



NOTES

VOLUME 15, NUMBER 4, FALL 2008

FROM THE HEAD LIBRARIAN

A COMMUNITY OF READERS

As mentioned in recent publications, the Library is very proud of being a home for writers. However, in my first *Notes* column of the 2008–2009 program year, I want to recognize another community: the community of readers. It is the passion for reading and the printed word among so many of our members that remains a constant throughout our long history. Readers have always given the Library its central reason for being, shaped our services, and guided the development of our collections.

Measuring by our circulation figures alone, reading is certainly not on the decline. Introduction of an online catalog in 1998 allowed us to start tracking statistics, letting us know that circulation of books has increased 12% in the last eight years. At any one time, 40% of our members have at least one book checked out; 85% have taken books out at some point in their membership.

The Library strives to serve and assist readers in a wide variety of ways. Books displayed in the lobby are the first port-of-call for seekers of new titles. We add genre tags to the spines of new books for mysteries, biographies, fiction, and nonfiction, and we display two shelves of books recommended by the Book Committee. A title is only moved into the stacks once its circulation activity declines.

The New Books List gives readers a first glimpse at what is newly available at the Library. Published at the beginning of each month, it is available at the reference desk and on the website. (Older issues, a great resource for recommended titles by genre, are archived at www.nysoclib.org/newbooks/index.html.) Not every new book purchased fits on the list, so the online catalog should be your main tool in looking for a specific title.

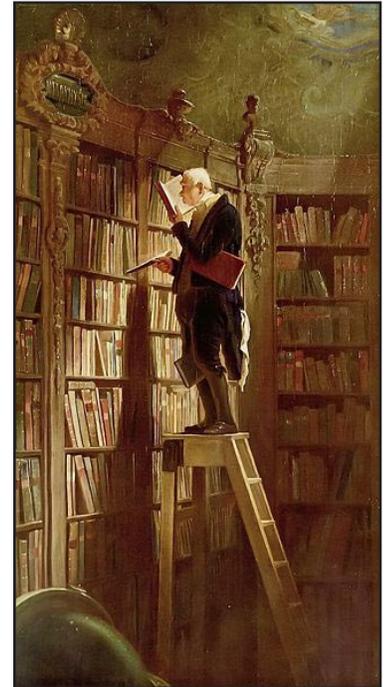
Many readers request help at the services desk in the lobby and in the Children's Library. Staff members are happy to assist readers in finding their crucial next book with the aid of book reviews, reference works, or related materials in periodicals and electronic resources.

The Library works hard to improve the online catalog every day by adding records for each new title purchased or received as a gift. Older records are reviewed and revised to correct and enhance authors, subjects, series titles, physical descriptions, and the occasional typographical error. Books with "on order" or "in processing" status are viewable in the online catalog, and holds can be placed on these items prior to their availability for checkout.

We also bolster the reading community with book discussion groups each season. Registration numbers and enthusiastic feedback tell us that these events are an important part of the reading life for many members and a vital section of our programming. This fall's season offers four exciting groups: Carol Rial on the intersection between political memoir and literature, Donald McDonough on Virgil's *Aeneid*, John Koller on the overlapping of Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and Sallieingham on her own and others' short stories. With future groups we want to acknowledge a range of reading interests, including such areas as biographies, history, mysteries, poetry, and travel. If you have ideas for future reading groups, please speak to me or to Events Coordinator Sara Elliott Holliday.

I have only touched briefly here on some of the Library's many services for the reader. I encourage you to take a look at our *Guide to Membership and Use of the Library* (available at the reference desk or www.nysoclib.org/terms.html) or to browse the full website to refamiliarize yourself with your membership privileges. In particular, we're pleased to announce the availability of recordings of many of our events; see page 4 for details.

In the midst of all these activities, we are still working to improve services to readers. One example: in 2009 we hope to distribute the New Books List by e-mail. If we do not yet have your e-mail address in our database, you are invited to add it by sending a note to systems@nysoclib.org (and keeping us informed if it changes); this will help us get a head start on spreading the list to all who would like it. This should be of particular help to readers who visit the Library infrequently or who receive books by mail. We will, of course, continue to provide printed lists as long as members find them useful. Are there other services, or improvements to existing services, that we could be making? Please do not hesitate to let me know.



The Bookworm
by Carl Spitzweg

continued on page 2

FROM THE HEAD LIBRARIAN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As your head librarian and as a reader myself I continue to be inspired by the depth and character of the Library's collections and the membership's embrace of them. I recall this when I take time to linger in the stacks and discover something new myself. Each year I read at least one title on the theme of reading and books, and this year I chose *The Romance of the Book* (Birch Brook Press, 1995), a collection of excerpts, anecdotes, and essays including such authors as Colette, George Eliot, Benjamin Franklin, Margaret Fuller, Stephanie Greene, Jan Morris, and Henry David Thoreau. One passage, by popular novelist Faith Baldwin, is worth sharing:

"Books are the real magic casements. Even a bad book has something in it as a rule, an effort, a striving after expression. Books are both reality and escape. They shock us, sometimes, they stun us, they trouble us—but always, they delight us. They sharpen our insight, set our imaginations free. And they are always the least expensive and most valuable form of entertainment as well as education."

