HAT is a hero, after all? Conventional wisdom tells us that history’s heroes are ordinary men and women thrust into circumstances that lead them to perform extraordinary feats. One person’s hero, however, may be another’s deadly enemy, as so often was the case during the Civil War. Historians now ask who these people really were and why they are still lauded long after their deaths. This is not just an exercise in deconstruction; it is an effort to understand the influences that shape a society’s concept of the heroic.

During a lovely summer week this July, a group of 21 high school and middle school students gathered at Bowdoin College to discuss what makes a hero. They focused on Joshua Chamberlain, the college professor from Maine who became a celebrated Union general. They were taking part in the Maine Humanities Council’s first History Camp, which gave promising pre-college students the kind of intellectually rich summer experience the Council has long made available to its teachers.

Many of the students had read Michael Shaara’s novel *The Killer Angels* or seen the film *Gettysburg*. Both works influenced their notions of who Chamberlain really might have been. A cadre of historians and archivists helped them determine how much fiction was indeed fact.

The real Joshua Chamberlain certainly did not look like a heroic figure. He was under average height for his time, with gentle eyes and a large nose. He was also an academician who had had only limited combat experience before finding himself in command of the 20th Maine regiment atop Little Round Top at Gettysburg. His troops were expected to anchor the far left flank of the Union Army on the crucial second day of the battle. Exactly what happened is still disputed. The Chamberlain legend maintains that when his overstretched Mainers ran low on ammunition, he ordered “Fix bayonets!” and caught the attacking Alabamians by surprise with a dramatic charge down the hill.

Just the premise of this story sets the stage for a hero’s arrival, and who better than the bookish Chamberlain? But it was more than this that made Chamberlain heroic to his contemporaries, explained Dennis Edmondson (history teacher at Mt. Ararat High School), who directed the camp. Edmondson—the 2005 Gilder-Lehrman Maine History Teacher of the Year—spoke about other ways that Chamberlain could be perceived as a hero. He was an example to his men in bravery, persistence, and cleverness. He fought in 24 battles, and his six wounds testified to his insistence on putting himself in the line of fire. He had a distinguished career off the battlefield, too, serving four terms as Maine governor and a decade as president of Bowdoin, where he advocated admitting women, a reform that would not come for more than a century.

But one might not have seen Chamberlain in so heroic a light if one had been present at the Battle of Gettysburg. Bowdoin historian Patrick Rael’s talk “What Really Happened at Little Round Top?” presented six different accounts, some written immediately after the battle and some many years later, including one dismissive of Chamberlain’s actions that day. “Did anyone actually remember what had happened in the confusion of battle?” Rael asked. The students were invited to compare these often conflicting texts and to determine which writer was the most reliable witness.

A major focus of the History Camp was on the use of primary sources, drawing on the archival research techniques used in the Council’s biography institute for teachers earlier in the summer: studying documents, noting consistencies and discrepancies, trying to figure out where the truth really lay.

Speakers included Charles Plummer, who, in Civil War uniform, presented a “living history” account of Chamberlain’s life. Historian Tom Desjardin, author of *Stand Firm Ye Boys from Maine: The 20th Maine and the Gettysburg Campaign* and *These Honored Dead: How the
F life is short, why waste your time wondering if Elizabeth Bennet will marry Mr. Darcy? You could be spending your time in school far more profitably by learning something useful instead of reading Jane Austen.

That seemed to be the message from the director of a local technology center quoted recently in the Maine Sunday Telegram: “In today’s world,” he said, “high school students must speak and communicate effectively, not be able to dissect the plot and characters of a great novel.” He complained of a “terrible mismatch” between traditional humanities courses and “the skills students need to be thinkers, inventors and innovators.” If schools continued as they were, he warned, we would not be competitive in the global economy.

The speaker had every good intention, but he falls into a trap that goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks: the urge to privilege know-how over understanding. On the contrary, we learn how to be citizens by studying history, and we may learn some valuable lessons about how to live our lives by studying—and discussing—imaginative literature. (Jane Austen may be of some assistance there.) Of course there are different types of intelligence and different styles of processing information. And obviously “old” subjects can be taught in interesting new ways. But to dismiss the humanities tradition in favor of “practical” education raises troubling issues. It suggests that art, literature, music, drama, history are the playground of a leisured few. Two hundred years ago, that was largely true. But the American ideal—however inadequately we’ve been able to realize it—is based on the radical notion that all young Americans deserve an education of the highest possible quality.

