

# Books & People

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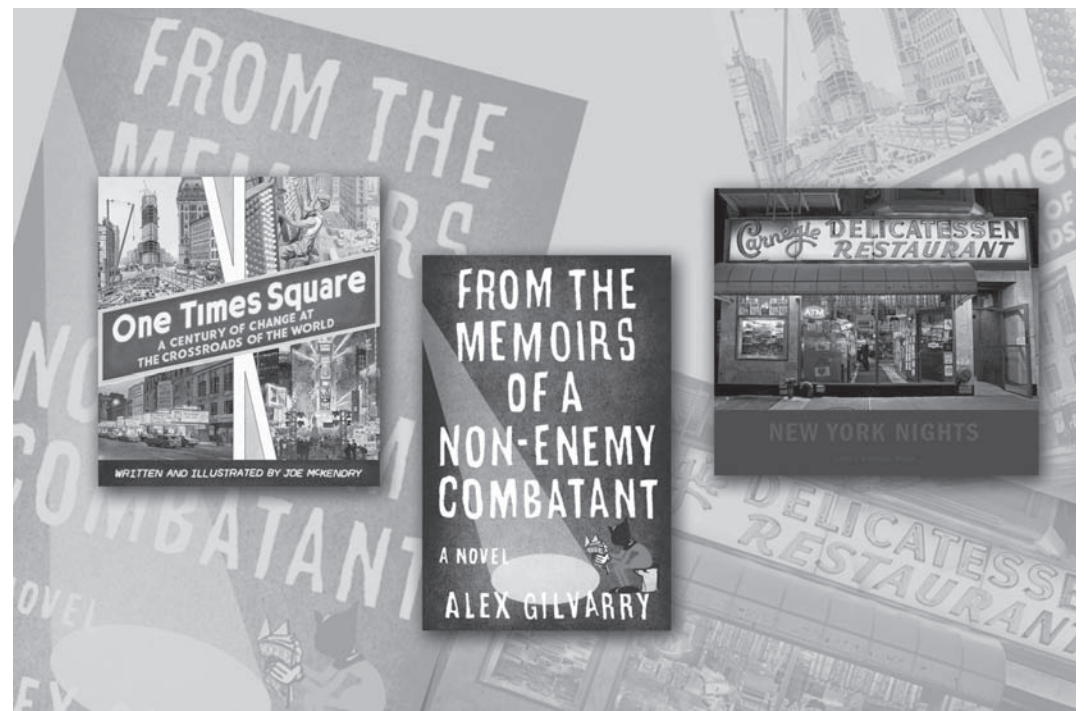
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## *The New York City* **BOOK AWARDS 2012**

The New York City Book Awards, established in 1996, honor books of literary quality or historical importance that, in the opinion of the selection committee, evoke the spirit or enhance appreciation of New York City. The annual Hornblower Award, made possible by the George Marshall Hornblower Trust, is given to an excellent New York City-related book by a first-time author.

**James T. Murray and Karla L. Murray**, *New York Nights* (Gingko Press)

James and Karla Murray are the authors of *Store Front: The Disappearing Face of New York*, which the New York Times called "a documentary mother lode." They have been photographing the streets of New York City since the 1990s. In *New York Nights*, another layer of the city's rich history is revealed. Interviews with shop owners bring to light their pride in both the history and craft of their businesses as well as their love for the city of New York and its endless possibilities. All of these illuminated façades radiate a vivid sense of excitement.



## New Trustee



Adrienne Ingram loves reading biography, narratives, memoir, and history. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri into a family that migrated from rural Mississippi. She graduated from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, has resided in Harlem for more than 30 years, and joined the Library in 2006.

Professionally, Ms. Ingram has three decades of experience in book publishing. She held VP editorial positions at G.P. Putnam's Sons, Waldenbooks and Crown/ Random House. For fifteen years she has consulted for corporations, authors and literary agencies and she now edits manuscripts for the Nashville Division of the Hachette Book Group.

Ms. Ingram serves on the Lecture & Exhibition Committee.

## The New York City Book Awards 2012 continued



Constance Rogers Roosevelt, chair of the Book Awards jury 2000-2008, and Roger Pasquier, chair 2009-2012



Winning author Joe McKendry (center) with trustee Ellen M. Iseman and Head Librarian Mark Bartlett.

**Joe McKendry**, *One Times Square: A Century of Change at the Crossroads of the World* (David R. Godine) Joe McKendry's *One Times Square* is also the winner of a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book Award for 2012. "This is both a handsome and highly readable book, one that will be pored over cover to cover by young New Yorkers, real and aspiring," the *Times* says, and *Publishers Weekly* adds, "...a fascinating biography of One Times Square....Architecture and history buffs—and, really, anyone with a sense of curiosity—will relish McKendry's visual approach."

**THE HORNBLLOWER AWARD FOR A FIRST BOOK: Alex Gilvarry**, *From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant: A Novel* (The Viking Press) Alex Gilvarry's *From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant* was called "Delicious...a left-handed love letter to America" by Daniel Asa Rose in the *New York Times Book Review* and "Lively...Hilarious...[A] whirligig of a book [that] draws some striking parallels between the way we mythologize stars and the way we look at terrorists" by John Freeman in the *Boston Globe*.

The winning authors and publishers were honored at a ceremony on May 8. Trustee Ellen M. Iseman welcomed guests, and jurors Meg Wolitzer, Peter Salwen, and Roger Pasquier presented the awards.



