

LIBRARY NOTES

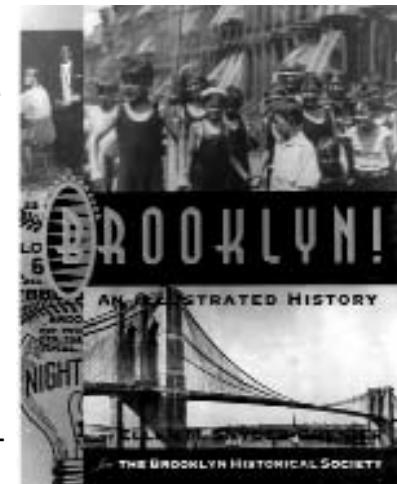
THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

N
Y
S
L
1
9
9
6
B
O
O
K
A
W
A
R
D



From Sicily to Singapore, from Bangor to Berkeley, mention Brooklyn and almost everyone will have a memory or an image of that sometimes venerated, sometimes beleaguered, ever-changing borough. Although I was born in the Bronx and grew up in New Jersey, my great grandmother was an immigrant who found a home in Brooklyn and, I am told, had a candy store in Flatbush--where my father's family also lived for a time. They say that one out of every seven people has a connection to Brooklyn, and I guess that's probably true. My own firsthand acquaintance with Brooklyn began after I had finished graduate school at Winterthur in Wilmington, Delaware, and got a job at the Brooklyn Historical Society. In the course of my nine years there, I was curator of collections, of exhibitions, and then chief curator, and over the years we conducted a broad spectrum of research projects, many of which served as the basis of the book.

In *Brooklyn! An Illustrated History*, I have endeavored to explore the borough's image and rich history through the unsurpassable collections of the Brooklyn Historical Society. I've used five larger-than-life points of entry into what makes Brooklyn, Brooklyn--the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklynites themselves, the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Coney Island, and the Dodgers--emphasizing the complex tapestry of developing neighborhoods, striving immigrants, melding--and sometimes clashing--cultures, as well as the booming and stagnating economic cycles. Above all, I've tried to fill the book with stories --stories that spring from the creative union of the city's rich heritage, the cultural diversity brought by wave after wave of new residents, and the energy of its people. Such tales of human hopes and hard work, of community building, of cooperation and mutuality of interest rarely make the evening news or the front page. Yet they give heart and soul and life to the borough's brownstones and bridges, to Coney Island and Brooklyn Heights--to every block in every neighborhood that is the special place called Brooklyn.



Brooklyn! An Illustrated History will receive The New York Society Library's 1996 New York City Book Award. William J. Dean, Library chairman, will present the award to the author, Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, on Wednesday, June 25th. Ms. Snyder-Grenier is director of special projects at the New Jersey Historical Society and former chief curator at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

The Library's New York City Book Award is given annually for a book of literary or artistic quality that, in the opinion of the selection committee, evokes the essence and spirit of New York. The members of the selection committee are Barbara Cohen, proprietor of New York Bound bookshop; Hope Cooke, author of *Seeing New York* and *Time Change*; Christopher Gray, architectural historian and writer for *The New York Times*; Joan K. Davidson, civic leader and past commissioner of New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, executive director of Cityscape Institute; and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Wendy Wasserstein.

Brooklyn! is a story of people and places. Ms. Snyder-Grenier has drawn upon the Brooklyn Historical Society's rich collections in illustrating the book, and her lively account chronicles the changing human and urban faces of Brooklyn from the seventeenth century to the present. Temple University Press, the publisher, has produced a book that is lucidly written and graphically handsome. *Brooklyn!* notably represents a work on a New York subject that deserves to be singled out for honor.



The Library received an extraordinary letter in March when Patricia S. Myrer wrote Mark Piel, "I enclose my check for \$25,000, a gift to the Library for its own excellence and open stacks that were so helpful to my husband, Anton Myrer. This gift is in his memory."

Following Mrs. Myrer's wishes, her donation will become a restricted fund for the purchase and preservation of nineteenth-century fiction and serious literary criticism through the time of Henry James. A special book-plate is being designed that will be placed in all volumes bought or rebound as a result of this memorial.

Anton Myrer, who died of leukemia in 1996, was a best-selling author whose themes were America's loss of innocence and the use and abuse of power. He is particularly remembered for *The Last Convertible* (1978), a summation of the American experience during and after World War II, and for *Once an Eagle* (1968), which traces the life of a regular Army officer and his family from before World War I to Vietnam. Orville Prescott, in *The New York Times*, wrote of *Once an Eagle*: "Myrer is a superb storyteller...who cares about the art of narrative and is a master." The Army War College Foundation, which is republishing the novel this year, describes it as "a perceptive study of the profession of arms and a chilling overview of armed conflict....Myrer forces us to smell and feel the battlefield as well as hear and see it."

