On January 5, 2011 the Bibliophiles went to China, figuratively speaking, under the tutelage of Peter Hessler, whose highly acclaimed ORACLE BONES: A Journey Between China’s Past and Present, was the focus of our discussion. Hessler draws upon acquired Mandarin language skills, and long-term contacts with students from his Peace Corps teaching experience in Fuhling, to elicit a detailed portrait of Chinese life past and present.

Some readers found understandable difficulties in tracking unfamiliar language and historical traditions in a country as huge and complex as China. One reader found a surfeit of “flotsam and jetsam”; perhaps referring to the detailed descriptions of characters and conversations, some in “broken” English.

On the other hand, Hessler’ demonstrates acute powers of observation and description, leading to insights into the character and personality of numerous Chinese subjects of all ages. There are fascinating vignettes of his maturing Chinese students, caught in the process of becoming individualized (one might say Americanized), through the extended process of his teaching, followed up by continuing practical and emotional support through repeated visits and correspondence.

Our next meeting will by Wednesday at 11:30 on March 2 (Venice Inn), when we will have UNL Journalism professor, Joe Starita, join us for a discussion of his highly
acclaimed book entitled: I AM A MAN: Chief Standing Bear’s Journey for Justice. Standing Bear’s story is one of the epic episodes of Omaha history and that of the American West. The issue of justice is a fundamental pivot point of the politics and policies (and dare we say, the “civility”) of American society.

Graham Lusk, a fellow bibliophile, has suggested our next title, which I commend to you as a candidate for our June 1 meeting discussion. For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus, by Frederick Brown has been critically acclaimed and is due out in paperback in early February. I suggest that you check it out on the Internet and come prepared to comment thereon.

(Reported by Bob Runyon, 1/19/2001)