James T. Murray, Karla L. Murray, Joe McKendry, and Alex Gilvarry

THE 2012-2013 NEW YORK CITY BOOK AWARDS ARE GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY ELLEN M. ISEMAN.



The winning authors with members of the 2012-13 jury

Photos on this page by Karen Simul



Photo by Beth Perkins

## Renovations

The Third Floor will undergo its long-awaited renovation and expansion this summer. This will provide increased space for children and families and renewed décor, lighting, and furnishings throughout the Children's Library and the Whitridge Room.

We are also delighted to announce the installation of the Chase Poetry Collection, a special gift of historic and current poetry books donated by Trustee Emerita Lyn Chase. This summer's renovations will create a welcoming permanent space for this collection on the west wall of the Whitridge Room.

To allow this work, the Third Floor will be closed to members beginning Monday, June 17. The two public computers will move to the stacks. Other parts of the building will not be affected, and noise should be minimal. Throughout the summer, most Children's Library materials will be available in alternative locations around the building. Please ask at the Circulation Desk to be directed to a children's browsing area or to have books paged. We encourage families to take advantage of our summer loans for reading needs while school is out; children's collection items may be checked out through September 9.

As of this writing, we anticipate the Third Floor's full reopening at the end of September. For updates on the renovation, check the Library's homepage ([www.nysoclib.org](http://www.nysoclib.org)), email [renovation@nysoclib.org](mailto:renovation@nysoclib.org), or call 288.688.6900 with any questions.

Thank you for your understanding as we continue to improve our landmark building, making the Library an even better place to bring together books and people.

## Summer Hours

The Library's summer hours went into effect after Sunday, June 9. We will be open Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:00 AM-5:00 PM and Tuesday/Thursday 9:00 AM-7:00 PM through September 6. We will be closed July 4 and 5 for Independence Day, and September 2 for Labor Day.

## Summer Loans

To aid your summer reading, books from the stacks and Children's Library (not lobby/new books) may be checked out until September 9. Please ask at the desk if you would like a summer loan extension on any or all of your items.

# THE LIBRARY THIS SUMMER

We look forward to seeing you in the Library this summer. When you visit, please keep these activities in mind. For up-to-the-minute information, call

**212.688.6900**

or email

[renovation@nysoclib.org](mailto:renovation@nysoclib.org)



# Find Your Summer Book

by the Acquisitions Department

**Summer** has the reputation of being a quiet time in the publishing industry, with editors and executives leaving the city in search of a respite from the heat and noise. But as with many a reputation, this one is only partly true. Plenty of important and popular books are published between the months of May and August.\* The following is a selection of titles, from blockbusters to literary fiction, and from old Hollywood gossip to serious nonfiction, to help you while away the quiet months of summer.

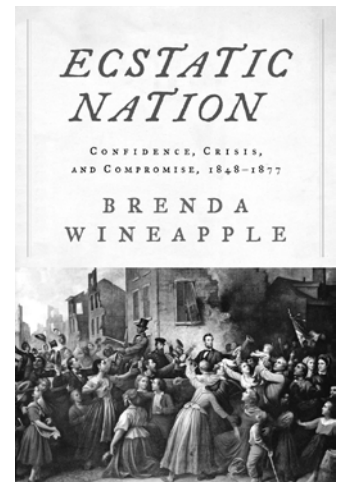
**HAPPY READING!**

## MAY

- Rick Atkinson / *Guns at Last Light* (nonfiction)
- Emma Brockes / *She Left Me the Gun* (nonfiction)
- Dan Brown / *Inferno*
- Bill Cheng / *Southern Cross the Dog*
- Clive Cussler / *Zero Hour*
- Gail Godwin / *Flora*
- Tessa Hadley / *Clever Girl*
- Khaled Hosseini / *And the Mountains Echoed*
- Amanda Knox / *Waiting to be Heard* (nonfiction)
- John Lescroart / *The Ophelia Cut*
- Janet Malcolm / *Forty-one False Starts* (nonfiction)
- Anthony Marra / *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena*
- Philipp Meyer / *The Son* (author of *American Rust*)
- Charles Moore / *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not For Turning* (nonfiction)
- Walter Mosley / *Little Green: An Easy Rawlins Mystery*
- W.G. Sebald / *A Place in the Country*
- Lily Tuck / *The House at Belle Fontaine*
- Fay Weldon / *Long Live the King*
- Mason B. Williams / *City of Ambition: FDR, La Guardia, and the Making of Modern New York* (nonfiction)

## JUNE

- S.J. Bolton / *Lost*
- Jeffery Deaver / *The Kill Room*
- Barbara Delinsky / *Sweet Salt Air*
- David Downing / *Masaryk Station*
- Joseph J. Ellis / *Revolutionary Summer* (nonfiction)
- Loren Estleman / *Confessions Of Al Capone*
- Niall Fergusson / *The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die* (nonfiction)
- Nicci French / *Waiting for Wednesday*
- Charles Glass / *The Deserters* (nonfiction)



