

Minutes of the Literary Club May 2020

For a Literarian, the definition of “unusual punishment” is having minutes read in back-to-back meetings. Whereas, two months of minutes delivered back-to-back during the same meeting constitutes “cruel and unusual punishment”. Thankfully, for this evening, they’re not.

On May 4, Bill Killen brought “The Worst Maritime Disaster that Few Remember,” a vivid recounting of the steamer Sultana which 155 years ago (almost to the day) blew apart with 2000 Union wounded soldiers and POWs on board. The soldiers were being transported home after the end of the Civil War; the overload of Union soldiers had been diverted on board because each carried a price per their head for the boat’s owners. Ominously, there had been two other earlier Sultanas that met their watery end... the third strike claimed more lives than those lost on the Titanic. This Sultana was in poor repair, a condition compounded by the Four Horsemen of Tragic Events: greed, corruption, mismanagement and willful neglect. A poorly patched boiler doomed the Sultana, straining against the mighty Mississippi current, as it debarked from Vicksburg.

Bill’s paper reminded the audience that even during the most dire of circumstances – in this case, a war of unimaginable bloodshed, suffering, ruin, with brothers bayoneting brothers – yet profiteers still plotted to extract money from country and kin. Kickbacks, bribery, military malfeasance, and crimes with abundant evidence but never tried due to familial/political influence spelled doom for virtually all involved. Bill noted that “ownership of a boat during this period was very lucrative because the Union Army paid well to transport troops and war material on the rivers.” But on a boat built for 375 passengers and 75 crew ultimately had 2400 people crammed on board - so many so that extra supports were built for the top deck and passengers were instructed to stay as still as possible to alleviate danger of capsizing. The 2400 unfortunate souls were comprised of troops, crew and paying customers. All told: 1700 dead or dying were pulled from the Mississippi, and of the 750 living rescued, almost half of those died at the hospital. Truly, America’s Darkest Hour upon the Water.

Steve Schweller presented the BBC-worthy “The Butcher’s Tale” on May 11. 80 members were in attendance on zoom, which is a number we now average weekly. As the group eagerly anticipates Steve’s well-researched papers into English nobility/familial chicanery/religious ideology, I for one would benefit from a printed program noting characters, bloodlines, foibles, curses, and unanswered mysteries.

To wit (and the paper was very witty), the Tichbornes were landed gentry in the south of England. A bedridden matriarch made her husband pledge to feed the needy – called the Dole -- based on the bounty of their land. The patriarch agreed with the condition that she had to cover the protected acreage as long as a billet of wood burned... however long that was, and whatever a billet is. So she crawled the perimeter of 23 acres - an area which is known now as “The Crawls” -- of course. Then, quote: “After being carried back to her bed, Lady Mabella warned her family that should the Dole be discontinued, the Tichborne fortunes would fail and the family name become extinct from want of male heirs.” This, she foretold, would come about when a family of seven sons was succeeded by a family of seven daughters. And of course, in due time, the game of family craps rolled sevens for both sexes. Thereafter, Baronets cavorted, Dowagers danced, and a marriage proposal involving the main character was accepted only because the bride-to-be’s father agreed while on his deathbed...but then he didn’t die. Dad said the couple could be married but while

engaged they had to live apart for three years with no communication between the two lovebirds. Some might say this is pretty good training for a marriage. In America, though, these thirty-six months of incommunicado are usually served between the seven-year itch and the silver anniversary.

So Roger, our hero, sails for South America. Sir James, his da, dies while he is abroad...then the boat Roger was aboard goes missing and ironically, an empty lifeboat is found. While strictly speaking the story stays in the Southern Hemisphere, the action moves to the lyrical Wagga Wagga in Australia where a butcher claims to be Roger, even though Roger was thin and the butcher is a stout 350 pounds, plus Roger spoke French and rough English, while the resurrected Roger spoke no French and his English had a Cockney accent. But the Dowager – Roger’s ma – believed he was her long-lost son had returned so there was a rainbow and payday on the horizon...until she died and then it was up to the courts. Whew.

There was a large pile of money coming to the new Roger if he could prove he was the old Roger. Over a hundred witnesses vouched for him...although most didn’t recognize him. There were twenty-two days of cross-examination, seventy sittings of the Court, and the defense began with a twenty-five day soliloquy by the lead counsel who was described as silver-tongued mediocrity. Honestly, one has to wonder how the jury kept everything straight, or even awake. The endless trials were the judicial equivalent of Michael Frayn’s “Noises Off” with characters going every which way. Ultimately, the civil trial collapsed, followed by a criminal trial with 212 witnesses. Indicative of the chaos to come, Roger’s own lawyer called him an idiot with the mind of a hippopotamus. On the 188th day of the trial, the jury found new Roger guilty of perjury. With this sort of patience, it’s no wonder that cricket – the slowest sport of all time -- is beloved in Merry Olde England.

On May 18, Emerson Knowles zoomed us with ‘Three Men with a Martini, a tale of WWII cunning and counter-intelligence. By planting a fake map into FDR’s circle, the President uses his radio hour to inform the American public that he has proof that Hitler has plans for Panama. Emerson then pulls back the curtain for a peek at the skullduggery behind the scenes detailing how German propaganda initially succeeded to keep the majority of Americans opposed to the idea of US military forces teaming up with Britain an ocean away from the professed isolationism.

The lead cloak-and-dagger man was Hans Thomsen, whose rise to be the top gun in the German embassy. Thomsen understood that Congress and the State Department could be manipulated and he worked tirelessly to maintain an alternate version of current events almost a hundred years before the terms fake news had been coined (then called false news). Thomsen was also responsible to propping up Charles Lindbergh – a US hero – as the voice who counseled avoiding catastrophic loss brought home by opposing Hitler’s force/forces. Thomsen enjoyed a remarkable run of success in softening Germany’s war against Europe, at least in the minds of Americans, because Britain had no similar voice stateside...until William Stephenson stepped up.

One of the three with a martini, Stephenson too was a master propagandist. Well connected within England’s network of spies, using his own money and moxie, he built up an equally impressive counter to Thomsen’s envoys, by working the press with the hook of breaking news and insider info, for he knew, quote, “Being first was often more important than being right in the news business.” Stephenson enlisted Col Fleming – the second martini drinker – and Wild Bill Donovan through the OSS, predecessor of the CIA. With Stephenson’s offices on the same floor in Rockefeller Center as the OSS, Stephenson’s organization gained invaluable access while they cranked out 40 pro-British articles every day for reprint in newspapers around the country. Yet even

with that output, progress was slow until the mightiest of American forces was brought into play – advertising – but still the Gallup numbers showed insubstantial support.

Enter the third martini – a Broadway song meister who also an expert forger. They combined their efforts to produce material that suddenly made Americans think that war was impending, and since it was a foregone conclusion, now was time to be ready and pack the powder keg. Pearl Harbor was the fuse. We all know how that story ended and were much entertained by Emerson's ability to knit together history, biography and fine storytelling...along with a martini, shaken not stirred.

On May 25, a rare Memorial Day meeting began with a memorial for Dick Rasner. Then came an unprecedented program of 15 club members who each contributed a 500-word essay on life in time of the coronavirus. It would be derivative, and near impossible, to provide synopsis of each, but as a budget times five, it was a multi-faceted view of how the pandemic has changed us all, be it by buying a surfboard or wearing masks or mulling the catastrophe that will have no vaccine, i.e., climate change. The collected presenters all came from the two Writer's Circle groups that President Dehner has cultivated for over the past few years. When considered in context of having one-fifth of the entire membership writing and presenting on a single, all-inclusive subject that has reached around the world, laying waste to cities and economies, killing too, too many people and turning our lives upside down as we tentatively transition from sheltering at home to social distancing. But this Memorial Day made more memorably, a choir of voices of concerned, careful Literarians, lit fifteen small lights illuminated a dark screen which at least for that night, lit up our faces and imaginations in the small squares that will have to do until we can gather together once again.

Take care one and all.

Minutes of the Literary Club April 2020

Here we are, meeting on the last Monday in May, when tradition previously closed the clubhouse for a rare holiday. Hence it's understandable to assume that like everything during the pandemic, this gathering is unprecedented. Well, sure, we can call it unprecedented until a timeline and math are affixed: Memorial Day was first celebrated in 1866 while the Literary Club dates back seventeen years prior. Therefore, our founders had been holding regular meetings for almost two decades without a hint of knowing what was ahead in terms of memorializing. Akin to Mary and Joseph, two haggard, sleep-deprived new parents, sitting around their kitchen table two thousand and twenty years ago, reminiscing about their carefree BC life versus the bellicosity of CED.

