

Books & People

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The Library is feeling livelier than ever this autumn, with staff and many patrons in the building and others finding new ways to appreciate our collections and services. To kick off the season, we talked with a few members about their Library stories.

Karim Barrada, member since 2011

How did you first learn about the Library? We moved from London to New York in early 2011. At the time, our first daughter was 18 months old, and we were looking for a library that had a very good children's section. We are keen bibliophiles and therefore we were also looking to borrow books for ourselves. A couple who, like us, lives in Carnegie Hill recommended the NYSL. We visited and we were hooked!

How does your family use the Library? It has evolved over time.

For many years we made good use of the weekly children's activities, including storytime, thematic activities like Halloween, and special events such as Bob "Bobaloo" Basey playing the banjo. The Library really became a destination. Children's Librarians Randi Levy and Susan Vincent Molinaro pay tremendous attention to every child who sets foot in the children's library. Just listen to the whispers: they always offer advice and engage with the children with suggestions and ideas. It's really nice to hear the children get in the habit of expressing their preferences to a librarian: We have one in the family so we know how passionate they are about reading!

What's your favorite thing about the Library? My favorite thing about the Library is that it is not a giant building. It feels like home sometimes. It's actually set in a beautiful family home, albeit a very luxurious one, and it feels as though it is the only place in NY that has not been propelled into the XXIst century. So you won't see computers, DVDs, and games. The NYSL manages to protect the integrity of the reading experience even though it uses plenty of high-tech infrastructure to deliver a wonderful experience to its members. We also have fond memories of attending the opening ceremony of the children's library after it was renovated, and also the book signing with [Laurent de Brunhoff,] the illustrator of *Babar*.

Michael Imperioli, member since 2021

How do you use the Library? I go to the Library to write; currently at work on another novel, just completed a first draft of a TV pilot. I also love having the giant wealth of resources at hand when I need to do some research for my work.

What's your favorite thing about the Library? My favorite thing about the Library is ...everything!!!! The staff, the stacks, the rooms, the building, the vibe, the proximity to the Met and the park!!! I love it all, it's a sanctuary and a home away from home... I love the Green Alcove, but don't tell anyone else about it... trying to keep it a secret!!



Greetings from the Head Librarian

Fall is not the time of year traditionally associated with rebirth, but that is exactly what this season has felt like to me. After eighteen long months, we are once again hosting live events in the Members' Room! What a delight to gather together in person and fully engage with each other and our wonderful speakers. (Thanks to funding from Alex Sanger, we can also livestream these events to a virtual audience.) Over the past year, many of you have inquired about staff members who have been working remotely. We've missed their daily presence too, so we were thrilled to welcome them all back after Labor Day. We also expanded our hours to 58 per week.

Another sign that the Library is rebounding: memberships have increased for the eighth month in a row. We are not yet where we need to be, but we are firmly on the right path, and that is thanks to all of you who have supported us and who continue to lift us up. This issue of *Books & People* is dedicated to you.

I can't help but add my own contribution to the "what's the best book you read this year" feature in this newsletter. Development Assistant Diane Srebnick recommended Deepa Anappara's achingly beautiful *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* to me, and I heartily commend it to you. Hands down, my nonfiction pick is Farah Jasmine Griffin's *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature*, a heartfelt memoir, literature class, and cultural commentary in one brilliant package.

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

Felicity Strauss, member since 2017

How do you and your family use the Library? We mostly use it to check out books and find new books to try. Since the Library has a wide selection of books, there's always something new and interesting on the shelves. When the Library has seating (pre-COVID-19) I love to just sit and read for a long time. When I was little, I liked the "Creation Station" where I could make crafts. My parents like to browse in the stacks while I enjoy the children's library.

What's your favorite thing about the Library? My favorite thing about the Library is how helpful and kind the staff are. They help me find new books that I will like, and everyone there is a part of the community. My favorite place in the library is the children's section.

Anything else you'd like us to know about your Library use? I enter the NYSL writing competition every year. It's really fun and a great opportunity to make my writing the best it can be. One year I got an award for my story and I got to meet Robert Quackenbush. He was really kind. My school also participates in Project Cicero, so I always donate books to that, and in fourth grade I made the poster to encourage students at my school to participate.