- Andrew Sean Greer / *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells*
- Carl Hiaasen / *Bad Monkey*
- Elin Hilderbrand / *Beautiful Day*
- Anne Holt / *Death of the Demon*
- Julie Kavanagh / *The Girl Who Loved Camellias: The Life and Legend of Marie Duplessis* (nonfiction)
- Lily Koppel / *The Astronaut Wives Club* (nonfiction)
- Judith Mackrell / *Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*
- Alexander McCall Smith / *Trains and Lovers*
- Colum McCann / *TransAtlantic*
- Tim Parks / *Italian Ways* (nonfiction)
- Ridley Pearson / *Choke Point*
- Xiaolong Qiu / *The Enigma of China*
- Roxana Robinson / *Sparta*
- Lionel Shriver / *Big Brother*
- Curtis Sittenfeld / *Sisterland*
- J. Courtney Sullivan / *The Engagements*
- Jeanette Walls / *The Silver Star*

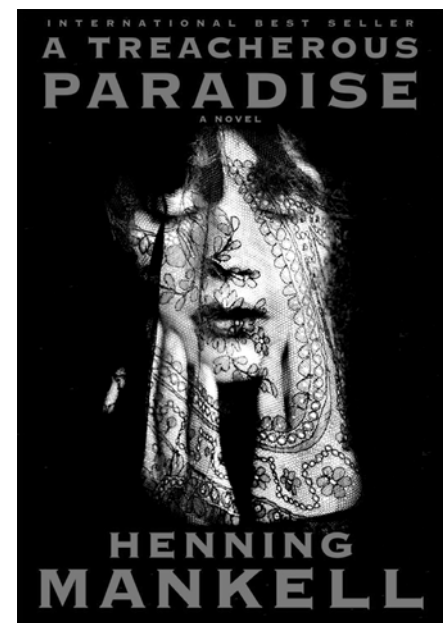
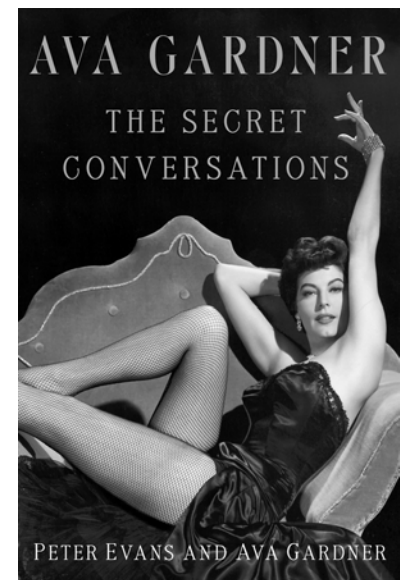
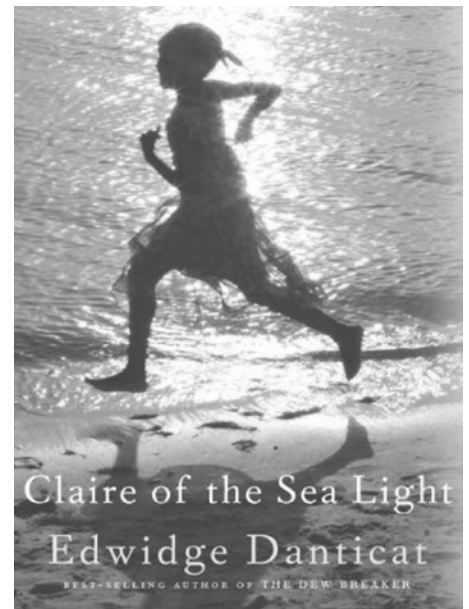
## JULY

- Tash Aw / *Five Star Billionaire*
- Louis Begley / *Memories of a Marriage*
- Peter Biskind, ed. / *My Lunches with Orson: Conversations between Henry Jaglom and Orson Welles* (nonfiction)
- Chris Bohjalian / *The Light in the Ruins*
- James Lee Burke / *Light of the World*
- Susan Choi / *My Education*
- Kate Christensen / *Blue Plate Special: An Autobiography of My Appetites* (nonfiction)
- Sarah Dunant / *Blood and Beauty*
- Benita Eisler / *The Red Man's Bones: George Catlin, Artist and Showman* (nonfiction)
- Peter Evans & Ava Gardner / *Ava Gardner: The Secret Conversations* (nonfiction)
- Philippa Gregory / *The White Princess*
- Steve Hamilton / *Let it Burn: an Alex McNight novel*
- Henning Mankell / *A Treacherous Paradise*
- Galt Niederhoffer / *Love and Happiness*
- David Rakoff / *Love, Dishonor, Marry, Die, Cherish, Perish: A Novel*
- Cathleen Schine / *Fin and Lady*
- Daniel Silva / *The English Girl*

## AUGUST

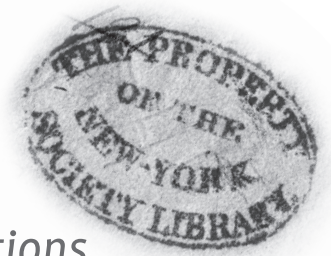
- Andrea Barrett / *Archangel*
- Aimee Bender / *The Color Master*
- Mark Billingham / *The Dying Hours*
- Benjamin Black / *Holy Orders: A Quirke Novel*
- Arne Dahl / *Bad Blood*
- Edwidge Danticat / *Claire of the Sea Light*
- Frederick Forsyth / *Kill List*
- Karin Fossum / *Eva's Eye: An Inspector Sejer Mystery*
- Faye Kellerman / *Beast: A Decker/Lazarus Novel*
- Thomas Keneally / *The Daughters of Mars*
- James McBride / *The Good Lord Bird*
- Javier Marias / *The Infatuations*
- Caryl Phillips / *It Happens in the Dark*
- Louise Penny / *How the Light Gets In*
- Marisha Pessl / *Night Film*
- Kathy Reichs / *Bones of the Lost*
- Charles Todd / *Question of Honor*
- Brenda Wineapple / *Ecstatic Nation: Confidence, Crisis and the End of Compromise, 1848-1877* (nonfiction)

