In Books Will Speak Plain, Julia Miller calls the nineteenth century the “last great period of the handmade book” because it was a period in which innovation and centuries-old tradition were combined. Even as machines took hold in the book manufacturing industry, books continued to be sewn by hand throughout the century, and covers often show traces of the human hands that decorated them. The “publisher’s cloth binding,” a hybrid of old and new technologies, survives as a book structure to tell this story. By examining the materials, cover construction, decoration, and sewing of these books, we can gain insight into the evolution of the book structure into its modern form. For a book conservator, knowing the context of a binding’s creation is also crucial in making an informed treatment decision. Our 1882 copy of A York and a Lancaster Rose by Annie Keary is a typical victim of decades of enthusiastic readers. Before diving into treatment, it is useful to consider the book’s Victorian roots.

Change was the defining characteristic of nineteenth-century industry. In the early years, book production was carried out fully by hand, much as it was in the preceding century. By 1900, books were almost entirely machine-made. For a trade that was conservative and slow to change, this swift transformation was breathtaking, and it happened as a result of a perfect storm of causal factors. The most obvious was the Industrial Revolution, which, of course, profoundly affected many trades. Higher literacy rates created a demand for more and more books. Innovations in papermaking and printing vastly increased the production of texts, which overwhelmed the hand-binding industry. (The effect this had on the quality of paper is a story for another time.)
Greetings from the Head Librarian

It’s hard to believe that it’s been almost a year since I took over as Head Librarian. I’m grateful to all of you who have shared your Library stories and told me what you think we’re doing well, and yes, even what we’re not.

We’re planning a membership survey for the early fall, and we’re eager to hear from you about everything from how we communicate with members to the value you place on our building spaces, collections, programs, and other services.

We didn’t need to wait for the survey to reach a decision on one long-overdue project. Through the generosity of a number of members, all the furniture in the Members’ Room will be reupholstered in phases over the summer.

We’re planning a membership survey well, and yes, even what we’re not. Remember that we are open seven days a week year-round. Stop in—the holstered in phases over the summer.

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Another major contribution to the mass production of books was the invention of starched book cloth in the 1820s. Previously, books were covered primarily with leather, parchment, or paper. Leather and parchment were expensive and time-consuming to produce, and as natural products, they could be of inconsistent quality. Bookcloth was cheap and reliable and required less skill to apply. Covers could be efficiently embossed with the same design en masse with heated brass dies and the help of newly developed “arming” presses.

Even with so much innovation, much of the bookbinding process was still done by hand until the end of the century. The brass dies used to stamp decorations on covers were hand-carved. One of the most time-consuming aspects of the book-making process, sewing the text block, continued by hand for most of the century. The turning point came didn’t arrive until the 1880s, when the Smyth Manufacturing Company began producing sewing machines. Yet even with mechanized sewing, book spines were still pounded into a semi-round shape by hand for some time, and workers glued text blocks into their covers one by one.

Bindings from this period can present a conundrum for a book conservator. They are not necessarily rare, but they carry the story of a pivotal time in book manufacturing history. They are valuable for more than just the words on their pages. They are unique in the way our Library is unique. As time passes, Victorian publisher’s cloth bindings grow increasingly scarce on library shelves. We are fortunate to have so many of them here, freely available to our members. They are at the heart of what we are as a library.

Bearing that in mind, you can look over my shoulder as I examine the publisher’s cloth binding that’s just left my workbench. By the time it reached the Conservation department, A York and a Lancaster Rose had seen a century of circulation. It was in pieces, with a torn spine and ripped and brittle pages. Major intervention was needed if this book was to become readable again.

The type of treatment it required is time-consuming, however, so I worked with our Acquisitions Department, considering the book’s value to our institution before proceeding.

In the case of A York and a Lancaster Rose, there are no identical copies available for purchase. Copies exist in other American libraries, but these are American editions, and in even worse shape. The Library acquired this British edition, likely at the behest of our patrons, years before an American edition was made available, just as we do today. It was not difficult to decide that it was worthwhile to spend some time to repair this book.

The photographs you see here illustrate the steps taken to conserve this volume. You may recognize some of the typical characteristics of nineteenth-century bindings discussed above.
To learn more about creating a book fund, call 212.288.6900 x207.

Library’s circulating collection.

...immeasurably to the breadth and depth of the New York Society Library’s circulating collection.

...city. How reviving it was to enter the building, with its stately, generous steps, and to spend time combing through the card catalog; or to walk through the cool, silent stacks redolent with the scent of paper and old bindings, searching for a particular book, only to pause here or there at some unexpected, intriguing title that seemed to beckon from the shelf.