On April 6, Eugene Rutz brought "It'd be the blue one, aye" There are two items in the first few paragraphs of Eugene's paper that deserve preliminary mention. Eugene noted that the most important element of writing a paper is to know one's audience. These minutes traditionally count the number of members in the audience (which on this night numbered 80). For those of us who can remember what it was like to gather at 500 E. 4th, both the confines of the clubhouse and number of available chairs max out in the 60s – to add another 30% is incredible. It's a wonderful thing to be reunited with members whom we see too seldom due to being times zones apart.

In the second paragraph, when relating the iterations and relocations of his career, Eugene mentioned he worked for some guy named Santa whose stated goal to increase, quote "international travel activities." Hence Brother Rutz might be foreshadowing his next paper about circling the globe with the Jolly Man in Red, i.e., a fine and fitting first-person holiday celebration reflection.

Whereas the world travels Eugene focused on in this paper were educational forays to his beloved Scotland, home of cutting-edge engineering, cutting peat, and Cutty Sark whisky, plus other labels. This paper, as the second LC zoom meeting, let us all benefit from the technological inclusion of photos from Eugene's journeys, especially getting the chance to share the landscapes, ancient stone buildings, blue skies and bays, and even his driving skills, or shall we politely say the inherent challenges of skinny Scottish roadways.

Eugene diligently researched destinations that promised unique educational experiences for UC students as well as side trips to Scottish distilleries that promised a dram or two of their namesake. His preparations gave his merry band invaluable learning experiences, as much knowledge is gained outside the classroom via participation, observation, and rumination. Prof. Rutz provided well, but as he admits, quote "I tend to highlight, and celebrate, [an important] feature of this club...community and camaraderie. Yes, I created the course on energy and society ...but the foundational reason was to create an authentic mechanism to get Richard (Gass), my sponsor to the club, to Islay. I was certain he would enjoy going but was also fairly certain he would not go without intervention by another. When I created the class I recall the associate dean asking me "why are you doing this class, what's in it for you?" What he did not know, but I did, was that this community of men is worth our emotional, intellectual and physical efforts." Here, here, we'll all raise a glass to his fine work.

On April 13, Tom Bennett brought his paper entitled "Blue" to a zoom audience of 81, a rollicking tale of adventure on the high seas (I've been waiting *forever* to use that line). Tom's Huck Finn escapade on a dinghy bobbing up and down in Lake Michigan stretched across four summers,

although his companion's name was Scottie, not Jim. Quote: "what a gift to give two young boys and their imaginations. Within hours we had found the little cove on uninhabited Bootjack Island, and our parents let us set up a little camp there for overnights. And we began to lurk around the other islands observing other cabins, boats, and kids or attacking swimming platforms with our cannon, or even boarding them." End quote.

Fast forward 25 years – Tom is now tossed about by the whitecap tempests of corporate finance in NYC, and one of the many ways that Wall Street captains (of industry) like to display their spoils of legal ingenuity/larceny is a boat, usually a big one that matches their ego. So for our humble and hardworking Tom, one thing (big deals) led to another (big drinks) led to another (big talk) and to another big trip (specifically, as part of a nine-man crew on a big 40' sailboat racing from Massachusetts to Bermuda). More rollicking adventure.

Boyhood friend Scott returns for the next year's Buzzards Bay to Bermuda race, this time Tom is navigator, which means paying a lot more attention to all the little details, be they above (celestial) or below (the Gulf Stream) in order to finish where you intended. Another event for celebration – drinks and showers for all.

Tom's last adventure with Scott flipped coasts and routes – from San Francisco to Hawaii. More navigational challenges and great stories to last, and recall, a lifetime or two. Scott and his wife Jean tragically lost their lives to Somalian pirates. As we've heard papers citing Melville and other masters of the deep blue, Tom's tale shared the wonders – seeing a whale's eye from 20 feet away – the rugged challenge – staying watertight and upright during storms – to mournful -- when losing a true-blue friend.

On April 23, Nostrum Remudeum by Chris Milligan greeted another digital gathering of four score and more, score being a numeric and operatic term that seems le mot juste. The stage is set – as is always the case at the Cincinnati Opera -- and from whence this paper stirs to life. It starts with a mysterious young woman, named Natalia, who only lasts a few rehearsals in 1977. Unfortunately, her unlabeled folks medicine which she pressed upon superstitious performers proved too much for safety-minded supervisors. Off she went, stage right, although the carpet bag which held the "medicines" stayed.

Forty years, or two score, later, the Opera decamps to the Aronoff while Music Hall is receiving renovations, when and wherein a letter addressed to the former director mysteriously appears. Chris communicates with Jim de Blasis, who responded from offstage left, typing at a computer keyboard in Omaha, which is just a cornfield away from where member Jim Barone may be zooming in from tonight. Jim d.B. approving Chris' request to open the letter which simply says: "I have what you need. Look inside the maestro's head. Pace, Natalia" Natalia drops the mic by claiming heritage to the legendary Guiseppe Verdi. Suddenly, the possibility of a missing Shakespearean opera takes on ethereal shape.

The plot, and these minutes, thickens. Chris follows the clues by reaching into the back of a bust of Max Rudolf, former director, his neck-up statuary likeness mothballed on the shelves of the Opera's warehouse. Secreted away in a cranny of the cranium, Chris finds a rolled-up photocopy of a photograph of a piece of paper that carries three words and an initial – King Lear, G. Verdi – appears scrawled across the otherwise empty lines that should denote musical notes for unforgettable arias and the tragedy of lost loves.

The story builds to a crescendo with more cameo appearances by real-life Cincinnati Opera personnel (tellingly, Natalie is neither) stride on to the stage, deliver their lines, stir the plot, then leave Chris center stage, in the spotlight, holding a carpet bag, once used to carry Old World elixirs and fixers, now empty but curiously heavy. Just like Geraldo Rivera opening Al Capone's vault, Chris slices open the bottom of the empty bag but voila, he found a wrapped package, bound as tightly by a twine as we were bound by his tale, but once opened, are just blank pages, no notes bearing the mark of Giuseppe's genius. Bravo for letting the spellbound listeners down as kindly as the Opera would have let down the fictional Natalia. I, for one, threw a rose at my laptop at the end of this performance, but like all dramatic gestures performed while quarantined, rather empty and pointless plus a piece of petal broke off and is stuck in the keyboard.

Bob Burdette's contribution to Anderson Cobb's budget a week later began on a lingering note: "She was an alto." His paper was also a mystery, with a never-named narrator describing a whirlwind romance that led to matrimony a la mode. Dotted with Cincinnati culinary institutions – Frisch's, the Maisonette, Lenhardt's -- Meg, the apple pie of his eye crumbled as the years found their ardor cooling and their feelings for each other fading.

The paper flashed back to the marriages of his parents and both sets of grandparents. In the case of the older couples, the grandfathers were more colorful and memorable, like male birds, in fine feather and sending out a trill for anyone nearby, while the grandmothers tended their nests and pecked at their husbands. The grandfathers' songs were stilled first, then the old crows followed.

The story, looking for an explanation as to why and how some marriages stay sweet, settled on the Eddie and Clara Blume, happily married friends who never had children, doted on each other, lived simply, had a parrot, ate like well, birds, quote: "they were tiny frail little people. Clara did not cook well and they ate sparingly. In fact, Clara seemed to survive on almost nothing but candy. They smiled a lot and told little stories together, one finishing a phrase the other had begun. Their whole lives seemed to be one long party. What a positive outlook on life they always had. Maybe that was their secret." End quote. End of story. The secretary's note, or as parents everywhere can now attest – sheltering at home en familia is not for sissies nor fodder for Norman Rockwell reminiscences - perhaps not having children was the secret to happy matrimony.

Anderson's paper followed the evening's title "Food, Love, Romance" precisely. Food to start. Most telling was his historical footnote made current: back in 1845 a fungus-like organism ran wild throughout the country of Ireland... A million Irish died from either starvation or food-related causes. Moreover, at least that many became refugees and had to leave their homeland. ... Also keep in mind that today, as it was for the Irish back in 1845, it was the poor and less privileged who were hit the hardest."