Dede Kessler, member since 1992

How did you first hear about the Library? A friend said I'd like something called the New York Society Library and invited me to meet her at 53 East 79th Street for a personal tour. Once there I was greeted by acres of limestone and marble, neoclassical sculpture on the divinely shallow-stepped stairway and elsewhere in the gracefully proportioned landings and rooms, and many more pleasing features, all contributing to an effect of grandeur and intimacy in one compact building. Best of all, there were 12 stacks of books, mostly accessible to members, holding a comprehensive and every-growing collection—and maybe I'd catch a glimpse of Shirley Hazzard! It was love at first sight.

What are some of the ways you use the Library? There's been a marked evolution in my use of the Library, as a lending library in my early years of membership and as a special escape into solitude and quiet in order to gather my thoughts for challenging drafting assignments in my professional work, to the past decade, when I've discovered the depth of the Library's holdings for specific research projects in history, art history, and other subjects in the course of my volunteer work.

I'm also a fan of the Library's superb exhibitions. Kudos to Harriet Shapiro, Head of Exhibitions, and the Library's design team for creating visually and content rich shows in the compact but lovely Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery. It took decades and the enforced isolation of a global pandemic, but I've finally discovered the Library's rich programming and staff-created content in the physical and digital worlds (a favorite: the blog entries!). I've also consulted the Library's extensive online archives for pleasure and for research.

What's your favorite thing about the Library? The Stacks! For me, winning the Voltairean sweepstakes for the best of all possible worlds would be the experience of wandering the stacks for something specific, finding it, and then losing myself and all sense of time among the hidden gems—a relatively unsung collection of essays by the great historian James McPherson, an elegant little book by John Summerson on 18th-century architecture, and so much more....Those serendipitous moments in the stacks can't be beat.



What's your favorite place in the Library? I probably spend most of my time in the Hornblower Room but I've spent important chunks of time thinking, reading, writing in just about every seat in the stacks and countless hours in the study rooms.

Laurie Rosenwald, member since 2002

How did you first learn about the Library? I first heard about the library because of Philip Hamburger, a wonderful writer for *The New Yorker*. One day I phoned Hamburger, to whom I lied. I said I was writing a book about New York and humor, or some such nonsense. Hamburger asked "Are you doing your research at 'The Society?'" No? Well, you should." I'm a native New Yorker, a smarty-pants and snobbish curmudgeon, yet I'd never heard of it.

I walked into the Library and was met by a tall, dour gentleman in a tweed jacket. He gave me the fisheye. I asked how much it cost to join the library. His answer? "It is ...prohibitive." I would have done the same. We don't want paint-splattered hippydippy riffraff like me in here.

How do you use the Library? A better question might be: How don't I use the Library? As an ashtray. As a dressing room. As a rehab center. As a snack bar. As a therapist. As a dating app. As a phone booth. As a cookie jar. As a retreat from the slings and arrows.

What's your favorite thing about the Library? My favorite thing about the Library is that I stuck a rejected *New Yorker* cartoon I drew up on the bulletin board on the fifth floor, and it's still there 4 years later. At least somebody likes it.

What's the most surprising thing you've found in our stacks? It's a tie. Either *Progress at Pelvis Bay* by Osbert Lancaster or *And to Name but just a Few: red, yellow, green, blue* by Laurie Rosenwald.

James Delbourgo, member since 2020

How did you first learn about the Library? I first discovered the Library by walking down 79th Street one day. Rumors of the demise of the importance of brick and mortar have been greatly exaggerated.

How do you use the Library? I read and write in the Library, I borrow books, and I order books via interlibrary loan. The research staff has been incredible during the pandemic, getting all kinds of books for me and the occasional hoary VHS tape to support my research. One saintly member of staff even offered to loan me a VHS player. I also ride the elevators as much as possible, within reason.

What's the most interesting or surprising thing you've found in our collections? The Library allowed me to read an original late-19th-century Italian edition of the novel *Il Piacere (Pleasure)* by Gabriele d'Annunzio. The pages were almost crumbling as I read them, but it was a wonderful and generous admission into a bygone world.

Anything else you'd like us to know about your Library use? Academic libraries serve important purposes, but the NYSL fosters a love of books for their own sake, quite unlike any academic library I have ever been in. The Library is an oasis of pure bibliomania. You have no idea where browsing its shelves will lead you. Discovering it during the pandemic saved my mind and changed my life. Not bad for a building full of old books.



Have you tried Overdrive, our digital magazines collection? Members can borrow and read over 2,000 periodicals, covering the worlds of arts and literature, history, current events, cooking, travel, architecture and design, fashion, magazines for kids, and much more. Current issues are available the day they hit the newsstands, and back issues for up to two years are also available. Libby, the OverDrive reader app, is compatible with most Android and Apple devices and is easily installed. Or, if you prefer, you can borrow and read magazines using your web browser. To get started, click the E-Magazines link on the Library's homepage to find instructions for downloading the Libby app and additional information about borrowing digital magazines.