\* publication dates are subject to change



# Mysterious Magic in the Winthrop Collection

by Laura O'Keefe, Head of Cataloging and Special Collections



Among the New York Society Library's most significant treasures are some 280 volumes that once belonged to John Winthrop Jr. (1606-1676) and his family. They came to the Library in 1812. Winthrop, the son of the Puritan leader and Massachusetts Bay Colony governor and the governor of Connecticut for some twenty-five years, had many interests, as reflected in his books' topics: medicine, theology, and especially alchemy, at the time considered both a practical art and a means of spiritual transformation.

The alchemical writings are by far the most requested items in the Winthrop Collection. Printed mainly in the 1500s and 1600s, in a variety of languages—Latin, German, Italian, French, and Dutch as well as English—they are well known to historians and to modern-day practitioners of alchemy. Soon after I began adding records for the Winthrop Collection to the Library's online catalog, a friend referred me to an alchemy discussion forum that includes people from both camps and is part of the website [www.levity.com/alchemy](http://www.levity.com/alchemy), administered by the independent scholar Adam McLean of Glasgow. Hoping that the discussants' expertise might help me in my cataloging efforts, I timidly applied for admittance to the forum. To weed out the insufficiently serious, it has strict requirements for participants: real names only, no clever screen names, and proof of who you are. Rather to my surprise, the portal opened to let me in. That was lucky, as almost immediately I encountered a book which required some insider knowledge.

The *Cheiragogia Heliana: A Manuduction to the Philosopher's Magical Gold* was published in London in 1659, the first English translation of a Latin text. As with many alchemical texts, its origins and author(s) are elusive. Many

sources state that the author was George Thor. [sic], whose name appears on the title page as Geo. Thor. Astromagus, but others identify him as the editor or translator of this work. And there's little agreement on who Thor. was—perhaps the 17<sup>th</sup>-century translator George Thornley? The *Heliana* in the title refers to Raphael Eglin or Eglinus, a Swiss theologian credited with writing an earlier section of the *Cheiragogia*—which, incidentally, is apparently an uncommon Greek term literally meaning “hand up.”



The title page of the *Manuduction to the Philosopher's Magical Gold*

I was able to muddle through all of the above with minimal help, but our Library's copy of this volume contained something completely baffling: a nine-line inscription on the front flyleaf, mostly in a code. With the aid of a chart of alchemical symbols, my co-workers and I were able to read the heading: “Dissolution of Sulphur in Vitriol.” But what followed was utterly mysterious.

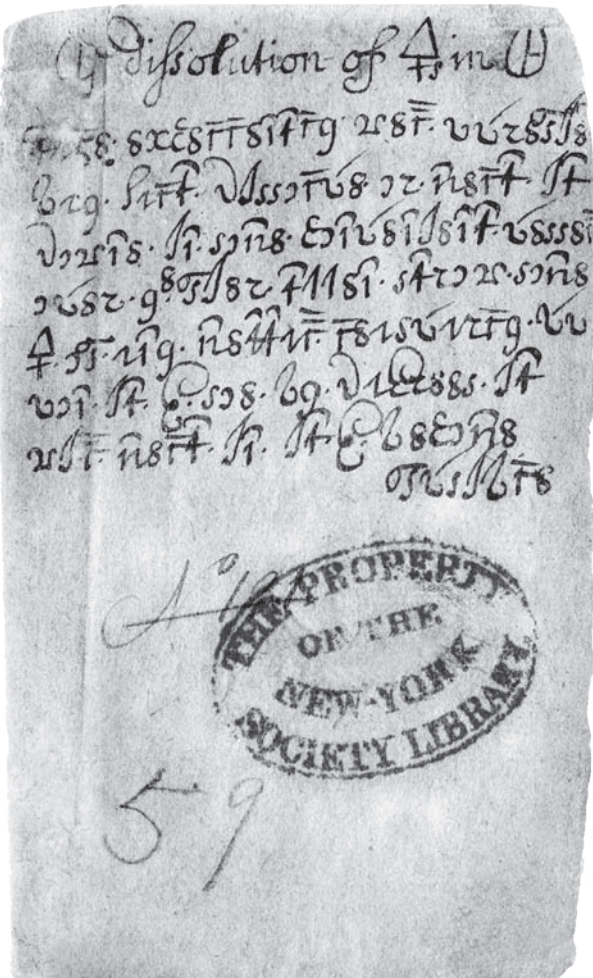
I wasn't at all sure that the denizens of the alchemy forum would find this inscription of interest or be able to help with it, but I posted the image to them with an appeal for help. Within two hours, a response appeared from another member, Paul Ferguson:

“Hi Laura, I have made a start on a frequency analysis. There seem to be 19 different characters. These are shown in the table below, along with the approximate number of times they occur in this brief sample.”