Next up: Love. Like Bob's central couple, Anderson's romantic journey started at a diner, similarly, the attraction was almost immediate. The couple grew closer, reflected in Anderson's fine photography. But just as theater features both tragedy and comedy, love and romance can lead opposite directions. Anderson's rose to the happy ending, as his paper noted and ended with his poem entitled "Daydreams... with love" repeating this stanza at beginning and end: I wander the empty roads and streets coming from nowhere, with nowhere to go following only paths... that keep the wind at my back ...and I have dreamed... of ladies like you.

Good night, gentlemen – I hope you had a memorable Memorial Day.

Minutes of the Literary Club March 2020

Now a fellow might venture that in 1966 the obvious road trip was to follow the iconic Route 66 and go West, young man. But Paul Shortt is a contrarian as well as a literarian, so he headed East, and well, also West, but on March 2, 2020, we only heard about the eastern swing. Entitled “Three Nights” and delivered to an audience of 52 members and 4 guests, this picaresque, albeit real-life story of a two-wheeled summer adventure blended “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance” and “Blue Highways” with a spritz of “Love Story” for flower-power Sixties flavoring.

An unplanned although admittedly deserved dismissal from a summer theater gig gave Paul six weeks of freedom before school resumed, so he lost no time in strapping his bags to his motorcycle and hitting the highway. Now 1966 was also three years shy of The Summer of Love so innocence was still in the air, and ultimately, it was that winsome element of no lewd behavior and no ‘ludes in the kool-aid that turned what could have been another sex-drugs-and-rock-‘n-roll fable into a winning paper that featured no sex, no drugs (except for nicotine), and no screaming-guitar soundtrack. Paul behaved like a gentleman during his version of the “Before Sunrise/Sunset/Morning” film trilogy and proved that his background, and future, in theater yielded a safe haven for boy-meets-girl amidst a pile of costumes on a deserted stage in a pitch-black theater. It’s a brave man that counter-punches the Club’s policy to avoid travelogues as a subject for papers, Paul pulled off an original caper and we’ll have to wait to hear how he met the bear in Yellowstone.

On March 9th, Ed Burdell brought “Every Dog has its Day,” a witty, wise and doggone good tale that he introduced as a sequel of sorts. Making the secretary’s job much easier, this time Ed named the onerous and officious insurance company -- Grand Eastern and Northern Canadian Insurance Company – but even better, brought back George and Leroy, our two heroes, one a slightly aged male, the other a ventriloquist disguised as a Husky.

Having successfully defended a bit of neighborhood gentrification in the first episode, this time George and Leroy are united as do-gooders in a battle over doggie doo. Well, at least that’s the smell left behind when GENCIC, the acronym for the insurance company, steps into it when trying to impose baronial rights over the park, private citizen neighbors, and its public policy as to rights bestowed by Mother Nature, ranging from trees to wee’s...as in the bathroom habits of the many dogs who accompany their human pets for regular walks.

Listeners may remember the scene in 101 Dalmatians where Pongo and Perdy wrapped their leashes around the legs of their respective, but oblivious owners, in order to bring them together – that’s precisely how nicely Ed wrapped up the particulars of his moral mongrels and immoral corporate malevolents. He also instilled a few Queen City facsimiles of a local politician turned talk-show host in Chicago, one Mr. Whipple whose doppelganger last appeared in a toilet paper commercial for a local consumer goods company also known by their initials, and finally, all the neighborhood dogs colluded in a wonderful tribute to the Twilight Bark, the canine collection that served as protectors of the 101 puppies and in this case, the alliterative park. As Jim Croce would warn, one should be wary to cross bad, bad Leroy Brown, badder than old King Kong, and smarter than a junkyard dog.

Metaphorically and emotionally, members' spirits were watered down without the usual bonhomie of fellow literarians and heavy pours (thankfully) from Nicco when the clubhouse went dark on March 16th and 23rd as we all sheltered in place for two weeks. But then – hurrah! As we know, the Literary Club has many traditions, one of being the stumbling edge of technology so we pushed aside the telegraphs that were in use when the Club was first formed and embraced Whoosh, or Hurtle, or whatever the heck is the name of that Hollywood Squares thing on the screen, Zoom, that's it, we zoomed on March 30th, certainly a first, foibles aside, that proved to be a wonderful virtual gathering for stay-at-home stentorians.

The first victim of this peering into a flat-screen crystal ball that rendered the faces and voices of compatriots (as well as one cookie-eating member and one or two female types using this whiz-bang technology to eavesdrop) was Jim Adams, who brought Meandering Musings to an audience of 80 members, which is certainly a record for attendees during this secretary's time of taking attendance, and included listeners from as far away as London, England and Tucson, Arizona.

As Jim introduced his paper by means of an invisible third-person commentator, he ably set the scene to ramble a bit, and made no bones about it. With sub-chapters entitled 1729 West 106th Place; Urban Pioneers; If the Crick Don't Rise, I'll be There; Will (so named for his son); Mrs. Pepper's Manuscript; and My First Day at Frost & Jacobs, Jim gave a personal chronology of his life and times that extended from a Kansas birthplace to a Chicago boyhood and concluded with the start of his local, legal livelihood. A pastiche of cultural references that invoked a certain time and place – Good Humor trucks, Brownie cameras, Ohio River uprisings, Tall Stacks, a short-circuiting son who must have had ESP for Brother Burdell's paper as he too featured a junkyard dog named Leroy Brown, and a first-day errand to fetch the office coffee pot, which is the perfect bookend for someone who was born in Coffeyville.

It's near impossible to knit together a connective through line for a collection of remembrances that stretches across miles, decades, and inventions – considering that the color TV, precursor to Jim's family's departure to the City of Big Shoulders, had recently appeared in lucky neighbors' living rooms – so one just has to sit back and enjoy the retelling of these front porch fantabulous memories – and hat's off to Jim for being our Zoom lab rat. It's time to switch off the gonkulater now – goodnight, Mrs. Calabash wherever you are.

Minutes of the Literary Club January 2020

It's interesting to note that to kick off this numerically auspicious year, one might expect papers with clear-eyed focus anticipating the future. Instead, January's papers reverted and riveted to the decades surrounding the Civil War, with the one outlier paper tied to racial equality a century later. Will wonders never cease.

On January 6, 2020, an audience of 54 members and 6 guests were treated to David Hoguet's well-researched debut paper which focused on Edwin Stanton, Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War. Eerily contemporary as well as historical, the subject reminded listeners that although we are technologically light-years ahead of 19th century, the human beast remains the same, likewise politics then and now are equally beastly, and hubris still rules the day.

We seem to have enough LC Steubenville connections, in this case as the birthplace of Stanton, to open up a satellite club 60 miles upriver. At best, Stanton maintained a Jekyll and Hyde persona throughout his professional life, impressing some, angering others, although hiding his oiliness proved impossible. As David noted, quote "In his public life, he tended to be insincere, devious and dedicated to self-preservation." Which made him the perfect politician. But whether this makes him a Zeitgeist, or the first Zelig – that's your call. But he was certainly a scoundrel and someone you shouldn't trust even if you held his gasping throat in your ever-tightening hands, as many wish they had done back then. Stanton's various villainous acts are too much to recap in short, which is yet another reason to reread this paper that will seem more incredulous as every page brings another revelation that boggles your mind while wondering what precisely it was that possessed this man.

As slippery as a greased pig, Stanton changed sides politically more often than Liberace changed clothes. As a footnote, I originally had Beyonce as the subject of the sartorial fiddle-faddle, but I want to clarify the reference. During his formative years of sub-professional development, Stanton moved first to Pittsburgh – perhaps becoming the first Steelers fan, hence Public Enemy #1-- then to Washington DC where public enemies roost. After that, he lied and libeled, shuck and jived, more often than virtually anyone else could pre-Twitter. And that's all before the Civil War. Truth be told, I've read David's paper half a dozen times and I still can't believe that Stanton had the moxie and malicious intent to flummox all his commanders in chief, from Lincoln to Johnson to Grant. To gaslight his character, which is only fitting, this from George Templeton Strong's diary – so he's writing for no one else save himself: "He was honest, patriotic, able, indefatigable, warm-hearted, unselfish, incorruptible, arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, vindictive, hateful and cruel."

On the 13th of January, 54 members and 6 guests enjoyed Theo Erasmus' paper on Nelson Mandela, entitled "The Troublemaker" which is the English translation of Mandela's given name; clearly, there was a sense of predestination for this world leader. Theo's South African upbringing allowed his "man on the ground" reportage to be infused with local accents, dialects and even clicks; Theo's delivery and background granted him a literary patois that embellished his paper with the verisimilitude of insider's history.