The Library's collection of electronic resources includes over twenty different products, offering archives of scholarly and popular periodicals, historical newspapers, acclaimed reference sources, e-books, the Loeb Classical Library, and more. Click the Electronic Resources tab on our homepage to learn more.

The Best Book I Read in 2021 (so far)

Leonardo da Vinci by Walter Isaacson. A clever and measured introduction to his formidable legacy.

—Karim Barrada, member

Letters to Camondo by Edmund de Waal. I recommend it because it is thoughtful, interesting, beautifully written, and ultimately shocking and tragic.

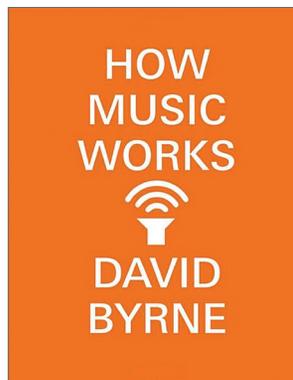
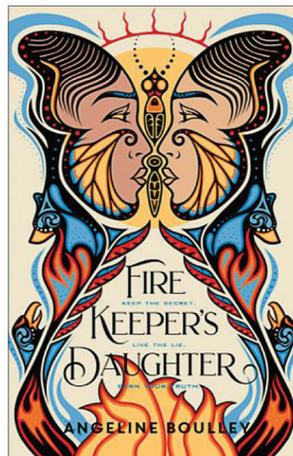
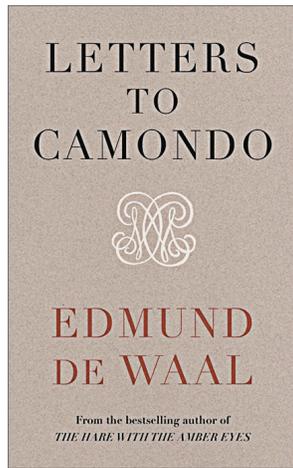
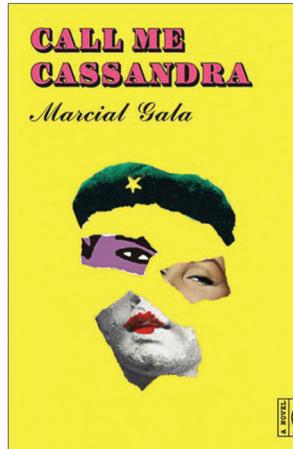
—Lucienne S. Bloch, member

The Great Mistake by Jonathan Lee is a series of vignettes that explore the interiority of a man with an extraordinary exterior life, one that gave us Central Park, the Met, and more New York institutions than there's space to list here. Opening with Andrew Haswell Green's senseless murder, the narrative moves through quiet scenes* that allow us to see his world through his eyes. Isolated sometimes by an inappropriate sense of kindness and at other times his own fear, he's haunted by opportunities for love missed, never to be eased and only to be accepted. The novel's title could refer to any number of mistakes (including the contemporary epithet for Green's consolidation of the City of Greater New York), but the greatest is the way we misinterpret both each other and ourselves. Though melancholy, Green's story is permeated by hope: a vision of a world greater than himself, filled with endless opportunity.

*Some are set here at the NYSL, Green's library of choice in the days before the New York Public Library, which he was also instrumental in founding.

—Kirsten Carleton, Circulation Assistant

How Music Works by David Byrne. Despite having read many volumes near it on the shelf, I only caught up with the multifaceted rocker's manifesto after seeing Spike Lee's film of his Broadway show *American Utopia*. An eclectic blend of history, acoustical science, neuroscience, personal reminiscence, and enthusiasm, the book shows the remarkable range and depth of Byrne's interests and the vital universality of music across cultures and languages. The changes in vocal style required by recording technology, the amazing impact of musical education on childhood development, the icky bathrooms at CBGB—it's all here.



How Music Works made me want to seek out a whole new assortment of styles with newly informed ears.

—Sara Elliott Holliday, Head of Events

Best book read this year was *Call Me Cassandra* by Marcial Gala. (It's only in galleys now, but his prior novel *The Black Cathedral* is a close second, as is *MONA* by Pola Oloixarac.