As a printmaker, I certainly value “hands on” learning. I’ve spent hours exploring the complicated, time-consuming techniques of getting ink onto paper—with the help of brush and burin, knife and printing press. Yet for all the technological skills that artists acquire, there would be something lacking in their work if it were created in a historical vacuum. We need to learn the many ways in which other artists, past and present, have used their medium to express their concerns and passions. As for competing in the global economy, I’d like to suggest that you don’t apply the same lessons closer to home.

As for competing in the global economy, I’d like to suggest that you don’t apply the same lessons closer to home.
The Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory, described in detail how Civil War battles actually were fought. Deborah Smith, former director of the Pejepscot Historical Society, which owns the Joshua L. Chamberlain House Museum, spoke about the revival of interest in the almost-forgotten Chamberlain and how his legend grew in the late 20th century.

Students also visited Chamberlain’s house, Special Collections at Bowdoin’s Hawthorne-Longfellow Library (where they examined original documents from the time), and Pine Grove Cemetery, where Chamberlain is buried under a small, undecorated stone.

Charles Calhoun, who directs the Council’s teacher programs, explained his philosophy for the camp: “The idea is to take them beyond thinking of history as battles and the names of generals and to help them understand how history gets written. History is not just facts, but the way those facts are interpreted.”

Students came from Gardiner Regional, Biddeford, and Bath middle schools; and Mt. Ararat (Topsham), Freeport, Edward Little (Auburn), Catherine McCauley (Portland), Deering (Portland), Boothbay Regional, and Maine Central Institute (Pittsfield) high schools.

Most had been recommended by teachers participating in the Council’s American Lives: Teaching History Through Biography institute, a collaboration with MSAD #11 in Gardiner, funded by a Teaching American History grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Clearly, the students were bright, sensitive, outgoing people, and they seemed to thrive on being in a room with other equally sharp history buffs. It was not an experience they had often had in school, but one they treasured, as they made clear in the final program evaluation.

At the end of the week, no one doubted Chamberlain’s status as a hero. Students said it had been helpful to study the steps that led to that recognition. Perhaps the whole nature of heroism was summed up best by Jeffrey Sullivan, a History Camp faculty member who teaches at Lewiston High School. Sullivan knows the Gettysburg battlefield well. He described to a group of students what it felt like to look out over the rocky terrain and think of the 20th Maine and the exhaustion and pressure they faced: “Anyone in a battle like that who isn’t running away in terror is a hero.”

On September 22, the Maine Humanities Council awarded the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize to historian Neil Rolde of York for his extraordinary contributions to the interpretation of Maine history and his encouragement and support of the humanities in Maine. Given in memory of Constance H. Carlson, a founder of the Maine Humanities Council, the award is presented to an individual, institution or group in recognition of exemplary contributions to the public humanities in Maine.

Past recipients of the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize include Tabitha King, Billie Gammon, and Karan Sheldon and David Weiss of Northeast Historic Film.

Neil has been an active figure in Maine’s historical, political, and leadership worlds. To start, he is the author of nine books: York Is Living History; Sir William Pepperrell of Colonial New England; Rio Grande do Norte; An Illustrated History of Maine; A Narrative History of Maine; The Baxter’s of Maine; The Interrupted Forest; Unsettled Past, Unsettled Future: The Story of Maine Indians; and So You Think You Know Maine. His topics have ranged broadly, from prehistory to the present. Neil is also publisher at Tilbury House Press in Gardiner, Maine, which specializes in books about Maine and children’s books on culturally diverse topics.

For 16 years, Neil served as a Representative in the State Legislature (District 106, serving York and Kittery). He was also Assistant to Governor Kenneth M. Curtis for six years. His public and private board service represents a wide swath of interests and commitments.

A pattern of deep civic involvement, historical study, and philanthropic support characterizes the gifts that Neil continues to give to Maine. The Maine Humanities Council is pleased to recognize the significant contribution he has made to the people of this state.

“Finding the Hero in History,” continued from page 1
Ashley Bryan does not “recite” poems. Recitation implies monotony and rigidity; Ashley’s delivery is riveting and athletic, occasionally cathartic. Nor does he “read” them: he holds a book in one hand, shaking it occasionally and jabbing at the page with his other hand for emphasis, but he never looks at the printed poem. Perhaps the poem is not even on that page; perhaps it’s in a different book entirely. It doesn’t matter: the poem is inside him. “Poetry is at my center as a human being,” he once remarked in an interview. “I believe that poetry lies at the heart of the wonder and mystery of language.”