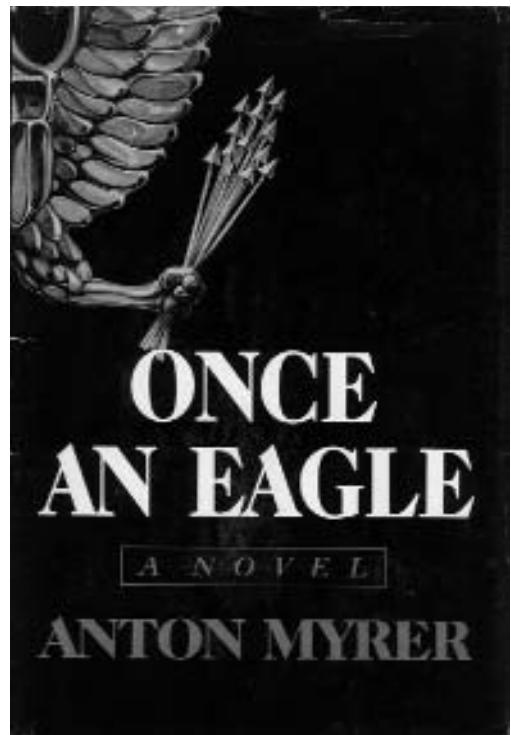
Myrer also wrote *Evil Under the Sun* (1951); *The Big War* (1957), of which one critic wrote, "I doubt if it is possible to come much closer...to an American *War and Peace*"; *The Violent Shore* (1962); *The Intruder: A Novel of Boston* (1965); *The Tiger Waits* (1973); and *A Green Desire* (1981). The Library has copies of all eight novels in much-read first editions and, in the case of six of the eight, in leather-bound volumes recently donated by Mrs. Myrer.



Greta Miller
Anton Myrer with the "Empress," the 1938 Packard Super 8 which inspired *The Last Convertible*.



Gift in Memory of Anton Myrer, by Barbara H. Stanton



Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, Myrer grew up in the Berkshires, Cape Cod, and Beacon Hill—all settings for his novels. A 1941 graduate of Boston Latin School, he interrupted his education at Harvard after Pearl Harbor to enlist in the Marine Corps and spent more than three years in the Pacific. He rose to the rank of corporal, took part in the invasion of Guam, and was wounded. He returned to graduate from Harvard magna cum laude and subsequently lived on the Cape, in Portugal, and at the time of his death, in up-state New York where he received books by mail from the Library.

All who have read Myrer's novels know the strength and passion of his moral vision. The Library is honored by his widow's generous and thoughtful gift in his memory.



James Joyce's Dublin, by Marylin Bender Altschul

Among the many joyous rituals of the June calendar, Bloomsday on the 16th of the month is a celebration fast becoming popular beyond the particular circle of James Joyce scholars. In Dublin, literary pilgrims and urban explorers gather to honor Leopold Bloom, the hero of Joyce's epic *Ulysses*. With text in hand and preferably garbed in oddments of Edwardian style, they trace Bloom's wanderings on that single day in 1904. Though Joyce left Ireland to write in permanent exile, he said that his native city, if ever destroyed, could be reconstructed by reference to his novel. Indeed, most of the landmarks of Joyce's "dear, dirty Dublin" have survived rebellion, civil war, and the wrecking balls of real estate developers.

Starting in the early morning at the Martello Tower in suburban Sandycove, now the James Joyce Museum, local actors and visitors from far and wide read from the opening chapters of *Ulysses*, which are set in the fortress overlooking "the snot-green sea." Emulating Buck Mulligan, some strip for a plunge into the "scrotumtightening" depths of Dublin Bay, while the less hardy repair to the center of the city for a robust Irish breakfast featuring Bloom's beloved "inner organs of beasts and fowls."

Others hire horse-drawn carriages for the ride to Glasnevin Cemetery, commemorating the episode in *Ulysses* of Paddy Dignam's funeral. At 1:00 P.M., Davy Byrne's pub in Duke Street serves Bloom's favorite lunch, a gorgonzola cheese sandwich and a glass of Burgundy. Across

the Liffey at the Ormond Hotel, a pint of Guinness is the stimulus of choice for recalling that Bloom and his wife's lover, Blazes Boylan, just missed meeting in the bar at 4:00 P.M.

The hub of Bloomsday activities through the day and into evening is the James Joyce

Centre at 35 North Great George's Street, on a block of grand, eighteenth-century Georgian houses retrieved from slumhood. Joyce's nephew, Ken Monaghan, recounts the harsh facts of the family's impoverished existence and leads a walking tour of the neighborhood that figured in both the writer's life and his fiction. The tearoom of the Centre is

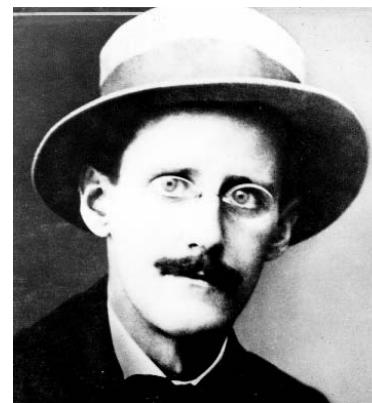
framed by the front door of Bloom's long-ago demolished residence, Number 7

Eccles Street. Behind that door in an upstairs bedroom, Molly Bloom uttered the "yes...yes...Yes" that concludes the novel. No Bloomsday is complete without a notable Irish actress reciting Molly's thirty-six-page sexual reverie.

