

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

Reading Matters

GREAT BOOKS COUNCIL OF SAN FRANCISCO
Serving Northern California

ZOOM! GBSF to hold annual meeting in thin air

By Rick White

No gasoline will be expended getting to the 2020 Annual Meeting of the Great Books Council of San Francisco. No sunburn. No smoky barbecue. No getting lost in the Berkeley Hills. No grabbing tent awnings blowing over in the wind. No salad or hot dish or folding chairs to shlep. Pants or skirts are optional. Because we'll be all be sitting with Zoom.

The meeting itself takes place in mid-air at noon on June 14th as invisible waves. We'll be able to see it, however, when these are translated by a modulator-demodulator (modem) into pixels cleverly assembled into colorful representations of individuals sitting in boxes on a screen.

One by one faces appear. Some plead they are not getting sound or perhaps picture. Some quit, others call in by telephone to participate by voice only. Caroline Van Howe, as moderator, tries to get everyone into our first virtual annual meeting.

As president of the Great Books Council of San Francisco, Brian Cunningham calls the meeting to order. A quorum of twenty-five attendees is required for the election to proceed. Following the election of officers and the Executive Committee and then a summary of the Annual Report we start our book discussion of "The Island," by Gustaw Herling. It and the Zoom method that will be used are described below.

Brian Cunningham is slated for second term as GBSF president

Louise DiMattio rides again!

The executive team of **Brian Cunningham** and **Elena Schmid** has agreed to hold onto the reins of the Great Books Council of San Francisco through the next twelve challenging months of Covid-19.

Louise DiMattio, long active in the San Francisco council, has returned to the Executive Committee after several years. She is up for election as corporate secretary. **Brian Mahoney** agreed to continue as treasurer, keeping the books, managing the budget, tracking our investment.

The other members of the Executive Committee to be voted on are **Melanie Blake, Laura Bushman, Rob Calvert, Jim Hall, Sheri Kindsvater, Louise Morgan, Caroline Van Howe, Jan Vargo, Kay White, and Rick White.**

Great short story, "The Island," is discussed by people in boxes

At press time there is no telling how many will show up for a Great Books discussion on Zoom. We are prepared for any number. Caroline Van Howe will break us into groups and leaders are prepared to step in. Twelve to fourteen is a good number for a discussion in this medium.



Those were the days.



“The Island” in the story is Capri by another name. The description matches available maps and photos except that the island is more developed now. The photo below is of a side too steep. The harbor is seen dimly on the right.



The Island

How to join the discussion

1. If you have the GBF 50th anniversary series volume *Living with the Past* it is on pages 146-220. The title of the story is “The Island.”
2. This volume is no longer on the GBF list. Amazon had 30 copies as of May 3rd. It is available from many other vendors, but with different pagination, as *The Island: Three Tales* by Gustaw Herling. The price is typically \$4.95 used. Our translation is by Ronald Strom.
3. The discussion will take place on Zoom, either on your computer or cell phone screen. It is also available, sound only, by telephone.
4. The discussion is on June 14th immediately after the brief business session at 12:00 noon, most importantly the election of officers and the executive committee. We need a quorum of 25 participants for a valid election.
5. Caroline Van Howe is our Zoom host for this session. Jim Hall will host a practice session earlier in the week. He’ll send you the date and time and the sign-on ID and password you’ll need for both sessions. We’ll go over the way Zoom works and the discussion protocol.
6. The June 14th discussion will last as long as we wish; my guess is that it will last not much more than an hour using this medium. When we are together at the picnic it tends to last an hour and a half.
7. What you see on your screen will be a grid of squares, each including one or both of you. That display will depend on your clicking on GALLERY. If you need help, one of us will be there.
8. You’ll be assigned to discussion groups of no more than 14 individuals. Each group will have a screen independent of the others.
9. Please let us know soon whether you intend to participate. There is no charge.
10. To register click on the URL address below or cut and paste it into your browser.
<https://tinyurl.com/y9y3nzuc>

With any questions about the meeting or discussion please write to me at rwwhite@aol.com.