Less than four hours after that, he let me know that he had shared the image with two cryptography forums. The moderator of one of them commented that the style was reminiscent of the Voynich manuscript, a lengthy fifteenth-century text in an undecipherable code, now at the Beinecke Library at Yale. He threw it open for discussion and analysis.

Two days later, Paul Ferguson announced: “We have a decipherment.” One TonyBaloney of the Ancient Cryptography forum (unlike the alchemy group, the cryptographers have no objection to screen names) came up with this for our inscription:

**Tooke excellently well purifie  
 bay salt dissolve or melt it  
 downe in some convenient vessel  
 over ye fier then strow some  
 sulphur of any mettall leasuarly up  
 pon it & soe by dagrees it  
 will melt in it & become  
 fusible**



The mysterious code

He also provided a completed frequency chart of the symbols used in the inscription. I thanked everyone profusely and offered to credit Tony B. by his real name. He was apparently too modest to reveal it, so our catalog record merely acknowledges the help of contributors from all the forums.

Still uncertain is whether the inscription is in Winthrop’s hand. It seems likely, but I ended up hedging my bets and describing it as “presumably by Winthrop.” Also uncertain at this point is whether we’ll discover any other encrypted annotations in the Winthrop Collection. Luckily, we now know where to go for help in deciphering them. Now that we’ve seen what’s involved, maybe we’ll create our own frequency charts and solve these puzzles ourselves.

Cipher in copy of George Thor's Cheiragogia Heliana 1659 (Winthrop?) v6		
Character	Approx. frequency	Value
∩	6	a
∪	5	b/p
∩	6	c
∩	3	d
∩	27	e
∩	2	f
∩	1	g
∩	7	i/j
∩	1	k
∩	8	l
∩	2	ll
∩	6	m
∩	9	n
∩	11	o
∩	7	r
∩	11	s
∩	1	S
∩	16	t
∩	8	u/v
∩	6	w
∩	2	x

Paul Ferguson’s helpful symbol chart

# The Eleventh Annual Young Writers Awards



Photos by Karen Simul.

Above: Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner (far left), Paul A. Wagner (seated, left) with the judges and the winning young authors; Left: Author and judge Robert Quackenbush presents an award. Right: Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner with Chair of the Board Barbara Hadley Stanton

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 21. Author judges Robert Quackenbush, Dave Johnson, Carol Weston, and Edra Ziesk presented the awards and offered encouraging words about the writing life. The winning entries can be read at [www.nysoclib.org/children/young-writers-awards-2013-winners](http://www.nysoclib.org/children/young-writers-awards-2013-winners).

## Winners:

Piper Sydney Brown for "No Name" (3rd-4th Grade Poetry)  
 Emily Gaw for "Introspection" (5th-6th Grade Poetry)  
 Quinn Barry for "Seas the Day" (7th-8th Grade Poetry)  
 Rami Sigal for "The Wave" (3rd-4th Grade Prose)

Matthew Langendorfer for "A Dog's Life" (5th-6th Grade Prose)  
 Gabrielle Herzig for "Tightening Strings" (7th-8th Grade Prose)  
 Rachel Goldstein for "Reflection" (10th-12th Grade Prose)

## Honorable Mentions:

Charlotte Lily Borthwick for "I Am From" (3rd-4th Grade Poetry)  
 Samantha Campana-Gladstone and Victoria Semmelhack for "The Life of a Pen" (3rd-4th Grade Poetry)  
 Natasha Parker-Rauscher for "Sunset" (3rd-4th Grade Poetry)  
 Theo H. Coulson for "As a Bird" (5th-6th Grade Poetry)  
 Maxine Pravda for "From the Top of the Apple" (5th-6th Grade Poetry)  
 Isha Chirimar for "The Cheerio Escape" (5th-6th Grade Prose)  
 Rosalie Steiner for "A Christmas Swap" (7th-8th Grade Prose)

THE 2013 YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS ARE GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY JEANETTE SARKISIAN WAGNER AND PAUL A. WAGNER.





Head Librarian Mark Bartlett, Trustee Carol Collins Malone, Joseph Kanon, Robin Straus, and Rick Malone at the Chair's Circle reception

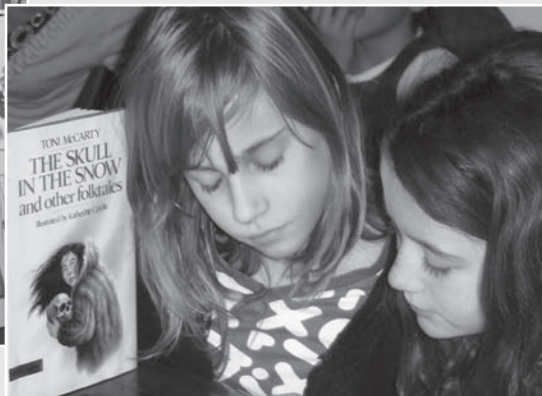
## The Chair's Circle

Members of the Library's Chair's Circle were honored at a special reception on April 30th at the home of Trustee Carol Collins Malone and her husband, Rick Malone. Joseph Kanon, celebrated author and Library member, spoke about the importance of the New York Society Library in his life as a writer and reader.

Chair's Circle members are those individual and foundation donors who provide leadership support for the Library and thereby play a critical role in sustaining and nurturing its programs and services. If you are interested in learning more about the Chair's Circle, please contact Director of Development Joan Zimmett at 212-288-6900 x207 or [jzimmnett@nysoclib.org](mailto:jzimmnett@nysoclib.org).