Nelson Mandela is without doubt one of the world's leading figures of the 20th century. Raised and educated according to Thembu traditions which meant as a boy he tended cattle, a rugged, formative childhood. Ultimately, his poise and conviction re: human rights carried him far

along his remarkable future which one might describe as inspiring as Ghandi and eloquent as Rev. Martin Luther King.

For most Westerners, Mandela was virtually unknown...yet the same was true even for his white countryman, as Theo related, quote: “Nelson Mandela was a mythical, even ghostly, figure — shimmering at the edge of my consciousness... Nelson Mandela was hardly mentioned in polite society. He represented, in many ways, that society’s greatest fear. A black man of unflinching dignity and bravery.” Imprisoned in the violent unrest rippling through South Africa roughly a decade after the same uprisings roiled America’s urban centers in the 60s, Mandela was released by FW de Klerk after 27 years as a prisoner in 1990.

Theo, raised a metaphoric world away from Mandela’s circumstances – his world being teenage stupor (an inherent condition to that age) in white, suburban Johannesburg, yet their linkage, at least within this paper, thankfully foretold a meeting between the two men which we will always remember hearing here.

On January 20, 2020 – MLK Day and a serial date just one score short of Lincoln’s opening line in the Gettysburg Address – Cameron Kitchin presented his first Literary Club paper to 61 members and 4 guests. The reference to Lincoln is not simply a fillip, for Cameron also opened his paper in the aftermath of the Civil War, covering Grant’s exit from the White House, stumbling into the economic Panic of 1873, then following fellow Literarian RB Hayes whisking into the White House which signaled the end of the Reconstruction effort in the Southern states post haste.

Cameron capped the core of his introduction with this quote “History is a deceit. Yet it is also the paths to many truths. The authors of history—academics, researchers, museums, universities—bring singular points of vantage to episodes in which no one experience or telling chronicles the complete set of interactions” before focusing history’s lens on the foreground of Cincinnati Ohio in 1874 when this area was first recognized as The Art Palace of the West, the catalyst being an exhibit of local women’s artistic achievement in ceramics, wood carving and textiles was heralded at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

In the wake of this very successful debut of Cincinnati’s artistic emergence on the national stage, local citizenry rallied around Nicholas Longworth as the primary patron for establishing Cincinnati as the epicenter for art and art organizations along the frontier. The 1830s were a remarkable decade for a long list of Queen City art societies and clubs, starting with the Academy of Fine Arts, the Western Art Union, then leading into the origin of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, the Mercantile Library, and most famously at the time, the Ohio Mechanics Institute.

The Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge came to the fore during this time. Although it sounds like a Monty Python sketch, the precepts of the Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge begat a series of public lectures, which begat the Women’s Art Museum Association cry to create a place for all this art to reside, which begat a fine building 100 cubits by 200 cubits high above the riverbanks, in a park owned by Longworth and by name we know as the Cincinnati Art Museum. Rumor has it there is now a wooden mantel piece on display there. Thank you Cameron, for the full history of this treasure.

Tom Schuck brought a budget built along the theme of Home Towns to an audience of 68 members and 5 guests on February 27th. Guided by the long shadow of Napoleon, Tom quickly

took the audience from Napoleon Ohio, to Napoleon the French emperor who led the Grand Armee of a million men (gathered from hometowns in a dozen different countries) into the Russia theater, lingering in Moscow for a month before retreating and losing almost half his men.

Part 2 picks up in a different Moscow, this one the Ohio village located 30 miles upriver from here. Unlike Russia's version, Moscow Ohio has always been lightly populated; its highwater mark was in 1890 when about 600 people lived within its borders; today it's a third that size. The interesting twist is that the village was allegedly founded by French immigrants/veterans of Napoleon's army – clearly, this time they stayed longer.

Part 3 recounted the life of John Damon, born in Germany and, later, also a soldier in Napoleon's Grand Armee. A survivor of the Russian massacre, he recuperated, but never fully recovered from his wartime injuries in Westphalia, Germany, where he married and became a father, before emigrating with his extended family to the US in 1830. He also took on the name Count, which was passed to his son Billy, who in time, figures as Tom's great-grandfather. Hence John Count Damon, who served under Napoleon, his great-great grandfather. A nifty way for stitching together hometowns large and small, united by the names and hometowns of Napoleon and Moscow in more ways than one.

Ernie Enyon took the podium with an expository recollection of the many differences between city folk and country folk, as collected during his young years. There was certainly a level of refinement and education which the city folks possessed, sadly lacking in the country boys who tussled with culture and cleanliness, although more often than not, coming up short on both counts. A bag of kittens seemed destined for a similar foreshortened lifespan as the country kin who knew not what travesty lay in their collective futures.

It's admittedly a bit difficult for this country boy to assess this premise; I suppose lack of shoes stunted my synapses during the critical years of childhood development. I cling to the hard-earned insights of authors like Will Rogers, John Steinbeck and Charles Dickens, whose menial backgrounds fostered and forged works wherein man's awareness emerges outside, not within, classicism. But I suspect, as Ernie had referenced the wit of Mark Twain in the first few paragraphs of his paper, he proved that broad satire can be as revealing as a mirror and this insight into the human condition carried the day.

Dale Flick concluded the evening with "Oh, That Instant," the multi-part story of the highs and lows of riverboard travel in the mid-19th century along the Ohio River. The first part followed the Moselle, owned by one Capt. Isaac Perin, a young man of 28. Chief Engineer J. Madden– if he had been in full control of his senses, he might have asserted his let his head and as his engines cool down, instead was fired by the combustion of alcohol and ego. According to eyewitnesses, very soon after the month-old Moselle cast off her ropes, quote "a huge white ball of steam blow up from the boat expanding with a surge carrying decks, smokestacks, boiler fragments, kindling, wreckage and human bodies up in the sky."

To paraphrase Newton, every disaster has an equal and opposite reaction. In this case, once the bodies were buried, a political/maritime committee was established to research the causes of the conflagration – and it all pointed to safety valve plugs and the need for regular inspections of riverboat boilers and engines. There followed various Literary Club connections – a Capt. Marryat who also harbored a penchant for writing who wrote a post-mortem on the grave accident, a certain

Samuel Clemens/Mark Twain lost his brother Henry when the engines blew on the steamer Pennsylvania while upon the Mississippi, and finally, a recount of Dale's extended family of whom many were employed in various roles for the river trade. Thank you Tom, Ernie and Dale.

Minutes of the Literary Club December 2019

On the second of December 2019, John Grate delivered a homophonous paper entitled “Nature – My Thin Places” to a gathering of 58 members and 6 guests. Starting with verse of Robert Service, the Bard of the Yukon, John shared with us the definition of a thin place, i.e. geographic POIs which lend a sense of reverence and awe in visitors. Psychologists identify thin places with vastness, connectedness, scenes that make time stand still and our role within this panorama rendered small, awash with physical sensation. John described his thin places as areas thick in natural splendor.

John found his thin places far afield, from the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota to the Sierra Mountains, where he and others have found the combination of rugged fitness needed to first reach, then to experience the spiritual awe from being amidst virginal wilderness. John’s final destination was Navajoland in the American Southwest. His experiences there, which also included meditation, chanting and sampling herbs via various methods. John’s paper amplified what writers like Michael Pollan and Terry Tempest Williams have been researching and reporting on for years; John broadened his account to artistic interpretation to include the works of Ansel Adams and Vincent Van Gogh, complete with soundtracks from Vivaldi and DeBussey.

John closed with an invitation and invocation, quote “Time is short, gladden the hearts of those you love and seek out your Thin Places. Whether your passion is the out-of-doors, or not, find time to enjoy, to nurture, to heal and claim the gifts that nature provides.”

During the business meeting held after the paper, honorary membership was unanimously bestowed upon our historian, Bob Vitz – congratulations to Bob on this well-deserved ascension to the Medallion Level for Literary Club frequent fliers.

On December 9th, Woody Uible delivered his debut paper, “An Exceptional Journey” to 54 members and four guests. As Woody explained, quote “I had heard the term American exceptionalism but wasn't clear on the source or history of it, or how it is explained. I suspect every country takes pride in its history and culture but Americans seem more so. We have unique attributes that have resulted in unrivaled power and prosperity which gives us a certain self-assured attitude.”