Whether your tastes run to Faith Baldwin or James Baldwin, Graham Greene or Anna Katherine Green, Sue Miller or Arthur Miller, our Library's collection of close to 300,000 volumes should have many more books for you to discover. I hope that you, devoted reader, hardworking writer, or other patron, will continue to find what you need here and will support our work with your presence, your suggestions, and generous giving to this year's Annual Appeal. All of these are central to maintaining and improving our collections and our services to readers.

I look forward to seeing you at the reference desk or at one of the many events scheduled for this fall. If you have not looked over the events calendar, please do so now—registrations are being accepted for the full complement of lectures, discussion groups, workshops, and children's events. Enjoy your membership.



Mark Bartlett
Head Librarian

HAVING AN IMPACT

The New York Society Library has received two generous responses to underwriting opportunities: from Ada and Romano Peluso to support this year's newsletters, and from Frederick J. Iseman and trustee Ellen M. Iseman to support the New York City Book Awards. We are most grateful. We welcome such designated gifts for special Library priorities in addition to unrestricted support. There are many opportunities to have a direct impact on the collections and programming that the Library offers, from underwriting a children's author visit or supporting the conservation and digitization of our historic charging ledgers, to presenting events and exhibitions of distinction.

Other examples include the following:

- ∞ underwriting a lecture by a leading author;
- ∞ supporting the Library's book discussion groups or technology workshops for a semester;
- ∞ underwriting the annual Young Writers' Awards;
- ∞ supporting an exhibition in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery;
- ∞ establishing a book fund named for the donor in subject areas compatible with the Library's collections.

We appreciate all gifts to the New York Society Library, including contributions, underwriting support, matching gifts, bequests, and gifts in honor or memory of a loved one. Together they ensure a strong and stable future for services and programs to be enjoyed by generations to come.



For further information, please contact Director of Development Joan Zimmett at 212-288-6900 x207 or jzimmett@nysoclib.org.

This year's events and features newsletters are generously underwritten by Ada and Romano Peluso in memory of Assunta Sommella and Ignazio Peluso.

Text contributors to this newsletter included Mark Bartlett, Arevig Caprielian, Laura O'Keefe, Ingrid Richter, and Joan Zimmett.

STATUS: IN CATALOGING

MEET THE CATALOGERS

Laura O'Keefe, Head of Cataloging and Bibliographic Maintenance

The six members of the Cataloging Department—four librarians and two bibliographic assistants—are responsible for creating and maintaining bibliographic records for the Library's holdings in our online catalog. We catalog new materials as they arrive, giving priority to books specifically requested by members. We also correct and update the records for older items as needed. Occasionally we reclassify groups of materials; for example, we recently transferred about a dozen works on the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692, which had been shelved among books on magic and the occult, to a more appropriate location in colonial New England history.

The department's long-term goals include full cataloging of the Library's named collections of rare books. Work is currently underway on the James Hammond Collection, some 1,000 titles that were a substantial part of a nineteenth-century circulating library maintained by Newport, Rhode Island merchant James Hammond. The Library acquired these volumes in the 1860s. Published mostly between 1750 and 1830, the books are representative of the popular reading tastes of their time: they include plays, poetry anthologies, romantic and sentimental fiction, and a large number of Gothic novels. The latter are precursors of our horror fiction genre and are characterized by exotic settings—castles, monasteries, etc.—elaborate plots, and elements of the supernatural. An author search in the online catalog under "James Hammond's Circulating Library" (that library being the corporate "author") brings up such sample titles as *Aluredus, Knight of Malta*, *Letters of an Italian Nun and an English Gentleman*, and *The Soldier's Daughter: A Comedy in Five Acts*. Among the notable writers represented in this collection are William Godwin, M.G. "Monk" Lewis, Lady Sydney Morgan, and Jane and Anna Maria Porter.

The Hammond Collection project has turned up a surprising number of scarce items; in many cases, the Society Library has the only copy of a particular edition of a work in North America. In at least one instance, we hold the single known extant copy of a title: *Castle Zittaw*, by the pseudonymous "C.R."

There is a recent surge of scholarly interest in writers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, especially women, who are heavily represented in the romantic and Gothic genres. As a result, we anticipate that as the holdings of the Hammond Collection become more widely known we will see an increase in inquiries and visits from researchers eager to make use of them.