Looking forward to a fine discussion! -- Rick White



At Vallombrosa

From the President:

What will you be doing at noon, Pacific Time, on Sunday, June 14, 2020? Hey, I know -- at least 24 of you will be attending the Great Books Council of San Francisco (GBSF) Annual Meeting. The efficacy of that Annual Meeting depends on 25 GBSF bookies attending it. Since I know I’ll be there, we need just 24 more of you to attend. You don’t have to attend the entire meeting if you have a crowded schedule. You don’t even need to vote if you are a little shy. We just need you to show up. Now let me explain why that’s true.

GBSF, the Council, is a California not-for-profit corporation. Those who attend any of the local, monthly reading and discussion Great Books groups regularly meeting in the Bay Area are the Council’s

(the corporation's) Members. The Council Members are supposed to meet annually to elect the Council's officers and Executive Committee Members. The Council's officers consist of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The Executive Committee is the Council's board of directors. The Council's Bylaws require at least 25 of the Council Members (that's you and me) to meet together to constitute a quorum for the conduct of Council business, including election of officers and Executive Committee Members. If a quorum shows up, a majority vote gets the job done.

All officers are nominated to serve one-year terms. By tradition the President and Vice President have been nominated to serve in each of two consecutive one-year terms while the Secretary and Treasurer have been nominated and re-nominated to serve an indefinite number of successive terms. The Executive Committee members have no specified terms but traditionally are re-nominated to serve an indefinite number of terms. Nominations are made by the Executive Committee acting through a Nominating Committee selected by the Executive Committee. The Chairman and sole member of the current Nominating Committee is Rick White.

The names of this year's nominees as officers as well as those to serve on the Executive Committee will be listed in a Notice of Meeting to be emailed not later than June 4, 2020 to each Council Member whose email address appears in the Council's records.

The shelter in place order resulting from the current Covid-19 pandemic has presented some challenges to holding the Annual Meeting this year. But, fortunately, California law contemplates what's known as "electronic video screen communication." That's Zoom for short. So that's what we're going to do. I look forward to seeing at least 24 of you on an electronic video screen near you at noon on June 14, 2020.

--Brian Cunningham

Reflections on Zara Yaacob's *Hatata*

By Brian Mahoney

The *Hatata* was written from a cave between 1630-1632 while Zara (or Zera) Yaacob (or Yacob) was hiding from a death threat by the king of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) because he would not accept the king's religion. The king died in 1632, allowing Zara Yaacob to return to his homeland. The *Hatata* was not published until 1667.

His writing predates René Descartes's *Meditations* (1647), David Hume's chapter 10 entitled *Of Miracles* from *Concerning Human Nature* (1739/40), and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1782). Zara Yaacob, an African, might be considered a harbinger for the Enlightenment period.

He starts his inquiry with an ancient Greek understanding of God with these words: *In my heart I did not believe in anything except in God who creates all and conserves all.* René Descartes comes to the same conclusion through reason.

Zara Yaacob continues: *All men are equal in the presence of god; and all are intelligent, since they are his creatures; he did not assign one people for life, another for death, one for mercy, and one for judgment. Our reason teaches us that this sort of discrimination cannot exist in the sight of god, who is perfect in all his works.*

The phrase *all men are equal* predates John Locke (1669), who profited by the slave trade and Thomas Jefferson (1776), who owned slaves. Zara Yaacob argues against slavery and considers women as equals. Jefferson and Locke did not mean *all men*.

Unlike the Europeans, who gave us closed systems like Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism, Hegelianism, Kantianism, and all organized religions, Zara Yaacob argues for an open system. This is what he wrote: *They allowed rulers to manipulate and control their subject population. I entreat any wise and inquisitive man who may come after I am dead to add his thoughts to mind. Behold, I have begun an inquiry such as has not been attempted before.*