Sometimes it takes a visitor from abroad to divine a country’s character, as was the case with de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who in the 1830 traveled from the Atlantic coastline to the frontier interior (which included a stop in the non-thin place of burgeoning Cincinnati) to research, write and publish the groundbreaking “Democracy in America.” Curiously, the pairing of “American” and “exceptionalism” might have been first uttered by Joseph Stalin – no surprise, Big Joe did not use it in a complimentary fashion.

One hundred and eighty-five years later, twenty social scientists returned to defining the American “persona” and illuminated the nation’s bounty of patriotism, individualism, enterprise, plus racial and religious inclusion; traits often invoked as key tenets to the founding of our country, hence our exceptionalism.

Woody wisely wonders if indeed these factors are still as strong as when recorded by de Tocqueville, for as modern politicians and economists point out, much has changed in recent decades. Many indexes – to frame it in investment committee terms which was the carriage for this paper – like wealth, mobility, industriousness and unemployment appear rosy, but it is vigilance to an ideal and enterprise in daily affairs that will provide future exceptionalism.

The Literary Club's holiday gathering took place on December 16th with 62 members in attendance. Dave Edmondson orchestrated another wonderful program, with ensemble, of traditional and folk songs as a prelude to dinner and papers by the trustees; guest performers in full voice which rose high then rained down from the rafters as part of the evening's delights. President Dehner also asked Nicco, Giovanni and their hardworking staff to receive an appreciative round of applause from members for their sterling service.

Steve Strauss got everyone's toes tapping with "Better!" his musical bio of James Haven Gillespie, composer of the seasonal favorite "Santa Claus is Comin' to Town." Born in Covington, his dismal childhood was catalyst to finding a new start in Chicago. His time in the Windy City found him married and learning the ropes as a printer, experiences which upon his return to Cincinnati five years later, led to a job offer from Barney Kroger to become the company's first advertising manager. Haven, who claimed to have printers ink in his blood, also had a song in his heart, so he turned down that opportunity to focus on songwriting. In 1911, he published seven songs and began receiving royalty checks, which were initially meager and found him looking for hit songs somewhere over the rainbow in NYC and back in Chicago, as the printing press still provided sustenance for his family. The early 1920s were his breakthrough, with several songs generating five-figure royalties, allowing him to pivot to a full-time gig as a songwriter. His big hit, and the accompanying subject of the paper, came in 1934 with lyrics written in 15 minutes while on the subway home. Paired with music by J. Fred Coots, the song was selling 25,000 sets of sheet of music every DAY by year's end; by 1964, there were 74 million records and 15 million set of sheet music sold, which jet-setted Haven and his wife, Corene, from Covington to Hollywood and Las Vegas, three cities not often linked unless one was in the Syndicate.

Dick Hague brought "Peace on Earth and Mercy Child." Like James Joyce's Dublin and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha – it's not just people's names I mispronounce, or as some would say, butcher – Dick returned us to Steubenville, on the banks of the mighty Ohio, home to a legion of Irish and Italian coal miners, steelworkers and railroaders, where Catholicism intermingled with the same wafting odors as the strange dishes bubbling on the stovetop. Dick presented a nifty remix of Dicken's story wherein he was both Christmas Past and Christmas Future. The richness of this recollection defies easy synopsis, even for a drowsy narrator, aka our very own literarian at the lectern, who confessed to the minor sin of slumber yet somehow managed to catch every detail. Perhaps the most memorable character, certainly in terms of his name, was Grandpa Ironhead, who provided comic relief in addition to his nickname with deafness that led to shouting over all the other voices of cousins, aunts and various in-laws by marriage and outlaws by character. As entertainment, I could revisit this tableau every year, along with Jimmy Stewart's Zuzu's petals and Jean Shepard's Daisy BB gun; as a literary exercise, it's the Christmas cookie which does not crumble.

Our final trustee, Rich Lauf, brought not only a paper, but also dessert, which served as the centerpiece of the “The Family Fruitcake.” Commencing in St. Louis with a recipe gleaned from the Victory Lutheran Church cookbook, the entire Lauf familia took part in the making and baking, serving primarily as nutcrackers, (no, not the ballet kind). Dad’s frugality led to everyone gathered ‘round to crack the hard shells of almonds, pecans, walnuts, and hazelnuts, plus the exotic Brazil nuts. This endeavor might have saved a few cents but made little sense since any savings trickled-down into the bellies of the production line. The overall output, as Rich attests, was prodigious – some years more than 100 pounds of fruitcake emerged from the Lauf kitchen -- so there was more than enough for teachers, church staff, neighbors, the mailman, crossing guard and of course, the many branches of the family tree. Later, when Rich returned stateside from Vietnam, his solo attempts to recreate the family heirloom rendered unfortunate results. Thankfully some trade secrets were imparted by mom and supplemented with one-of-a-kind measuring systems in order to – voila – create a fruitcake with all its nostalgia tastiness. Although Rich’s later path led to P&G’s purchasing department, the engineering group could have also benefitted from the Lauf methodology that foresaw early recycling efforts and consistent baking throughout with a couple MacGyver fillips and finishes. This winsome tale should live on, as reportedly fruitcakes can do to the point of carbon dating, but the next generation has foresworn further gastronomic travails by moving into the modern age of store-bought holiday treats.

A new year, a new decade, is upon us. Of all the professions represented by members of the Literary Club, after scanning the directory, it seems we have no optometrists in our ranks, which is a pity as 2020 is surely the year they’ve lived for. Surely a better appellation than the Chinese Year of the Rat, we can hope that a clear-eyed view into the Club’s crystal ball will reveal good health and best wishes for a bright New Year, one and all.

Minutes of the Literary Club November 2019

On November 4, 2019, Ducky Wadsworth brought the story of English poet Edmund Waller to an audience of 3 guests and 54 members. Waller, born in 1606, enjoyed a boyhood and academic life that was rich in multiple ways; he then wisely extended that envious appellation into his married life. Waller established himself with one foot in the literary arts and his other foot in politics.

England during the mid-17th century was bountiful beyond measure with factions, salons, monarchy, anarchy, naval prowess, and world-domination history in the making. Waller was well-regarded by those in power, additionally, he was also agile and slippery enough to re-insinuate himself when leadership changed parties. Time and again, Waller would present himself to one court or another with a poem in hand that commemorated an event still to come.

Ducky's paper admirably colored in the pastiche of British royalty warring their rather petty peccadillos – when reading or hearing about all this dithering about, one is tempted to think “Don't they have something better to do, like conquer a country or run a kingdom?” Case in point is the title of Waller's most notorious poem: INSTRUCTIONS TO A PAINTER FOR THE DRAWING OF THE POSTURE AND PROGRESS OF HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES AT SEA, UNDER THE COMMAND OF HIS HIGHNESS-ROYAL; TOGETHER WITH THE BATTLE AND VICTORY OBTAINED OVER THE DUTCH, JUNE 3, 1665. Thank you, Ducky, for illuminating this previously dark chapter of British history.

I can assure you that there is no secretary in the long history of this club that has been happier to report that we elected two new members -- Richard Ziconda and Ed Lloyd.

On November 11, Robert DiPaolo brought “Everything is Social” to a hardy audience that distinguished itself by laughing in the face of the first flurries of winter (45 members and two guests). What we were treated to in return for our fortitude was a master class in Social Media. It's a good bet that the phrases Social Media and Literary Club have never before been linked in the same sentence, or century before.

We learned, and I paraphrase, that social media is the latest innovation in computer-mediated communication that poses a serious challenge to existing media and government, disrupting (a key word) the mass distribution of information and news so it is no longer the privilege of newspapers, broadcast, and cable news. It's estimated three billion people, 40% of the world's population, use social media and that every day Americans spend an average of two hours sharing, liking, tweeting, and updating their social media profiles.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Instagram -- these barely two-decades old names have supplanted GE, IBM, Exxon, and GM from the top tier they existed in for over a century; moreso, the newly minted minions rake in billions in revenue. The benefits of social media: connectedness, information, education and contentment. Social media has negative effects on commodification, addiction, mental health, cognition and memory; immoral behavior; privacy, fake news, crime, political polarization. That's almost 2:1 score for the bad guys – no wonder most of us decry the decline and fall of modern society while we check our digital brains. Robert lifted our

sagging spirits when he summarized the Pending Improvements to, and Governance and Regulation of Social Media in conclusion.