As the creator or co-creator of almost forty picture books, Ashley Bryan has captured the mystery of language in volumes that are cultural records as well as works of art. He has interpreted African legends and popular songs (his illustrated version of *What a Wonderful World* is one of the most popular books used in the Maine Humanities Council’s *Born to Read* early literacy initiative). He has compiled an *ABC of African-American Poetry* and several volumes of spirituals, about which he writes, “Wherever I travel, people sing these songs. Often they do not know that they are singing spirituals [that] come to us from the time of slavery in the United States.”

But Ashley is an educator, not a historian. Even as he preserves cultural artifacts in his books, he adds new contours and colors and tones. When he performs poetry by such masters as Langston Hughes and Eloise Greenfield, he pulls each word from within and lets it travel through him, gathering meaning as it goes. He imbues the poems with the voices of their creators, so that to hear him is to read them, to watch him is to know them, to join in with him is to become them. The volume of his voice ranges from a whisper to an unabashed holler, according to the exigencies of the language.

We are not used to hearing words stretched and tossed around in this way. “We take language for granted,” Ashley has said. “I would like the
reader to be shaken out of the doldrums of just decoding and for the work to become alive, meaningful.”

In May 2005, Ashley shook a small swath of the Portland community out of the doldrums of a drizzly night when he appeared at the Born to Read conference, “Early Literacy in a Changing World.” The children in the audience spent most of the program squirming, poking each other, and peering under their seats, as children in an auditorium are wont to do. No one thought to make them sit still. After all, Ashley was in motion too, clutching at his podium and dancing about the stage. During his call-and-response readings, the children echoed his words intuitively from their perches on laps, armrests, and carpet. Even the adults in the audience showed little self-consciousness. They surprised themselves by shouting and murmuring and swaying along with Ashley, and emerged looking rapturous, dazed, slightly exhausted.

It was Ashley who ought to have been exhausted. In the space of twenty-four hours, he had accepted a key to the city of Portland and an award for Leadership in Arts Education from the Maine College of Art (both accolades received as graciously as if they were his first, although he has also received the Coretta Scott King Award, the Arbuthnot Prize, the Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, the Virginia Hamilton Literary Award, and the Maine Library Association’s Katahdin Award). He had also spent time with students at Reiche Elementary School and met friends for a tour of the Portland Museum of Art, and was scheduled to address another Born to Read audience the next morning. Despite careful planning, the booksellers who brought Ashley’s books to the event sold out of their stock long before the book-signing crowd showed any signs of waning. Any other 80-year-old might have been grateful for this excuse to head to dinner, but Ashley requested a stack of blank bookplates and kept on signing. When they left that night, his grateful fans carried stickers with the author’s scrawled signature, their palms still tingling from his warm handshake, poems still coursing through their hollow places, then settling like sediment at their centers.

Ashley’s connection with this Portland audience is not unusual. Wherever he travels—South Africa, San Francisco, his parents’ island of Antigua—he wins the devotion of the people he meets. Revealing what he called “his secret” to an interviewer, he has said, “whether with a child or an adult, I am striving for an exchange.” Ashley was born in Harlem, grew up in Brooklyn, and began visiting the Maine coast in the 1940s. He returned to, and eventually chose to live on, Little Cranberry Island, which “reminds me very much of the neighborhood in which I was raised.” Ashley sees no dissonance between his island and the New York City borough because he has connected with the people who inhabit both communities. “If you are in the moment,” he once said, “you are stretching out to reach that which you recognize in others.” Ashley’s message to fellow educators is that children are more likely to become joyful readers if they find meaning in stories. He explains that he holds a book even when he doesn’t need to see the text because he wants children to connect poem to page, sound to symbol. (Incidentally, specialists in early childhood development are trying to promote the same connections, except they refer to them as “concept of print” or “alphabetic principle.”) The teachers and librarians who heard Ashley in May have told Born to Read that he gave them the courage to share poetry with children for the first time. Thanks to the wisdom of a Maine master, these children are discovering that books contain enough volume and motion to fill an auditorium, enough meaning to last a lifetime.