With a combination of daily cataloging and special projects, the Cataloging Department provides the behind-the-scenes work of maintaining order and getting books to patrons.

THAT WILDE OSCAR

Arevig Caprielian, Rare Books Librarian

It is perhaps fitting to his personality that with all the gems in the Library, Oscar Wilde still manages to seize attention. In this case, the eye-catching volume found in our open stacks is *Poems*, printed in London in 1881. It is a "first first"—an obsessive qualification of mine—meaning that it is the first edition of the very first published book by "O. Wilde."

While first editions are a dime a dozen in our collection, this one is an extraordinary copy, bearing not one but two presentation inscriptions by the author. The half-title page offers a respectful inscription to Madame Christine Nilsson, complete with "Homage de l'auteur." On top of that, there is a laid-in letter to Madame Nilsson, reflecting the writer's esteem for her and referring to this volume as "the first copy of my volume of poems."

Research revealed that the recipient was Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson, Countess de Casa Miranda (1843–1921) (pictured at right). Though biographers suggest that Wilde had no



An illustration from Matthew Lewis' Ambrosio, or The Monk (1799)



Wilde shortly after the publication of his first "slim volume" of poetry



ear for music, he was a constant attendee of all the performing arts in both Paris and London, where he must have seen Nilsson perform frequently. Widely known as a devoted admirer of Lillie Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt, the poet may have found it natural to express his veneration of another artist through this gift. Adding another touch of literary magic, it is theorized that the character of Christine Daaé in Gaston Leroux's 1911 *The Phantom of the Opera* was based on this real-life opera singer. Although verifiable evidence is lacking, there are notable similarities between Madame Nilsson and Leroux's character.

This unique item is one of the numerous sought-after books donated to the Library by Christian A. Zabriskie in the 1950s and later. It joined a longtime favorite, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, of which we have both a British first edition and an American early edition.

MISS AN EVENT? ATTEND VIRTUALLY

The Library is pleased to announce the public broadcast of audio and video recordings of our events, including most events from April and May of 2008 and nearly all upcoming ones. The Macromedia Flash player is required in order to stream these events from our website. It can be downloaded for free from www.adobe.com/products/flashplayer/.

STREAMING AUDIO

A complete list of audio event recordings is available at http://mail.nysoclib.org/Digital_Archives/audio/index.html. The audio recordings are available for download (MP3 format) or for listening as streaming audio. Audio CDs of events are available for checkout and are currently displayed in the lobby.

STREAMING VIDEO

A complete list of audio event recordings is available at http://mail.nysoclib.org/Digital_Archives/video/index.html. The video recordings are available only for viewing online, not for download.

The recording lists can also be reached from the drop-down menu on the main web page (www.nysoclib.org) under Books/Digital Projects/Streaming Audio (or Video), or on each event's individual page at www.nysoclib.org/notes/index.html.

The following event recordings are available as of this writing:

Edith Grossman and George Guidall, "*Don Quixote: Found in Translation*," March 1, 2007

Marie Ponsot reading her poetry, April 17, 2007

Peter Behrens, *The Law of Dreams*, September 26, 2007

Richard Wendorf, "America's Membership Libraries: Past and Present," January 30, 2008

Michael Gorman, James G. Neal and Maggie Jackson, "The Book Is Dead! Long Live the Book!" Panel, April 15, 2008

Jules Feiffer and Kate Feiffer, *Henry, the Dog With No Tail*, April 17, 2008

Brian Jay Jones, *Washington Irving: An American Original*, April 19, 2008

Susan Nagel, *Marie-Thérèse, Child of Terror*, April 24, 2008

Ellen Feldman, *Scottsboro*, May 1, 2008

The Young Writers Awards Ceremony, May 8, 2008

The New York City Book Awards Ceremony, May 14, 2008

Patricia Reilly Giff, "The Things That Matter to Us," May 15, 2008

Mark Singer and Nick Paumgarten, "New Yorkers and the *New Yorker*," May 19, 2008

Author Series: Bill Moyers, *Moyers on Democracy*, September 16, 2008

Michael Gorman, James G. Neal & Maggie Jackson
The Book Is Dead! Long Live The Book!
Tuesday, April 15, 2008 at 6:30 PM
Members' Room



Length: 53:16 minutes

Streaming Audio: [The Book Is Dead! Long Live The Book! \(77.8 MB\)](#)
 Streaming Video: [The Book Is Dead! Long Live The Book! \(174.9 MB\)](#)



The Book Is Dead! Long Live The Book!
 (Length: 53:16 minutes)

UPCOMING EVENTS

For full information and a list of workshops, see the *Early Fall Events* newsletter (available now) and the *Late Fall Events* newsletter (coming soon), or visit www.nysoclib.org/notes.html.