For those who can't make it to Dublin, Bloomsday can be vigorously observed in New York.

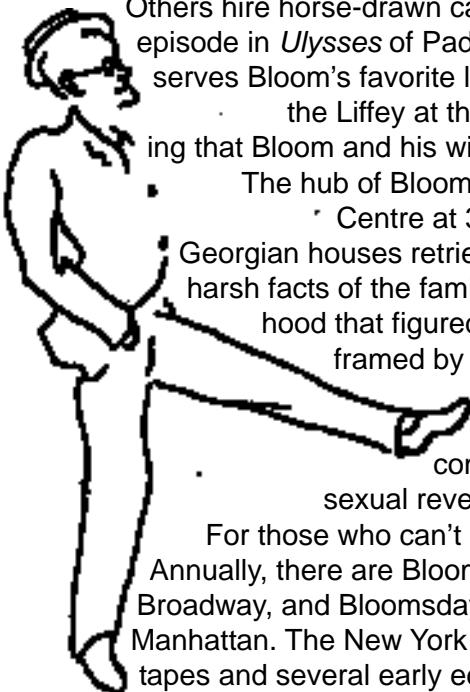
Annually, there are Bloomsday readings from Joyce's *Ulysses* at Symphony Space on upper Broadway, and Bloomsday breakfasts and other Joycean events at Irish venues in downtown Manhattan. The New York Society Library has a comprehensive Joyce collection including audio-tapes and several early editions in its rare book holdings.

Desmond Harsworth, courtesy University of Texas's Humanities Research Center



James Joyce in Zurich circa 1917

From the Harley K. Crossmann Collection of James Joyce, Special Collection Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale



THE VISITORS COMMITTEE: One of the most successful programs of the Library has evolved from the Visitors' Committee and its efforts to assess the Library's collections in various subjects. Members volunteer to "visit" and evaluate those sections in which they have expertise. Some 30 reports, bound in a looseleaf notebook, are available for the asking at the Main Desk. The reports range widely, from urban politics and planning, German historiography, and the theater to Islamic science, World War I, and the decorative arts. These Visitors' reports are essential to the vitality of the Library, and additional volunteers with areas of special knowledge are always welcome.

We are also seeking a new series of reports based on travel and the companion world of literature. Many travelers choose a destination because of correspondents and historians like Harrison Salisbury and Barbara Tuchman, or the journals of nineteenth-century explorers like Richard Burton and Henry Morton Stanley in Africa. They may be haunted by fictional memory--of Paris as captured by Marcel Proust or of St. Petersburg and Moscow evoked by Leo Tolstoy or Boris Pasternak. These distinctive Baedekers will draw on Visitors' knowledge of specific places and will serve as travelers' guides with reference to Library books to be read before and during a trip.



Library Staff Member Wins Academy Award

Leonard Lionnet, a composer and staff member of the Library (going on four years), was recently recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for his musical score to the film, *Erosion*, which won the prestigious Academy Award for Student Films. Directed by Robert Gelber of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, *Erosion* is a narrative puzzle, told through visual images and orchestral music, depicting a man's inner journey to recollect his past loves.

Growing up in New Orleans, Lionnet didn't begin to study music until he enrolled in the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), a special high school that has produced many musicians, including Wynton Marsalis and Harry Connick. At seventeen, he began composing, and his first orchestral work was performed the next year at Tanglewood. After receiving a B.M. from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, he moved to New York and is now a Ph.D. candidate in music composition at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Trained in classical music and orchestration, Lionnet has branched out beyond the concert hall into other types of composition. Through Everett Aison, a writer and professor at the School of Visual Arts he met while working at the Library, Lionnet began writing music for films. "It's totally unlike concert composing," he says. "It's a subversive form where you are really creating an emotion without the knowledge of the audience. The score has to dance with the film."

Lionnet has composed for film, TV, concert stage, modern dance, and ballet, and his works have been played and performed throughout North America and Europe. His next project, after he finishes his Ph.D. dissertation next year, may be a score for an upcoming Broadway musical, and he will continue to experiment with various kinds of musical mediums.

LIBRARY TALES: The Library renovated and moved into its present building sixty years ago this summer. Margaret Mather Byard can remember wheeling the perambulator containing her eldest child, Margaret, to 53 East 79th Street to investigate and inquire about membership. She was told she could join as soon as the Library reopened, which she did.

Have other members memories of this building or the previous one at 109 University Place in the 1930s and 1940s? The editor would be most interested. Please write Jenny Lawrence, care of the Library.



THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

53 East 79th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021