Winner of this month's most alluringly titled paper: Loose Women You Have Known Who Changed Your Life was delivered by John Cobey as his literary club debut, on November 18, 2019. What is certain is that John quickly learned the club tradition of misdirecting expectations with a winsome title applied to an altogether different subject. John's loose women include Guinevere, Rahab, Isola, Helen of Troy, Aspacia, Carmen, and Mary Magdalen. Women who stirred men's souls in devotion. When doing a paper of historical research, clearly the supposed oldest profession in the world is bound to, no pun intended, pop up. But as John ably illustrated, although these women might have occupied a, let's say, lesser professional title – their influence is legendary.

John's scholarship and research are sterling – to twist the old saying, you won't know all these players without a scorecard. His text was a lot to read, especially to understand the structure. I certainly appreciate the depth and unique premise of his paper. Although I was unable to be present for this paper, it wasn't always intuitive and I struggled when following the Who's Who approach that connected these women of ill-repute but mighty progeny. And I suspect 26 pages made some antsy, but the wit of his subject holds promise for John's future papers. Because let's face it, if our professors had been this sly, we might have paid attention in history class.

November 25, 2019 found Steve Phillips leading a budget on Fraternities to a group of 52 members and a seemingly equal number of guests, although in truth there were only a dozen. Steve dove in with a warm remembrance of his invitation to join and assimilation into the Beta Theta Pi, Delta chapter at DePauw University. When reconnecting with a frat brother decades later, he admirably recited the names of the eight founders in less than seven seconds, just as all the pledges had to do before admittance. Just as all our institutions have had to weather the changes of societal standards in the last six decades, the pledge process then seems likewise reflective of these simpler times. One incident in particular – when it seemed there was going to be bigotry in the ranks, it was revealed to be a litmus test of new brothers that instead polished up the welcoming standards of the chapter.

The values that distinguished Brother Steve's time at his fraternity -- communication, social skills, personal leadership, financial constraint, tradition, loyalty, and pride in the organization – were reflected and celebrated at the year-end rite of passage when seemingly failure to pass the last test of fraternity history once again bonded the group, instead of breaking them apart, a union that Steve carries forward to this day.

Nick Trelka's "Among the Tribe" spoke directly of his UC fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, which notably is also the largest fraternity in the country. Ideals brought forward in "Minerva's Highway" the SAE parable of Brothers Zero (who added nothing to the group), Brother Nero (who used the chapter for personal gain), and Brother Hero (who strove for self-improvement and personified a True Gentleman) – no surprise as to which brother embodied the chapter's ideals. Nick laced his personal tale with a history of fraternities in American college life. The first major change was fraternities organizing nationally, the second was post world wars when hazing and other local rituals were applied for induction, and now the Greek life world hovers at the beginning of the third shift: how to return to the academic and social ideals of the founders and wipe away widespread hazing and other negative traditions.

Clearly, when Brother Nick recounted the SAE fundamental tenets – loyalty, brotherhood, service to others above self, and dedication to best self – they echoed Steve’s experience at DePauw. I suspect the same is true for the many other Literarians who joined fraternities while undergrads, these ideals sound universal to Greek system. The tea leaves are not hard to read, as Nick noted, and I quote: “There are 9 million living Greek alumni, and 750,000 Greek undergraduates. If just a third of those alumni determine to perpetuate the intrinsic values that made them better people; mentoring, participating and donating, Greek organizations will thrive.”

Joe Dehner concluded the budget with “Decision” a fictional literary exercise of compare and contrast. We meet Dana, our immigrant protagonist, enmeshed in “To rush, or not to rush, that is the question” followed soon thereafter by other Shakespearan soliloquies wittily revised capture his quandary of joining a fraternity.

Dana then consulted with advisors who shared their opposing views. Mr. Steve noted Fraternity men are 2% of America but historically 85% of Fortune 500 CEO’s, 76% of U.S. Senators and 85% of Supreme Court justices since 1900. All but two presidents in the past 120 years were Greek lettered brothers. Mr. Joseph then countered with “Fraternity members are three times more likely to commit rape than their non-Greek counterparts. ...Hazing deaths occur annually, and fraternity related deaths average more than five a year. Hazing’s reinforced by a code of silence, teaching that the interests of the fraternity are paramount over justice. Some view it as training for mastering cover-ups and group perjury. Fraternities discriminate.”

After these one-on-one conversations, Dana was advised to construct a T-chart, with “What I Want” listed in the left column, “What I Should Want” in the right column. More consternation. More introspection. More bard: “Words are easy, like the wind. Faithful friends are hard to find” followed by “Be great in act, as you have been in thought.” Ultimately, it’s up to each individual to decide.

There are no Greek letters that follow our name, but I love this fraternity we call the Literary Club. Similarly, there are no more minutes to be read between now and the start of 2020, so best wishes for bright holidays to one and all.

Gentlemen, good night.

Minutes of the Literary Club October 2019

On October 7, Rick Kesterman brought “Birth of a Zoo.” Attendance was not tallied as work duties took me three time zones away; likewise, the minutes are based solely on Rick’s words on the page, so if there were flourishes from the lectern, they’re not recorded here, alas.

We are reminded of the prominence of the Cincinnati Zoo and its high rank amongst U.S. zoos during every fund drive and/or election. But to think of the zoo, or any Cincinnati cultural institution, solely in dollars makes no sense as that approach misses museums’ many contributions to residents and visitors alike. Rick’s history of this cornerstone of civic heritage ably filled in any gaps in our recollection.

The paper opened with a prequel of the zoo’s opening in 1875 as a haven for hungry birds and their hankering for the caterpillars lunching upon Cincinnati trees. Thankfully, this is not a tale wherein a non-native species introduced for ethnic cleansing becomes the Animal Kingdom’s Game of Thrones – the sparrows eventually thrived, and did their songbird cousins in a Disney-like scene whereupon release from a nearby house, and I quote, “a pair of nightingales appeared at the window, rested for a moment, and then flew to the limb of a tree and elevating their heads in the sunshine burst out in joyous song. Within the next few seconds, the birds fairly poured out onto the trees and shrubbery, filling the old woods with melody.”

And just like that, the path was cleared Andrew Eckenbrecker to assume the many duties that manifest as a founder’s status: securing land, getting City Council approval, organizing administration and labor crews, plus in due time, hiring on Armin Tenner, who would become Eckenbrecker’s right-hand man as general agent.

There was a bloody tussle between a donkey and a lioness which surprisingly ended in a stalemate, and which the zoo oddly memorialized as both animals received full taxidermy honors then stood guard in the aptly named Carnivora House. The Zoological Gardens officially opened on September 18 – Eckenbrecker and Tenner both received gold-headed canes for their service. The Monkey House was the final building inhabited, moving uptown from 500 E. 4th St. so we could thereafter move in and continue their noble evolutionary traditions. I made up that last part.

On October 14, Ken Patel brought “A Canoe Comes to America” his debut paper, to an audience of 58 members and 5 guests. Comparing and contrasting the familial histories of Winston Churchill and Mohandas Ghandi, the former’s lineage started with empirical power and wealth, while the latter’s anchored in a tiny Indian province. What next defined their respective lives beyond their opposite-ends-of-the-spectrum childhoods and adolescence was a virtual exchange of cultures: Churchill’s time in Bombay and beyond, while Ghandi studied in London – crucially formative times in each of their lives. Thereafter, as both chose careers in politics, their lives were intertwined personally as were England and India economically. As the final years of the 19th century came to a close, England’s colonial empire fixated on India and each nation asserted itself in ways that would reverberate around the globe.

Surprisingly and coincidentally, the final stages of both Churchill’s and Ghandi’s political personas were forged by their experiences in South Africa, culminating in their first/last face-to-face meeting. Over the next 45 years, these political rivals would use virtually any means necessary to

protect their respective country's survival in the face of bitter disagreement and a fractured future, played out across world wars, eroding economics, and most importantly, divided belief in which side was right.

In so many ways, these men were star-crossed, even linked in their final moments. Quote: "Churchill would die exactly 17 years to the day of Gandhi's assassination. Two men, born 5 years and 4000 miles apart met only once when both were unknown, both believed that the personal and political were inseparable. Gandhi spent his life insisting Indian self-rule and rule of self were the same thing. Likewise, Churchill believed a strong nation was the necessary product of strong people. To late Victorians like Gandhi and Churchill, those terms meant the same thing."

The denouement of Ken's paper introduced a third character, ultimately even more important to our presenter than either Mohandas or Winston. An equally inspiring story of a young Indian man who seeks his future, and hopefully, fortune in a faraway land, his life started akin to Gandhi's, then led across the Atlantic to a pharmacy degree at Purdue University. Married and at the last moment securing employment stateside which would lead to a rise within corporate America, perchance their slice of the American dream, Ken's father closed his son's paper, a moving homage to his homeland and thanks for his family.