...way I can remember making my way through Dante, a perfect setting for one with my predilection for the gothic. Sterling Library, with its spires and cathedral-like ambiance, a vast collection.

...was my introduction to history, transporting me to the world of young Queen Elizabeth, say, or that of Marie Curie.

...school, Polytechnic, had an airy library surrounded by lawn and oak trees where I often studied and did homework. For those who work alone, as I do, it can be comforting, even inspiring, to be among others at work in a library—people reading or researching, or teenagers bent over their homework.

...the twenty-first century, to dismiss libraries as something of an anachronism. Everything will be online, we are told, and in this digitized universe what will be always be a place, it seems to me, for the institutions which safeguard books and learning—perhaps even more so today, in our increasingly fractious and fragmented world. Libraries serve as both refuge and ballast; they are, in the words of T.S. Eliot from Four Quartets, that most precious thing of all: “the still place in the turning world.”

...myself, I moved to Pasadena, California where libraries, in every guise, loomed large.

...for a journalist and moved to the Upper East Side. In the early 1980s, I became a member of the New York Society Library. Then, as now, it seemed an oasis in the middle of the exciting, if frenetic city. How...
Welcome to summer, when days grow longer and the pace of life includes getting lost in a good book.

Here are a few that Library staff have enjoyed or plan to enjoy this season.

My recommendations are all set in France, not because I’m going there this summer, but perhaps because I wish I was. I loved The Only Street in Paris: Life on the Rue du Martyrs by Elaine Sciolino (lobby Nonfiction & e-Book), which is a wonderful slice of life on a street steeped in history and a great deal of character. Diane Johnson, Edmund White, David Safarlov, and other writers, well-known and not, pen humorous, insightful essays on the City of Light in Paris Was Ours, edited by Penelope Rowlands ($14.45 F). And for a classic, I highly recommend The Chateau by William Maxwell ($11.99 M). In this beautiful novel, Maxwell’s perceptive comments on human nature are revealed as a young couple travels to France post-war, innocently misunderstanding their hosts and fellow travelers.

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

Eileen by Ottessa Moshfegh (lobby Fiction) is full of dark humor and dark deeds. In Eileen, a boy’s prison and her equally ugly home are revealed as a young couple travels to France for a summer. Moshfegh manages to make Eileen likeable through her singular writing voice. The novel is full of dark humor and dark deeds. In Eileen, a boy’s prison and her equally ugly home are revealed as a young couple travels to France for a summer.

—Mia D’Avanza, Head of Circulation

I’m thrilled to recommend a couple of books by a favorite writer of mine, Graham Swift. He’s just published a wonderful book called Mothering Sunday (lobby Fiction), a deceptively simple account of one day in the life and the mind of a maid named Jane Fairchild. To say anything else would be to give too much away. I picked up the new one because Waterland ($9.99, a 1983 novel by Swift, is a stunner. Either or both of these books would be a great addition to your summer.

Having recently read The Infatuations by Javier Marías, an author whose work was previously unknown to me, I plan on reading more contemporary literature in translation this summer. I tend to read American and English authors out of habit, and summer seems a ripe time to try something new. Maybe I’ll start with a couple of books on the 2016 longlist for the Man Booker International Prize, all of which are in the Library’s collection. (themanbookerprize.com/international).

—Patrick Rayner, Acquisitions Assistant/Circulation Assistant

The circus appears from nowhere as though born out of a dream in Erin Morgenstern’s fantasy romance novel The Night Circus (F M). Wonders fill the black and white tents, acrobats and magicians wander the sawdust-covered streets. But a secret hides behind the canvas. Celia and Marco have been trained since childhood by their mercurial instructors solely to take part in an ancient competition with only one victor possible. Unaware of the danger, Celia and Marco fall in love, setting off ripples throughout their world. Their choices will change the rules of the game and leave everything they know hanging by a thread.

—Liam Delaney, Circulation Assistant

Summer picnics are all the more blissful after a languorous day filled with Debussy. Whether picking out the familiar tune to “Clair de lune” for the first time or revisiting his singular dissonance très expressif, Joseph Prostakoff’s selections (and translations of performing directions) in Selected Works For the Piano (themanbookerprize.com/international) provide a delectable Debussy spread of un-edited pieces in their original form. Bonus: cool, cavernous churches often let you play their piano for free in summer when the city experiences mass exodus.

—Sharon Kim, Circulation Page

It’s summer in 1930s Monroeville, Alabama, and I’m looking forward to traveling back in time as I dive into Tru & Nelle by G. Neri (juv-F N), a story about two eccentric and unlikely friends making the most of summer vacation together, complete with a treehouse, mischief, and mysteries in need of solving. This novel should have wide appeal to adventure, mystery and historical fiction fans ages 9-99. A bonus for readers familiar with the works of Truman Capote and Harper Lee: this imagined and imaginative tale is based on their real-life friendship.