## Children's Events



Children's events this season included Michelle Frey, Executive Editor at Knopf Books for Young Readers, discussing the role of the editor and leading participants in writing and revising their own stories.

# Celebration of Longtime Members

The Library honored those with memberships of forty years or more at a reception on March 27. Barnet Schechter, author most recently of *George Washington's America: A Biography Through His Maps*, talked about the centrality of New York City as a subject for historical research and writing.

Top: Tamara and Gerald Weintraub  
Middle: Carlyn Parker, Michael Kowal, Reily Hendrickson; John Taggart and Paula Offricht  
Bottom: Karelei Tulenko and Nancy Newcomb; author and speaker Barnet Schechter



Photos by Karen Simul

# The New Members Party

The Library welcomed members who joined in the past year at a party on June 4. After a reception with remarks by longtime member and author Susan Cheever, guests embarked on self-guided tours throughout the Library.

Clockwise from top: Special Collections Librarian Erin Schreiner shows rare book gems; Chair of the Board Barbara Hadley Stanton with Mildred York and Gerald Aksen; guests listen to remarks by Susan Cheever; Sarah Nichols and Martha Nichols; James Melo and Alana Ruben Free; member authors Susan Cheever and Betsy Carter



Photos by Karen Smul



Trustee Theodore C. Rogers, Michael Gorra, trustee William J. Dean, and Elizabeth Barlow Rogers

# The Goodhue Society

The Library hosted its annual celebration for members of the bequest society named for one of our most generous benefactors, Sarah Parker Goodhue. A special reception preceded Michael Gorra's March 7th lecture on *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*.

To learn more about the Goodhue Society, contact Diane Srebrick at 212.288.6900 x214 or [dsrebrick@nysoclib.org](mailto:dsrebrick@nysoclib.org).



# A Literary Magazine Salon

On May 1, the Library celebrated with *The Hudson Review* in honor of their 65th Anniversary Issue, "Literature and the Environment." Speakers and readers included Paula Deitz, editor of *The Hudson Review*, and authors Laurie Olin, Tess Lewis, Peter Wortsman, and Antonio Muñoz Molina.

THE WRITING LIFE EVENTS IN 2013 ARE GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY JENNY LAWRENCE.



Above: Lyn Chase and Jenny Lawrence  
 Left: Paula Deitz (second from left) with staff from *The Hudson Review*;  
 Below: speaker Peter Wortsman



All Photos on this page by Karen Smul

# Lorenzo Da Ponte at The New York Society Library

By Paul E. Cohen, NYSL Member and co-recipient of the New York City Book Award for Manhattan in Maps (Rizzoli, 1997)

Anyone consulting the mid-nineteenth century catalogs of New York City's two oldest libraries would be struck by the astonishing number of Italian books recorded. There are as many works of Italian fiction listed in the topically arranged 1839 Columbia College catalog as there are works in all other literatures combined, including English. In this manuscript catalog, "Romaic, Latin, Spanish, French and English" fiction constitutes a single group while the Italian entries are so numerous that that language merits its own category. In 1838, a disproportionate number of Italian books are also entered in the printed catalog of the New York Society Library. Did Italian studies really rank so high among Columbia College students and members of the New York Society Library in the 1830s?

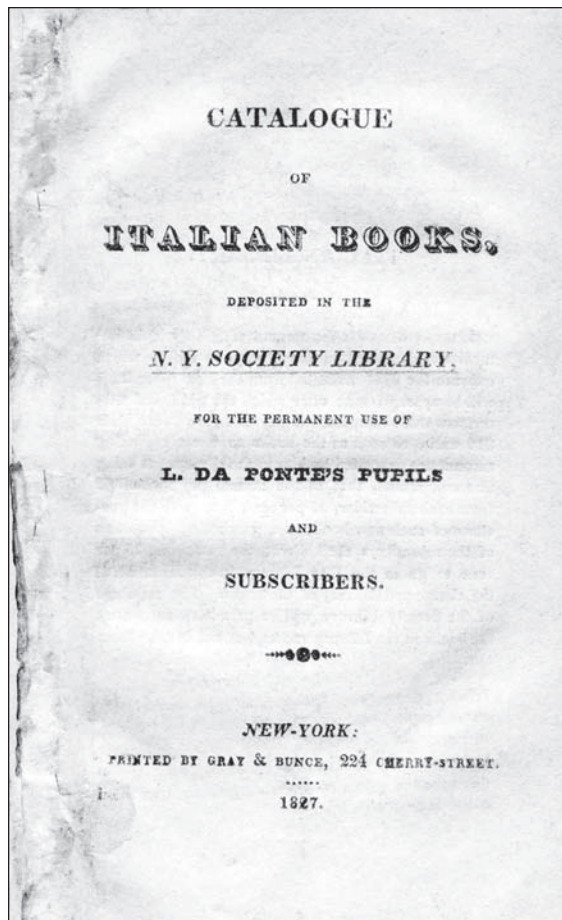
This unexpected surge of interest was the result of a single-handed crusade by Lorenzo Da Ponte to introduce Italian culture to America. Remembered today as the librettist of Mozart's most famous operas, his was one of the most picaresque lives of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, perhaps rivaled only by that of his friend Giacomo Casanova. As Professor Joseph Russo of Columbia's Italian department wrote, "Seldom, if ever, indeed, had a man of more interesting personality come to these shores from Europe." Born in 1749 near Venice, he was the son of a Jewish father who converted to Roman Catholicism to remarry. Da Ponte's young manhood was spent attending seminary, taking holy orders, teaching literature and writing librettos. Despite these respectable pursuits, by 1779 he was living such a dissolute life in Venice that he was charged with adultery and banished from the city. It was in Vienna in 1782 that a well-known incident occurred involving his teeth. Suffering from an abscessed gum—the story goes—Da Ponte sought relief from Dr. Doriguti, a physician who had fallen in love with a woman who preferred Da Ponte. Seizing this opportunity to eliminate his handsome rival, the doctor prescribed a mouthwash of nitric acid. Within a week, every tooth in Da Ponte's mouth had fallen out.