Gordon Christenson took on the difficult challenge of crafting a heartfelt, emotional story of love and loss as a literary exercise. "Abduction" was read to a group of 54 members and 4 guests on October 21. It started as a time capsule of sorts: a trio of females enter a Washington D.C. fern bar, including one described as a chic woman who runs an escort service...that couldn't be the Mayflower Madam, could it? Then again, the nation's capital has always been a hot house for more primal matters of money, power and sex...well, who knows, maybe it was a real madam.

What the listeners do learn is that Gordon's falls fast and hard for Fabienne, the striking young woman with auburn hair down to her knees. It's a relationship symbolic of the 70s when it took place: not just the long hair and flowers, but also European getaways, a rotating cast of other ingénues, a certain jet set feel with Cincinnati's own Isley Brother's striking a "Love the One You're With" soundtrack.

Gordon burnished the marriage admirably, capturing the high notes of falling in love with the somber bass line that runs through all merry music of life, because regardless of how besotted and caring the couple might be, this and all "Love Story" unfortunately ends in parallel Ali McGraw Ryan O'Neal fashion; yes, true love wins out, but ends with the passing of the beloved.

Like a good literarian, Gordon turns to books, and journals (his own and Fabienne's) which both chronicle the courtship as well as provide perspective when reading them again almost four decades later. He also comes upon the quirky "God's Diary" which is purportedly the Almighty's chronicle of a many-splendored things, but I found Gordon's more insightful and better written.

It is no small task to stand in front of this group and bare one's innermost dreams, doubts and dramas. Fabienne certainly lives on, through her fragrance business which literarian Tom Murphy now continues, and most of all, in Gordon's heart. His last line rings clear, quote: "After these many months, raw grief has become deep sorrow, and it is time: to put down my pen, close all the journals, and thank you for listening." Gordon, thank you for writing.

On October 28, the 170th Anniversary found 62 members looking their best in tux and kilt, ruddy in cheek, and ready to put another notch in our belts.

Historian Bob Vitz set the stage with “Cincinnati in 1849: The Dark Side.” Bob tipped to previous historians Diehl and Green as he too recounted our start, a literary stake in the ground that helped hold steady the Big Top circus tent, sounded by Cincinnati’s calliope of growth, optimism and prosperity. But as Bob soon shared, not everything was Longworth’s wine and Saengerfest’s roses. There was a dark cloud hovering over the river basin, a stench made corporeal as the Queen City in 1849 had no modern plumbing. The specter of the Civil War also darkened the sky, loomed on the nation’s and the city’s horizons. The numerous newspapers of the day chronicled growing crime sprees. Cholera decimated the burgeoning population as the disease raced up and down the Ohio River. The aforementioned Nicholas Longworth, in a public letter, lamented the rot that was decimating his vineyards. Loco-focos, a radical political element, were perhaps the notorious precursor to those crazy Hegellians.

Bob summed it up like this “The last weeks of the year brought quieter days. November rains solved the river problem; health issues all but disappeared; complaints of election fraud dissipated.” He then searches for a mention in those same newspapers as to the founding of this group of gobsmacked gentlemen, average age 25 – kid you not – who sought to share ideas and camaraderie via debate, discourse, dissemination of finely-wrought papers, and occasional drink. Hence, as the ultimate foreshadowing of the presidential address to follow – with no accredited acknowledgement of whence we came, we are therefore free to write our own version of past, present and most importantly, our future.

President Joe Dehner shared a stirring Presidential Address, centered on the question: “What does it mean today to be the Literary Club?” Via process of elimination, Joe peeled back the onion of group dynamics to show that we’re not a fraternity of hale and hearty well-met, but a group that gathers as a brotherhood of the mind based on the love of words. The preparation and presentation of our papers draws us here weekly and lies at the very core of our individual and collective aspirations.

With the past spiced and diced by Historian Vitz, Joe then moved from present to future and set the bar high by invoking that we must adapt the literary mission to our time, that we must change like language itself. A menu, rich in taste and possibilities, was laid on our tables: new roles as mentors and critics, perhaps another Writer’s Circle, a Poet’s evening for members and guests of both genders in the spring of 2020, perhaps imagining new uses for our historic home here on Lytle Park, or podcasts, or publishing...yet always centered on The Papers.

His close, and mine in reiterating his words: May this Club inspire us to be better writers and communicators, to advance the mission for which our Monday mistress beckons. May each Monday night be a blessing and a summons. The majority passed the torch to us. We must hand it blazing to those who follow. We do this for what words can mean. We do this for the love of words.”

Thank you, President Dehner. Goodnight, gentlemen and good luck to all those who will rise to that oratory challenge this literary year.

Minutes of the Literary Club September 2019

On September 16, 58 members and 6 guests summited the stairs at 500 E. 4th St. to start the Literary Club's 2019-2020 season. In stark contrast to the recently completed seasons of other Cincinnati clubs, including the Reds, the club closest to the Literary Club's longevity at 150 years – and FC Cincinnati, the youngest club which just closed its maiden season in MSL – and the unfortunate start of the current season for the Bengals, mathematicians amongst us may note that we could total all their wins to arrive at a number that barely exceeds the average age of a Literarian. Oldest, finest, best read. Seniore, pulcherrimus, optimus legere. So let's settle in for another season of razor-sharp papers, restorative whisky and wine, but most of all, fine bonhomie.

The evening started with Gordon Christenson reading a memorial for Ernest Gordon Montz. Thereafter, Paul Franz brought "Local Dialects" a paper remarkable in many ways, first and foremost, his attentive ear and scholarship involved. We are often self-deprecating in referencing the somnolence of our group, so Paul distinguished himself at the start when he shared that the subject came to him at the close of Mike Meyer's maiden paper on Max Lilienthal, the club's first Jewish member when he, Mike cited Judge John Bernhard Stallo one of the so-called Ohio Hegelians, as well as the two other club members: Moncure Conway and August Willich.

Sitting up there in the nosebleed section, even with our new sound system, what I heard Paul say is that Stallo was one of the Ohio Hooligans, which could have been an equally entertaining, albeit very different paper. We learned that a Hegelian is someone who followed, or was influenced by, German philosopher Georg Hegel. Truly a fearsome and foreboding two-word combination: German + philosopher, that'll put some starch in your shorts even before the paper delved into the particulars of his precepts. Let us simply say: there are rabbit holes, there are wormholes, and there are Hegel-holes. There are also Mass-holes, which is another word for Boston drivers.

I've read Paul's paper a half dozen times. Each time, I felt that I followed it and even understood it...up until I tried to craft a one-line summation of any paragraph. All I had was scheiss. Nonetheless, his paper is brilliant to read. If we ever get to the point where hazing is part of the new member protocol, applicants must recap "Local Dialects." Even the names of the Hegelians – John Bernhard Stallo, Moncure Conway, August Willich – seem as impenetrable as the philosophy – yet these were remarkable men whom somehow time forgot until Paul dug through the archives and uncovered their legacies.

Here's a paraphrased example "Willich emigrated to London where he worked as a carpenter, and served with Marx and Engels in the Communist League. Willich helped draft the charter of the "World Society of Revolutionary Communists." a group which lasted seven months but split over whether the time was ripe for revolution or whether workers would have to endure decades of struggle to achieve power. Incensed, Willich challenged Marx to a duel. Let that sink in: a member-to-be of this Club challenged Karl Marx to a duel because Marx was too conservative."

“Local Dialects” is a cogent and captivating paper. I am better for having read it many times and remain intrigued by its many references. Nonetheless, I can’t shake the image of the Monty Python skit entitled “The Philosophers Football Match” where the Germans engage the Greeks on the soccer pitch, a game wherein Hegel and Marx are reunited as teammates and ultimate victors...just like Paul.

’Twas the autumnal equinox, September 23, 2019, when 52 members and 6 guests gathered for Erwin Erhardt the Third’s treatise “War and Remembrance” a fond reminiscence of Erwin Sr. and Erwin Jr, grandfather and father of the speaker. At the heart of his paper was a generous memorial, symbolically tied to the Memorial Day services that tethered his young life as the Erhardt family honored their forefathers’ service in the United States Army during World War I and II.