—Randi Levy, Head of the Children’s Library

Hiding in our new Young Adult section on stack 9, Rainbow Rowell’s gem of a novel, Eleanor & Park (YA HS-R), is about two teenagers who meet on the bus on the way to school and fall in love. Reading about their budding romance made my heart sing and reminded me of how sweet new love is. In the background of their relationship, both Eleanor and Park contend with different, but important, problems at home which force them to discover themselves and fight for one another. I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves the music of the 80s, reading about teens finding themselves, and sighing loudly with longing when they finish their books.

—Danielle Gregori, Children’s Librarian
The New York City Book Awards

The New York City Book Awards celebrated their 20th anniversary with a ceremony and reception on May 3. Head Librarian Carolyn Waters, Book Awards Jury chair Lucienne S. Bloch, and Library trustee Ellen M. Iseman spoke about the history and importance of the awards, followed by presentations from jurors and words from the winning authors about their outstanding New York City books. See nysoclib.org/events/2015-new-york-city-book-awards for full details on the winners and ceremony. Photos by Karen Smul.

The Goodhue Society

Members of the Library’s bequest society, named for our generous benefactor Sarah Parker Goodhue, gathered for the annual reception in their honor on April 26th. They were joined by author Mary Norris and later attended her lecture on Between You & Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen. To learn more about the Goodhue Society, please contact Joan Zimmett at 212-288-6900 x207 or jzimmett@nysoclib.org. Photos by Karen Smul.

New Staff

Rob Bruno joined the staff in April as Systems Assistant, coming to us from the Foundation Center. He holds a Master’s in Library Science from Queens College as well as a certification in web design.

Dana Keith became Circulation Supervisor in May, and you’ll see him at the Circulation Desk evenings and weekends. The holder of a Master’s from Simmons College in Boston, Dana has previously worked at Boston University’s and Harvard’s schools of public health as well as at the Strand Bookstore.

Simen Kot has worked as a Library page and Circulation Assistant and has now moved to the fourth floor as a Bibliographic Assistant.

Stephanie Merchant, Circulation Assistant, is a new face at the front desk.

Ashley-Luisa Santangelo is a new page.

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From top left: Head Librarian Carolyn Waters with Goodhue Society chair William J. Dean, Mary Norris, and Jeannette Watson Sanger; Lorrie Bodger; Roger Pasquier and Elizabeth Wetherop; Alden Proudy with Mary Norris; Patricia Volk and Lucienne S. Bloch.

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The annual Young Writers Awards honor excellent writing by students in the Library community. The winners, honorable mentions, and all who participated were honored at a ceremony and reception on May 19. Authors Dave Johnson, Robert Quackenbush, and Carol Weston presented awards and offered encouraging words about the writing life. Visit the For Children page at www.nysoclib.org to read the winning entries.

Winners:
Ines Alto, “Where I Am From” (3rd & 4th Grade Poetry)
Avery M. Gallistel, “Life of a Droplet” (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
Amelia Cogan, “Quiet” (5th & 6th Grade Poetry)
Josephine Ainslie Blough, “Colors” (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
Beatrice Gouverneur, “Why Did She” (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
J.J. Yu, “Constellation: The Birth of the Caliphate” (7th & 8th Grade Poetry)
Henry Platt, “Typewriter” (7th & 8th Grade Prose)
Dora Grossman-Weir, “Triolet for the Last Dance” (9th-12th Grade Poetry)
Tara Shirazi, “Blurred Lines” (9th-12th Grade Prose)

Honorable Mention:
Abigail Zimmerman, “Billboard” (3rd & 4th Grade Poetry)
Samara Choudhury, “A Change in the Air” (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
Luca Cy Fong-Causone, “If I Were a Bird” (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
Emily Kilpatrick, “The Library Girls” (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
Fia de Sève, “Cold New York” (5th & 6th Grade Poetry)
Leonardo Yu, [Untitled] (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
Rebecca Arian, “Trust Me” (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
Henry Eisenbeis, “Jonah’s Move” (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
Lara Thain, “Point of View” (7th & 8th Grade Poetry)

The Young Writers Awards

The New Members Party

Members who joined within the last year enjoyed a reception and building tours on June 6. Welcoming remarks were given by Head Librarian Carolyn Waters and Janice P. Nimura, author of Daughters of the Samurai. Photos by Karen Smul.

THE YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS ARE GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY JEANETTE SARKISIAN WAGNER AND PAUL A. WAGNER.
One More Picture

Picture book author Elizabeth Bluemle visits with a young fan in the Children’s Library in April.