Notwithstanding the loss of his teeth, the Viennese years were the most productive of Da Ponte's long life. He was named "Poet of the Italian Theatre" to the Hapsburg court of Emperor Joseph II, which led to a partnership with

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. That evolved into "one of the most successful collaborations in opera history." With Da Ponte writing the librettos, Mozart composed his greatest operas, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan Tutte*. When Joseph II died in 1790, Da Ponte lost a patron and protector from the intrigues of the court. "Sacrificed to hatred, envy, the interests of evildoers;" he wrote in his *Memoirs*, after the partnership with Mozart had ended, "driven from a city where I had lived on the honourable earnings of my talent for eleven years! Abandoned by friends." Mozart's disgraced collaborator surfaced in London in 1793 where he operated an unsuccessful shop specializing in Italian books. By 1805 he was financially ruined and facing debtors' prison. Da Ponte fled to America where he hoped his run of bad luck had run its course. The foremost librettist in the world began life in the New World as a grocer in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

A chance encounter with Clement Clark Moore in 1807 launched Da Ponte's career in New York. Moore was the Professor of Oriental and Greek Literature at Columbia College, and he met the urbane grocer at Riley's bookshop on lower Broadway. They fell into friendly conversation, and Da Ponte impressed Moore with his easy familiarity with the classics and fluent Hebrew and German. The professor soon learned that in addition to Da Ponte's numerous talents and accomplishments, he was also personally acquainted with many of the most cultivated men in Europe. A friendship quickly ripened between the two men, and with introductions from the socially prominent Moore, Da Ponte was soon being lionized by the literary elite of the city. After devoting a few years to teaching private classes in Italian, in 1825 Da Ponte won an appointment at Columbia College. At the age of 76, he became America's first Professor of Italian.

1825 was the watershed year for Italian studies in New York. When the Italian Opera Company arrived in the city that year, the just-appointed professor organized and promoted the first operas performed in America. Taking advantage of the quickening enthusiasm for all things Italian, Da Ponte established a relationship with the New York Society Library and founded the Italian Library Society there. In May of 1827, Da Ponte announced that he had placed some 600



books in the Italian library and expected to add another 400 when they arrived from Europe, the whole to contain “the flower of our literature in all the useful arts and sciences.” A list of these books can be found in the *Catalogue of Italian Books, Deposited in the N. Y. Society Library for the permanent use of L. Da Ponte’s Pupils and Subscribers* (New York, 1827).

Forty-six “Subscribers to the permanent Library” are named in the original subscription book of the Italian Library Society. A number of these subscribers were also diligently studying Italian with Da Ponte. Shares were sold for five dollars, most subscribers buying one or two (Gulian C. Verplanck purchased five), and \$340 was raised in this way. Several were bought by Columbia professors, among them Clement Moore, who had been a trustee of the New York Society Library since 1811. Lorenzo Da Ponte himself purchased a share, setting a good example and entitling him to such privileges of membership as checking out books.

The word “permanent” crops up several times in connection with these books, so it comes as a surprise that in April