Ashley Bryan has recently been nominated by the International Board on Books for Young People for the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the highest international recognition given to one author and one illustrator of children’s books. Only one illustrator from the United States is nominated each year. The winners will be announced in March 2006. The Council looks forward to bringing Ashley Bryan to more Maine audiences next year—please watch our website for specific engagements.
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A typical reaction to a supply of *Born to Read* books, they get creative. Barbara Korn relies on her personal library of over 1,000 children's books, collected over approximately forty years as a librarian. "I've been a public librarian; high school, elementary school, and parochial school librarian; Head Start librarian; and Future Farmers librarian. *Born to Read* nearly satisfies the one job I never found: prenatal librarian!" Barbara feels most comfortable reading her old favorites, but she also consults the children's librarians in Parsonsfield and Limerick so that she can incorporate notable new books.

Marilyn Roper of Houlton loves reading to infants and toddlers, starting at four months, but she has a hard time finding enough books that are appropriate for this age group. The local library has responded by building a fine board book collection. The books requested by Marilyn have benefited the entire community, circulating constantly among parents and caregivers. Adrien Deschenes spent several months reading exclusively from a giant treasury of illustrated fairy tales. He used these tales, many of which the children had never heard before, to inspire rich discussion and lead the group into related activities.

Indeed, most volunteers eschew the books that some might think would most effectively quell children's wiggles and whisperings—what Joan Beckford calls "those crazy books with Hollywood movies or TV characters"—in favor of archetypal characters and classic themes, captivating language and high-quality illustrations. The stories they choose actually encourage wiggles and whisperings, which volunteers recognize as signs of engaged imaginations and growing minds—symptoms of readers in the making.

But volunteer readers don't stop at books. All volunteers learn finger plays and songs in their *Born to Read* training, and they trade activity ideas whenever they meet. Linden's annual gardening project has become such a vital part of the Rubber Ducky Daycare year that one little boy starts inquiring about it in late February. Harrison Roper, former conductor of the Northern Maine Chamber Orchestra, leads children in music activities that help them learn about rhythm, sound, and rhyme—all important elements of reading.

Participating teachers and caregivers consistently report dramatic, positive changes in literacy skills (including attention span, book-handling, and vocabulary) as a result of these activities. To take just one example from a survey conducted this January, 78% of teachers around the state said that their *Born to Read* volunteer had made a "significant contribution" or "major contribution" to children's increased interest in books and stories, while an additional 9% indicated that the volunteer was "totally responsible" for the increase.

Volunteers also have a considerable impact on the development of social and emotional intelligence, which current scientific research has revealed to be just as important for school readiness as cognitive achievement. Several teachers have said that all it takes to overcome the separation anxiety of a toddler is a reminder that after their parents leave, they'll see their volunteer reader. Eighteen percent of teachers surveyed said that the volunteer was "totally responsible" for increased self-expression among children. As one elaborated, "I see children relating to the books. Children have come out and talked to me about things going on in their lives because they could relate to a story. It also helps them to ask questions to learn more about a topic of interest to them."

But by far the most frequent observation made by teachers and caregivers concerns the connections forged across generations. Statistics released by the U.S. Census Bureau early this spring revealed that Maine has surpassed West Virginia as the oldest state in the nation, with a median age of 40.6 years. Many older residents—whether or not they've retired—are eager to stay active by volunteering. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, people 55 and older contribute about 7.5 billion volunteer hours each year. When these volunteers connect with young children, as they do in the *Born to Read* program, they are bridging a growing gap in our culture. "Mrs. Park brings us so much more than books," says Leslie Szylow of Jumping Jacks Day Care in Bangor. "In a world of hectic households and disjointed families, Mrs. Park is our extended family. She is a grandparent's shoulder to lean on for the children, and a sounding board for desperate teachers. She is the source of grace and etiquette in a world of lost manners."

For the volunteers themselves, lasting connections like these make the program worthwhile. The Ropers recognize the names of children they've worked with in their morning newspaper. When Roberta Carlstrom substitutes at her local elementary school, she is greeted with hugs from second- and third-graders who remember her as a reader from their preschool days. "I don't know what I'll do this summer," laments Barbara Korn after her last visit to the Alphabet Preschool in Limerick. "I've seen the children change and grow just since I started reading last year. Trying to describe them is like trying to put your finger on mercury. I come out of there on Thursday afternoon thinking the world is a better place. You'd have to throw down a brick wall to keep me from coming back in September."