Listening to Erwin, what became clear was not only a son’s appreciation and admiration for his familial unsung heroes, but also how predominate it was during that time in America to have a family full of veterans with brothers, uncles and cousins also having served in the trenches, in the skies and upon the seas. The other salient is that in many cases, these were first generation Americans, who might also be defined as second generation immigrants, a population who not only eagerly took up arms to protect their new country but in many cases, gave their lives for a land wherein they just gained citizenship. As we saw with many WWI centennial remembrances in the past calendar year, their final, fleeting breath was given to protect future generations a hundred years on.

The latter half of Erwin’s paper was a recollection of his visits to the European battlefields and memorials afforded him through professional academic relationships. While it was our club member who journeyed to Maastriche, Ghent and Flanders Fields, it was as if his father was able to accompany him via Erwin’s phone calls and photos. All this, to preserve their dignity and sacrifice, as Erwin noted, lest we forget.

On September 30th, Kris Gillis brought his first budget. Although unplanned, when preparing the minutes, it was impossible not to notice that we concluded last season and commenced this season with funny, and insightful, pieces of fiction about coming to the finish line of life. “Stiff” was Kris’ contribution, a delightful romp through the not-quite-after-life, the hyphen signifying not heaven, nor hell, but what might happen if one is not allowed to depart this mortal coil when his time comes. Russ, the story’s anti-matter hero, thumbs his nose at medical advice to live healthier, hence like Jimmy Stewart in “It’s a Wonderful Life” he gets to revisit his family and work, except in his case, he’s still able to be seen and converse with others, although he’s decomposing before their very eyes. Glittering and metaphoric, it was an illuminating and uplifting yarn about death.

Tom Murphy brought “I’ve Been Waiting for You” – a charming congress (of sorts) between American folk history and the Western cultural bastion of Greek gods and goddesses. Built upon the hale and hearty efforts of Johnny Appleseed to feed and flower the Great Lakes region, Tom conjoined (in more ways than one) Johnny’s seed sowing with Greek mythology when Mr. Appleseed’s last night on earth was spent (again, in more ways than one) in the loving embrace of Panacea, goddess of universal remedy. But no relation to Panera, the modern-day goddess of Soup served in Bowls made of Bread. Thus deflowered, yet fruit-filled, Panacea confesses to Eris, goddess of strife and discord, of her Dalliance with Mortal. Not the same as Dances with Wolves, but not entirely dissimilar either.

Anyway, Johnnyson, the Mendelian hybrid byproduct of the union, is born and grows into a fine young Muggle, who like HP, is bullied and teased by his peers. Ultimately, his future lies far from Olympus, when he returns to Earth with a godlike visage and a small pouch of seeds that he delivers to Perdu, the pharmacist, who return the favor by bestowing upon him a new name, Johnny Poppyseed, making him the patron saint of the Woodstock generation. The end. Applause.

Dick Hague brought the final fiction of the evening with “Alas” a tale set right here within the walls of our clubhouse, a consternation and conversation starter tied to a guest at the LC on the evening of June 10, 1882. While poking around where he didn’t belong, Dick found in the Vault a pair of women’s shoes, a lock of auburn hair, and a note of thanks from one O. Wilde. In Dick’s tale, the he is a she, a fox, not a wolf, in sheep’s clothing. Sure, Oscar Wilde swung both ways, leading to his nickname O-very-Wild. But this was something different, something forbidden, something oh-so-very-interesting.

Clearly, the sanctity of the club had been penetrated, so to speak. But the key to unlocking the chastity belt was kept back at the Burnet House where the lass amused a Literarian for hours, clandestinely revealing herself as a certain lady of Dublin who may or may not have likewise entertained the young George Bernard Shaw. Great merriment reigns as the plot thickens, just like the lubricious stains on Shaw’s trousers must have dried. stiff. Nellie Bly, you’re such a vixen. Then again, her real name, was Elizabeth Cochran Seaman. It’s true, every word, so Dick swears.

Although each budget paper was presented as its own literary song, the three papers combined almost like a musical performance where one distinct voice comes forward while the other two provide harmony. The pieces were raucous, well-written and appreciated by all.

Minutes of the Literary Club June 2019

On June 3, 2019, Jim Adams brought “King Coke & Little Pictures” to a full house of 64 members and 5 guests. A paper grounded in the life and times of Henry Clay Frick intertwined with the career of his business partner-in-plunder, Andrew Carnegie. Although there were a few cameos by other robber barons and industrial magnates, to great degree, this seesawing complementary/contentious relationship was the previous century’s version of Bill Gates v. Steve Jobs. It was a business handshake that led to an arm-wrestling match as they were devolved from colleagues to competitors. While many of their public works endure, it was the nugget of ego and unyielding pride which became the only thing harder than the steel their massive companies forged, ultimately blinding them to any truce through the end of their days.

Kudos to the audience as no one thought that King Coke was meant to evoke the linen jacket savior faire of Miami Vice’s Don Johnson nor the murderous rampages of drug lord El Chapo. This cultural control is that symphonic equivalent of hearing Rossini’s William Tell Overture with no one blurting out “Hi-Ho Silver.”

Coke, as in the product yielded by heating coal in the absence of air, carried the day during the Industrial Revolution. As coke enriched steel production, it was enriching in many other ways for Frick and Carnegie, although not so much for the citizens of Pittsburgh who had to labor and live in a carbon-contaminated environment. Carnegie decamped to Scotland, leaving Frick to the dirty work of breaking strikes, surviving an assassination attempt, and patching up (unsuccessfully) the South Fork dam which when breeched led to the infamous and deadly Johnstown Flood. Note: if we ever do go abroad for the spring outing, which will be recapped next, I vote for Carnegie’s castle, Skibo, where we might tour the grounds for weeks on end.

Carnegie, Thomas Mellon, Clara Barton, J. Pierpont Morgan, literarian William Howard Taft – all these marquee names that populate American history were connected to Frick as he rose as the captain of the steel industry and proprietor of one of the premier art collections in America, if not the world. Yet with all that polish, all the philanthropy, when Carnegie tried to lay an olive branch to mend their friendship at advanced age, Frick’s reply was “Tell him I’ll see him in hell, where both of us are going!”

Which leads us directly to Fred McGavran’s “Erebus Kincaid and the Devil.” With the devil as a sharp-tongued and sharper-taloned louch chasing the central character who climbed to the top by being a bottom feeder, this man of no morals outside money and all its attendant lucre, Fred’s immoral character meets his immortal match in this pitch-perfect compare and contrast work of fiction. Erebus’ devil is sly, slick, smooth and vulgar: a Hugh Hefner in scales and tails; Erebus is the devil’s twin brother in human form.

Reading like the literary lovechild from cinematic parents of Bill Murray’s “Scrooged” and Oliver Stone’s “Wall Street,” Erebus trips along his picaresque travels through the offices of the officious: from his to the doctor’s to the lawyer’s and ultimately to the priest’s. The devil pursues without fail, even as Erebus kills him off time and time again. Fred’s warm wit and experience as Assistant Chaplain imbued his tale with a redeeming conclusion.

Perhaps my favorite scene is when Erebus and his devil sit down to break bread at the dining room of the City Club. Quote “Kincaid entered, his devil swaggering beside him. Glances became turned heads, conversation stopped, and he was greeted with bigger grins than a recently elected politician. The devil, too, worked the room like a politician, waving and shaking hands with other devils lurking at the feet of the diners or sitting at their tables.” It’s hard to draft minutes on a short story as masterful and mirthful as Fred’s, for to pull on any of the threads unravels the wit that weaves it together. In this case, “Bravo” is the most appropriate review.

From beginning to end, it was a picture book evening for the Spring Outing. Terry Horan graciously opened his home to 62 members, graced by the return of Robert Smith for the meal. Thanks again for the hospitality, Terry.

Following Fred’s paper, Jerry Kathman thanked everyone, and we thanked him, for his year of service as President to the Literary Club. Next, like the many bottles of wine poured that evening, everyone’s appreciation flowed to Nicco, Gianvonne and their staff for their sterling dining and drinking management, not just that night al fresco, but throughout the year. Newly elected president Joe Dehner received the gavel as smoothly as a mile relay team hands off the baton. In his short remarks, pledged to do his best and urged us all to think about ways to make the Literary Club more literary. This is all I have to offer: Invoking the Bard who famously noted that brevity is the soul of wit, as I always end up halfway between brevity and levity – forsooth, I’m giving the devil his due by being a humble half-wit. During the course of such research, I stumbled upon the Old English term Trumpery, which is defined as “1. worthless nonsense, and 2. Useless articles.” Hence, inspired by President Dehner’s charge, I discovered the fountainhead of the phrase “fake news.” One can’t be more literary than that.