading of J.D. Salinger’s “Franny and Zooey” did a Viennese waltz with Ted’s “Bill & Siggy” The writings of all three emergent voices pioneered psychology first medicine, later in culture via Salinger’s fiction. The meandering meeting of the minds will never fail to amuse and bewilder readers as new insights echo on fresh pages and rise together to be viewed as avant garde, even if at first it was just titular...a word which probably made Freud chortle.

On February 22, Igor Dumbadzhe brought a budget with the theme, and title, “What’s past is prologue.” Igor’s contribution began with the quote from Shakespeare’s “The Tempest” then a parable starring two older gentlemen, neighbors who meet every Saturday for breakfast, one a survivor of the WWII atomic bomb, and the other, a former pilot who may have been part of the attacking force. Ignited by 75th anniversary of Hiroshima, this curtain opens the theme of forgiveness, notably, quote “Forgiveness is emotionally difficult because evolution has endowed us

with the psychological motivation to avoid being exploited by others, thus the urge to retaliate is deeply rooted in evolutionary history, and is a passion that is present in every human being.”

Tom Carothers also brought a piece of fiction, but set his out on the Left Coast as San Francisco in the 60s was called. Reminiscent of Wallace Stegner’s “All the Little Live Things” in theme, setting and time, Tom sketched a winning story that illuminated a past still present.

Larry, the protagonist, returns from Vietnam with a wise but world-weary view. To counter that, he joins the counter culture. He meets Sarah, soon his flower child girlfriend, in Haight-Ashbury. Along with a tribe of like-minded others, they decamp for a few idyllic months to a commune up the coast, where all were able to embrace a Make Love, Not War lifestyle. But the long arm of the law broke up the group hug and shut them down. Bummer.

Twenty years later, Larry’s now part of the establishment which he and Sarah railed against before they were married, now with a family in tow. Told ably in prose and poems, lyrical and limerick, Tom gave the members an important POV – not from a mountaintop commune, but from inside a survivor’s head, looking out, at a world long gone, man, proving that a good flashback is really a mind-blowing flash forward.

Third up, Ben Greenberg brought “And so, it is with us” a moving story of forebears which echoed the themes of the previous papers.

Quote: “The dominant narrative of my reform Jewish education framed our people as united in a collective struggle to return to a literal and metaphoric homeland...I was taught that in order to overcome these countless attempts at annihilation, we had to stick together—were often forced together—and it was through our unity, our shared desire to preserve our faith and traditions, that we persisted through episode after episode of persecution and slaughter.”

An introduction like that steels the audience’s attention with humility and reverence, for such stories remind of us the world’s continual saga of ancestral hubris and racism, with too many such stories of oppressed rage ever present in society today. As there doesn’t seem to be a race, religion, country or clan that did not mete out violence against others as a means of protecting their place in society. This is a bitter story arc that never bends.

But perhaps there’s hope, as Ben sums up: “I wish I could say that the Cincinnati Jewish community of today stands united in all things with a shared sense of purpose to preserve, persevere, and perform the work of tikkun olam—to repair the world.” It is, as Ben deftly crafted, perhaps a message of hope by looking forward, not past, for we learn too soon that a mirror can be the most unflinching of looking glass.