If you are one of Maine's many long-distance grandparents, or you simply want a weekly "kid fix," please consider becoming a *Born to Read* volunteer. Contact *Born to Read* or your local RSVP office (see contact information on page 6) to get started.
This year the Maine Humanities Council did something it has never done before. From April to October, it brought one of the Smithsonian Institution’s traveling exhibits, *Barn Again! Celebrating an American Icon*, to Maine for a tour that visited three sites: the Saco Museum, the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel in Lille, and the Bethel Historical Society.

When Deedee Schwartz, our Executive Director, first asked me to coordinate the *Barn Again!* tour, I was rather stunned. Although born and raised in Maine, I am certainly no authority on barns or farming. At the same time, it sounded like an intriguing project I might enjoy and a wonderful opportunity for the Council to work with museums on an entirely different level than usual.

Since then, I am happy (and relieved) to report that everything has worked out beautifully. We pulled together a wonderful group of advisors to serve on our planning committee, and the Smithsonian’s traveling exhibit branch (known as Museum on Main Street or MoMS) has provided information and encouragement to help things along. Special thanks should go to Don Cyr, Director of the Musée culturel du Mont-Carmel, who also served as Project Scholar; to Christi Mitchell from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission; to Deanne Herman from the Maine Department of Agriculture; and to the tireless workers at all three museums.

The Smithsonian Institution has a unique arrangement with the state humanities councils to provide these traveling exhibits for state tours. Besides their obvious goal of reaching a broad segment of the public, the Smithsonian hopes this program will provide opportunities specifically for smaller museums which otherwise might not have the chance to host a significant exhibit of such high quality.

*Barn Again!* itself provided general information about barns across the United States including styles, historical uses, and preservation issues.
To that foundation, we added our own panels with information specific to the history of barns in Maine, and each site added its own local stories and artifacts.

In the process of organizing the exhibit, we found several themes that deserved highlighting. Of particular concern to us was the question of how to preserve some of these structures which are very old and threatened, not just by age but also development pressures and changes in current farming needs. We also wanted to shine a spotlight on farmers in the state and applaud their efforts in a difficult line of work. We hope Barn Again! has provided enough information to encourage the public to continue discussions on these topics.

For me, it’s been a joy to work with the museums, plus a wonderful opportunity to learn so much more about the history of barns and farming in Maine. Barns are something I’ve seen around Maine all my life, but I’ll never look at them in quite the same way after this.

By establishing an Advisory Committee, we were able to tap into firsthand knowledge of farming in the greater Saco area, garner wonderful “farm profiles” for inclusion in the exhibit, as well as great generosity in loaning objects which enhanced the local component of our exhibition. People were eager to participate in the exhibit, because, in part, of the Smithsonian connection.

As we all know, we cannot simply “install it” and wait for people to come to the museum. Marketing is becoming an increasingly vital component of a museum’s budget. The quality and quantity of marketing materials available to us was one of the greatest advantages of partnering with the Maine Humanities Council and the Smithsonian Institution on this project.

A full-color brochure, web site links, public relations assistance, and gorgeous posters are examples of the superb marketing tools that were at our disposal for this exhibition.

The Smithsonian exhibition kiosks were as easy to assemble as touted in all the written materials. (Yes—one did have to follow the directions. As the first site in the state to host the exhibit, we benefited from many people being on hand to learn and assist in assembly.) Our staff of one-and-a-half, along with a couple of volunteers, were readily able to disassemble the kiosks and store them in their proper crates.

All in all, the Smithsonian experience in Saco was tremendous! We exceeded our visitation numbers for the previous year for the same time period and our outside family program had people asking if this was going to be an annual event. Well...now there’s an interesting idea. It was a great experience to work with the Maine Humanities Council and the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service. We’re already looking forward to the next one!
ELIPE III of Spain looked out the window one day and saw a young man laughing wildly. He’s either insane, the king remarked to a courtier, or he’s reading Don Quixote.

The second half of the novel had recently been printed, and already Cervantes’s work had become not just another tale, but an enduring cultural phenomenon. Four centuries later, 100 of the world’s most distinguished writers were polled as to what they considered the best novel of all time. Don Quixote was easily the winner.

But tell me the truth: have you actually read it? It’s one of those books we all feel we know, or recognize, through such familiar incidents as the hero’s tilting at windmills or mistaking a tavern maid for a princess or through the antics of his earthy companion, the original of all sidekicks, Sancho Panza. The appearance of a new translation by Edith Grossman provided an opportunity to see if Don Quixote lived up to its reputation; by a nice coincidence it was also the much-celebrated 400th anniversary of the publication of the first half of the novel. (Cervantes and Shakespeare were contemporaries, and 1605 also saw the first performance of King Lear, another study in self-delusion.)