—Michael Imperioli, member

I will limit my response to fiction for no reason other than to observe that many good works of fiction have been published in the last couple of years, but nothing that stirred me like Nabokov's funny, poignant *Pnin* or Dostoevsky's titanic *Brothers Karamazov*, both of which I read or re-read, as the case may be, in the course of seminars offered by the Library and consummately led by Jane Mallison (4 books by Nabokov) and Nicholas Birns (*The Brothers Karamazov*).

—Dede Kessler, member

This summer I compulsively listened to the audiobook of Angeline Boulley's debut novel *Firekeeper's Daughter*, a complex and gripping thriller-meets-love story about 18-year-old Daunis Firekeeper Fontaine as she grapples with the untimely death of her uncle and the murder of her best friend amidst a community roiled by a growing methamphetamine epidemic. Of mixed heritage—Ojibwe and French-American—Daunis is determined to help end the destructive cycle in her beloved Michigan community despite the danger and heartbreak that may come with uncovering the truth. (also available in hardcover)

—Randi Levy, Head of the Children's Library

The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing and the Future of the Human Race by Walter Isaacson. *The Code Breaker* tells the fascinating story of the discovery of the CRISPR system, which can be used to edit genes. The book focuses on the American biochemist Jennifer Doudna, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2020 (with French biochemist Emmanuelle Charpentier) for the CRISPR system's discovery. Additionally, Isaacson explores the moral and ethical implications of editing genes. While curing diseases by editing genes seems completely reasonable, changing genes to select for a different height or other physical

traits might produce some unwanted consequences. I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in the future of science and the behind-the-scenes work and human relationships that make scientific discoveries possible.

—Mirielle Lopez, Circulation Assistant

As the world very slowly reopens, three books that I enjoyed in 2021 relate to traveling, be it local or abroad. Before departing on a recent overdue vacation, I savored Ellen Feldman's *Paris Never Leaves You*, and the title proved true, even if, like me, you haven't visited the City of Lights for over 20 years. I also chuckled over Helen Ellis's recent humorous essays, *Bring Your Baggage and Don't Pack Light*, again always true for me, especially if I were to go on a family trip. And finally, returning home, I recommend *Names of New York* by Joshua Jelly-Schapiro, which enlightened me about the unique history of place names throughout my adopted state.

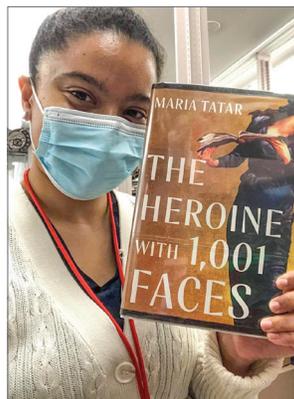
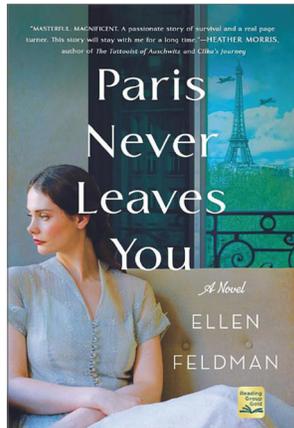
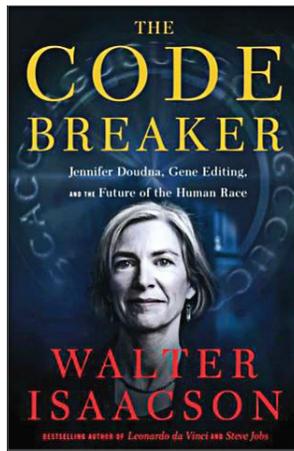
—Susan Vincent Molinaro, Children's and Young Adult Librarian

The Heroine with 1001 Faces by Maria Tatar is a must-read for folklorists and folklore lovers alike. The book traces sources ancient and contemporary—from ancient mythology and *The Thousand and One Nights* to Nancy Drew, Wonder Woman, and Charlotte (*Charlotte's Web*). The purpose is to showcase the power of women's voices—and the shocking ways cultural and societal norms try to suppress, dismiss, reject, and deny them. The world-renowned folklorist and academic also engages with the works of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, and various others on the varying powers of all women—quiet, fierce, steadfast, and empowering. The book is a reminder of how transcendent storytelling is, especially in diving deeply into the trickster female that is—strangely—an almost unheard-of rarity. Of course, the book takes off from Joseph Campbell's famous 1949 work of comparative mythology *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—and shows that wielding a sword is not necessarily always heroic

—Marialuisa Monda, Events Assistant

I Really Like Slop by Mo Willems. I love that book because Gerald goes 'Urk! Urk! Urk! Urk!' and then he changes into all different colors. *I Really Like Slop* is my favorite book.