Daniel Javitch with Gus Powell on *The Way It Wasn't*

Wednesday, October 15, Members' Room, 6:30 P.M.

Children's Author Visit: Laura Vaccaro Seeger

Tuesday, October 21, Members' Room, 4:00 P.M.

Frances Kiernan on *The Last Mrs. Astor*

Thursday, October 23, Members' Room, 6:30 P.M.

Karl Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac on *Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East*

(A 2008-2009 Author Series lecture)

Tuesday, October 28, Temple Israel, 7:00 P.M.

"Red Car" and Other Short Stories

with Sallie Bingham

Thursday, October 30 and Friday, October 31, Whitridge Room, 11:00 A.M.

Saturday, November 1, Members' Room, 11:00 A.M.

Children's Author Visit: Bruce Coville

Tuesday, November 11, Members' Room, 5:00 P.M.

Exhibition Launch: *Shelf Life: Works in Brass* by Christopher Hewat

Thursday, November 6, Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery, 6:00 P.M. (time previously listed as 5:30 p.m.)

Nancy Goldner

with Merrill Ashley on *Balanchine Variations*

Wednesday, November 12, Members' Room, 6:30 P.M.

Used Book Sale

Saturday, November 22, Reference Room, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. (no registration required)

Robert Thurman on *Why the Dalai Lama Matters*

(A 2008-2009 Author Series lecture)

Wednesday, December 3, Temple Israel, 7:00 P.M.

Affinity Company Theater presents W.H. Auden's *For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio*

Sunday, December 7, Members' Room, 7:00 P.M.

Joelle Wallach, "Inspiration and Intentions: George Frederick Handel and *Messiah*"

Monday, December 15, Members' Room, 6:30 P.M.



Merrill Ashley

HOW TO REGISTER

The Children's Library will continue to take reservations for events by phone (212-288-6900 x234) or by e-mail (children@nysoclib.org). Fees for children's events should be paid at the door.

For all other events, Library members are asked to reserve places for themselves and their guests in advance, using the registration form on the back of this newsletter. This form can be dropped off at the Circulation desk, faxed to 212-744-5832, or mailed to The New York Society Library, attention Events, 53 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10075.

Online registration is available at www.nysoclib.org/events_registration.html.

Many events are free of charge; other events are \$10 or more per person for advance registration, as indicated. This fee must be paid at the time of the reservation by credit card or by check made out to The New York Society Library. If space is available, attendees arriving at the time of the event will be admitted, for an additional fee. Advance registration will be taken up to two hours prior to the stated event start time.

Returning this form with payment automatically registers you for the events indicated. Registrations will be recorded in the order received. The Events Office will contact you only if an event is fully registered and you are on a waitlist.

For single-session events: The Events Office will respond to your registration only if an event is fully registered and you are on a waitlist. A reminder will be sent to all registrants in advance of each event.

For multi-session events: The Events Office will contact you by phone or e-mail with a confirmation and further information.

There will be no refunds of registration fees, except in the case of waitlisted reservations for which no space becomes available, or cancellation of the event. If you and your guests have reserved places for an event but are unable to attend, you are welcome to donate the fee as a tax-deductible contribution. Please indicate this by calling the Events Office up to two hours prior to the start of the event.

Finally, most events can now be experienced as streaming audio and video from the Library's website within about a week of the event.

Questions? Please contact the Events Office at 212-288-6900 x230 or events@nysoclib.org.

EVENT REGISTRATION FORM

NAME OF PRIMARY REGISTRANT (PLEASE PRINT)

DAYTIME TELEPHONE E-MAIL ADDRESS

Single-Session Events

The Way It Wasn't, Oct. 15
(\$10)

Balanchine Variations,
Nov. 12 (\$10)

The Last Mrs. Astor, Oct. 23
(\$10)

Why the Dalai Lama Matters,
Dec. 3 (free)

Kingmakers, Oct. 28
(free of charge)

For the Time Being
Dec. 7 (\$20)

“Shelf Life” Exhibition Launch,
Nov. 6 (free)

“Inspiration and Intentions,”
Dec. 15 (\$10)

Multi-Session Event (free of charge)

“Red Car” In Context
All three sessions _____
Last session only _____

Workshops with Space Remaining

Introduction to Computers _____ Home Book Maintenance _____
Introduction to the Internet _____

TOTAL REGISTRATION FEES

My check is enclosed.

Please charge my credit card:

CARD NUMBER

EXPIRATION DATE

The New York Society Library thrives and prospers through the generosity of its donors. Contributions are fully tax-deductible and can be made by check, credit card, or in appreciated securities at any time throughout the year. For more information on supporting the Library, please visit our website at www.nysoclib.org/donations.html or call the Development Office at 212-288-6900 x214.

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY
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NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10075

This newsletter is available
in electronic form
at www.nysoclib.org/notes.html.