As with previous Winter Weekends, we assembled a distinguished array of scholars, feasted in a style Cervantes might have recognized, heard some very good Spanish music, and argued about the book for a day and a half. Was it brilliant? Or almost unreadable? Was it a comic masterpiece? Or the saddest, most cruel book ever written? Or all of the above? There was a tinge of irony in asking 125 serious readers to devote a good chunk of their winter to a 1,000-page novel—which, after all, is about a man who reads far too much for his own good. And there were interesting echoes from earlier Winter Weekends. Paolo and Francesca, for example, from Canto V of Dante’s Inferno. Reading together a romance about Sir Lancelot, they slip into adultery and eternal damnation. Or who could be as deluded, as obsessional, as Captain Ahab? At the point in her life when Mary Shelley was writing Frankenstein, she read aloud to her husband Percy from Don Quixote. And was not Beowulf, in his shaggy sort of way, the first in a long lineup of knights errant? Don Quixote mistakes sheep for rapids. Odysseus turns his armed men into sheep, as it was, to escape from Polyphemus’s cave.

Harold Bloom says that Don Quixote is the first and still the best of all novels. For Winter Weekend 2006 (March 10-11, Bowdoin College) we take up what some would argue is an even greater novel, Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time. We won’t tackle the entire 3,000 pages, but only the first of its seven parts. What was something like 444 pages in Lydia Davis’s new translation (far more straightforward and concise than the earlier, more florid attempts to put Proust into English).

Not much “happens” in Proust: a young man (who may or may not be the author) grows up, falls in and out of love, meets some more or less interesting people in the upper reaches of French society, travels a bit, falls ill, thinks his life has been squandered. (A loose translation of the title might read: How Did I Waste So Much Time?) At the end, however, he has an epiphany that changes his perception of his life, of everyone’s
POETRY COMES TO LIFE IN MAINE LIBRARIES

On June 13 and 14, 2005, the Maine Humanities Council brought together twenty librarians from around the state at the Bangor Public Library. They gathered to learn ways of expanding poetry programs and services at their libraries, and to share their programming ideas, through Poetry in the Branches, a training created by Poets House and sponsored by the Maine Humanities Council, Toms’ of Maine, and the Maine State Library.

Poets House is a literary center and poetry archive in New York City that developed the Poetry in the Branches training to increase poetry awareness and poetry-related programming in public libraries.

I see the boy alert
In near darkness, head back to see the sky—
A veil laid over an ancient earth,
The truest irrelevant guide.

Four lines from Baron Wormer’s “Swayed” from his book entitled When (Sandbende Books, 1997)
IT’S TIME TO SIGN UP FOR WINTER WEEKEND...HURRY!

Winter Weekend continues on March 10 and 11, 2006, with Lydia Davis’s new translation of Swann’s Way. The first of seven volumes from Marcel Proust’s immortal A la recherche du temps perdu (initially translated as In Search of Lost Time and later as Remembrances of Things Past), Swann’s Way is regarded by many audiences as Proust’s most definitive work. Published at the author’s own expense in 1913 as Du côté de chez Swann, Swann’s Way contains the fateful moment when a taste of a madeleine dipped into linden blossom tea evokes the narrator’s childhood in Combray. It is a story of beautiful memories and early loves. It is also a tale of idol-worship, social cruelty, and the corrosive effects of jealousy.

To all who have read it, the book’s characters come alive at the very mention of their names: the narrator’s great-aunt Léonie, the red-haired Gilberte, the writer Bergotte, the odd yet intriguing Baron de Charlus, the musician Vinteuil, the alluring Odette de Crécy, and, of course, Charles Swann himself. Davis’s is a more literal translation than those previously published and has received great acclaim.

Winter Weekend brings together people who love great literature to discuss and hear talks on a definitive fictional text. Tickets are $200 per person and with admission include a Proust-inspired dinner, breakfast and lunch, background materials, and a copy of the Lydia Davis translation of Swann’s Way.

Winter Weekend seats are limited and go very quickly. If you are interested in attending or have questions about the program, contact Tricia Currie Hunt at the Maine Humanities Council: 207-773-5051.