—Julian P., member, age 5



I love good mysteries. During COVID I have reread many of my favorite authors—P.D. James, Elizabeth George, Tana French, Kate Atkinson—and reentered the lives of their detectives, their most wonderful characters.

—Sarah Piper, member

Best book read this year: *How to Make Mistakes on Purpose* by Laurie Rosenwald.

—Laurie Rosenwald, member

This year, I re-read, once again, *A Writer's Diary* by Virginia Woolf. After Woolf's death, her husband Leonard Woolf pulled extracts from her voluminous diaries that explain her writing process and creative influences. It gives a fascinating insight into Woolf's work (which I love) and also into the creative process itself."

—Gretchen Rubin, trustee

It's very hard to choose, but one of my favorites that I've read this year is *Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy* by Rey Terciero, which is a graphic novel adaptation of *Little Women*. Another of my favorites is the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney. My final favorite is *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, which was recommended to me by an NYSL children's librarian (Morgan Boyle) a couple of years ago. It is a story in pictures and it's about a man who goes to a new, strange place so it shows what it is like to be an immigrant.

—Felicity S., member, age 11

I loved the *Kane Chronicles* by Rick Riordan, because I learned about Egyptian mythology, and I like the fantasy and adventure.

—Audra S., member, age 9

I love the *Asterix* series by René Goscinny because of the fantasy and fighting!

—Patrick S., member, age 7

How Did that Get in My Lunchbox by Christine Butterworth. I like *How Did That Get in My Lunchbox* because it's about food and where it comes from and stuff like that.

—Kavita V., member, age 3

What's the best book you've read this year? Tag @nysoclib on Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #BestBook!

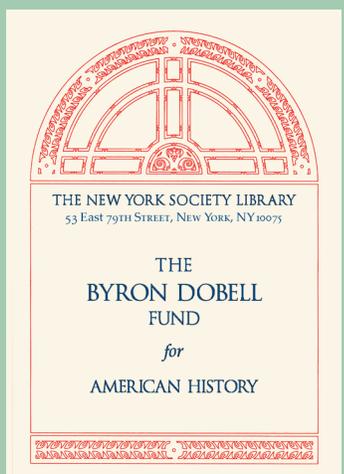
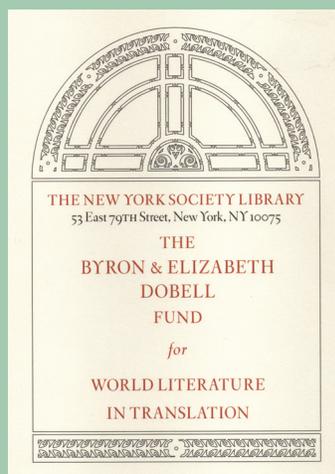
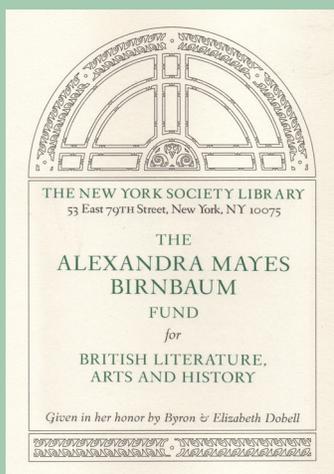
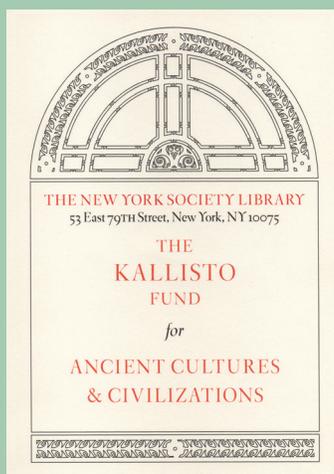
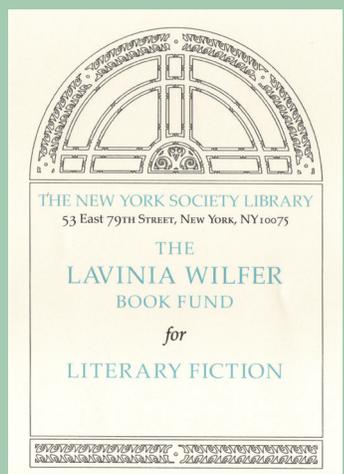
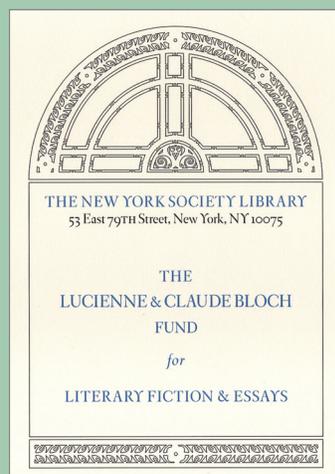
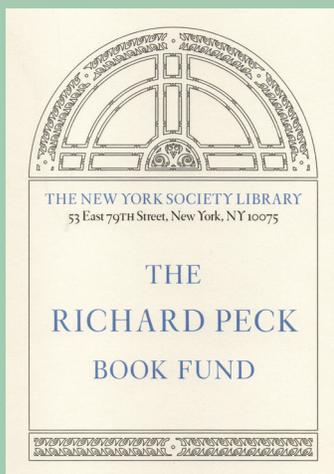
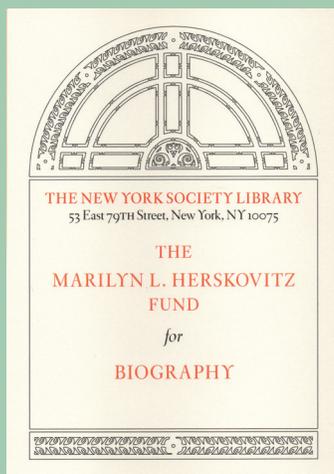
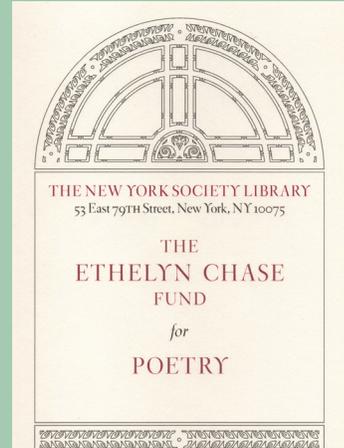
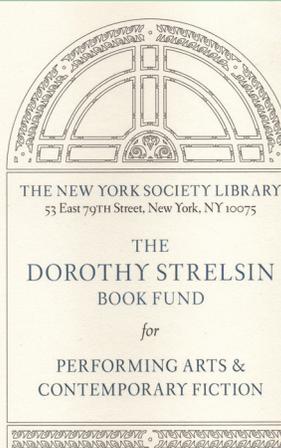
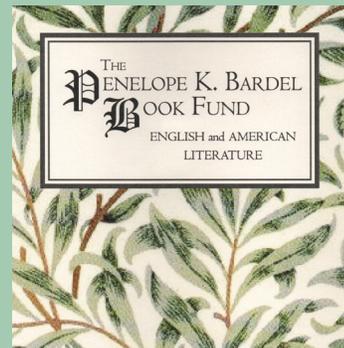
Book Funds

have a lasting impact on the Library's collection.

Since 2016 book funds have supported the acquisition of over a third of all books purchased by the Library. We are deeply grateful to the many members of the Library community who have established books funds throughout our history, and we are pleased to share the beautiful bookplates of the funds that continue to add depth and breadth to our circulating collection.

Book Funds can be established to build our holdings in a specific interest area and designated in the name of your choice. To learn more about creating a book fund, please call 212.288.6900 x207.

Special thanks to Ada and Romano Peluso for their generous support of The Peluso Family Exhibition Books Fund, established to purchase non-circulating volumes for our exhibitions and special collections.



Events Return to the Building

We were delighted to re-start Members' Room events (with limited, vaccinated audiences) in September and October. Most Members' Room events also stream online, and some lectures, seminars, and workshops continue online only.



From top, left to right: Thomas Dyja speaks on *New York New York New York*, October 7; Diana Altman and Henry Alcalay read from their work at Live from the Library, October 14; Prof. Farah Jasmine Griffin introduces her new book *Read Until You Understand: The Profound Wisdom of Black Life and Literature*, September 30; Live from the Library readers C.S. Hanson and Muffy Flouret; Cynthia Saltzman and Xavier F. Salomon discuss her book *Plunder: Napoleon's Theft of Veronese's Feast*, October 25.



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One More Picture



We're pleased to have with us new Circulation Page Justin Schwartz, Circulation Assistant Sarah Callery, and Bibliographic Assistant Cullen Gallagher. They and all of us look forward to seeing you around the building.