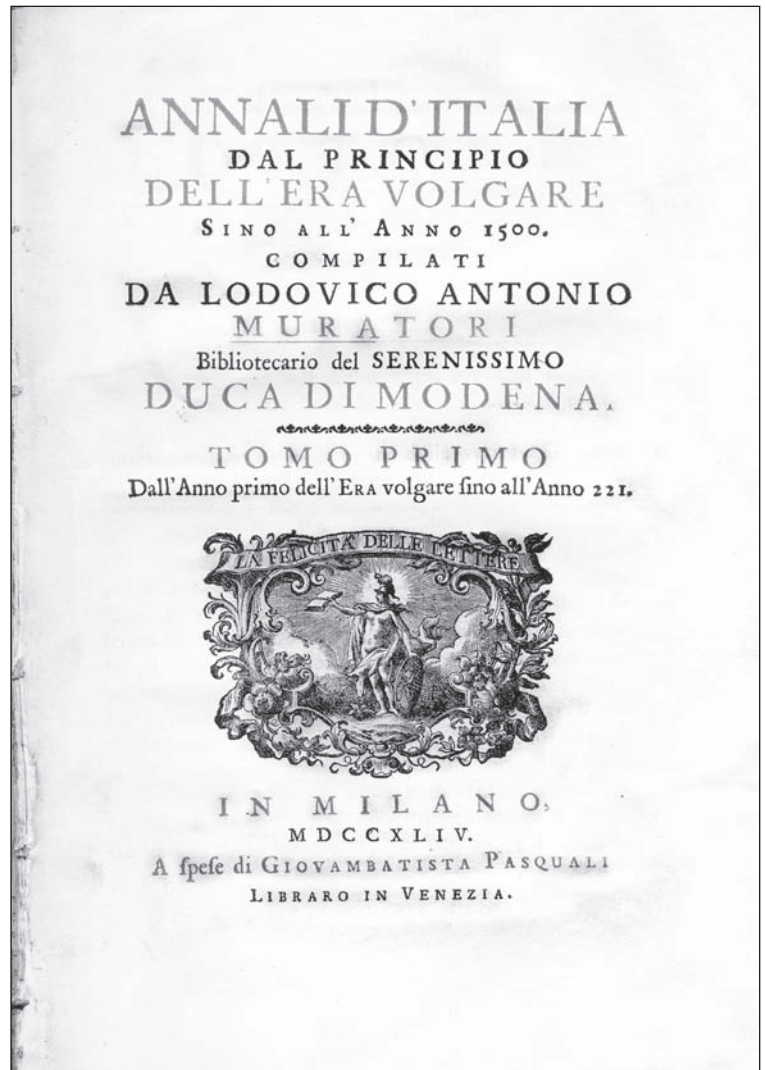
of 1830, Philip Jones Forbes, the librarian of the New York Society Library, reported that “Mr. Da Ponte has taken away all of the books he has deposited in the Library from time to time – excepting those sold to the Italian Library Society.” Almost sixty Italian authors were represented on the list of books that had been sold to the Italian Library Society at a total price slightly higher than the amount raised by subscription. These books were absorbed into the New York Society Library where they remain to this day. The New York Society Library’s printed catalog of 1838 includes these along with fifty-five additional volumes of the *Edizione di Classici Italiani*, the gift of Messrs. Clement C. Moore, Gulian C. Verplanck, and John I. Morgan. Da Ponte favored these particular editions of Galileo, Cellini, Redi, and others, and it is likely that he persuaded his friends to purchase the series for the Society.

There are no special markings in the New York Society Library’s Italian books, but it can be assumed that most, if not all of the titles that also appear in the *Catalogue of Printed Books*. . . [for] *L. Da Ponte’s Pupils and Subscribers*, came from Da Ponte. As a subscriber to the Italian Library

Society, he was authorized to check books out, and the subscription book, which includes circulation records, indicates that Da Ponte was the heaviest user of the Italian books. On May 15, 1830, for example, he borrowed volumes two and three of *Storia Fiorentina di Messer Benedetto Varchi* (a five-volume set) but did not return them. After the books were long overdue, a librarian penciled next to the entry in the subscription book “still out.” The New York Society Library’s online catalog indicates that volumes two and three are lacking and presumably still checked out to the librettist.

At the same time that Da Ponte was overseeing the Italian Library Society, he was attending to his academic duties at Columbia College. The toothless and elderly professor must have seemed out of place among the other members of a faculty that consisted almost entirely of Columbia alumni. Fortunately, Da Ponte’s two closest friends in America were his colleagues, Clement Moore and his cousin Nathaniel Moore, the librarian who compiled the 1839 catalog of the Columbia College library and a future president of the college. The Professor of Italian had no fixed salary but was paid according to the number of students who enrolled in the elective course. Da Ponte attracted several students to the class in his first year at the college, but none signed up the second year. In fact, after that first year, he never had another student, though he remained on the faculty for thirteen years. “*Professor sine exemplo*” (Professor without parallel) is the way Da Ponte characterized the mostly studentless years of his academic career.

When Professor Da Ponte arrived on campus in 1825, he discovered that the only Italian book in the library was a tattered Boccaccio. To remedy the deficiency—and to help with his recurring financial difficulties—early in 1826 he offered the library 263 Italian books for \$364.05 and, on the recommendation of Clement Moore, 161 were purchased for \$243.17½. During his years at Columbia, Da Ponte continued to import Italian books at a faster pace than he could sell them, though eventually he also numbered the Library of Congress and the Library Company of Philadelphia as his clients. In 1830 he opened his own bookshop: “My customers are few and far between,” he forlornly wrote in his *Memoirs*, “but I have, instead, the joy of seeing coaches and carriages drive up at every moment before my door and sometimes the most beautiful faces in the world emerge from them, mistaking my bookstore for the shop next door, where sweets and cakes are for sale.” By 1831, the number of books on his shelves had swollen to 3,000 volumes of



“the most beautiful pages of our literature.” A financial crisis that year forced the luckless bookseller to put some 2,000 of them in auction. “Alas, fate takes from me my only treasure!” he wrote as he said farewell to the books. “Death would have been less bitter than this last farewell.” He was almost ninety when he died in 1839.

According to the Columbia University website, the Italian department is still “Drawing on a distinguished history initiated in 1825 by Lorenzo Da Ponte.” It has a Lorenzo Da Ponte professorship and his portrait hangs at the university’s Italian Academy, formerly the Casa Italiana. The New York Society Library has a specially designated “Da Ponte Collection” that can be located on its online catalog through an author search. The 55 titles, comprising 247 volumes of the “the flower of our literature” are on the Special Collections shelves in the Library. To this day, the two libraries are noted for their strong holdings in Italian literature.



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## One More Picture

The cast and producers of Troupe of Players' *As You Like It* radio play, in the Members' Room on April 24. Performers covered all characters by changing hats, manners, and voices, and also played instruments and sang the songs in this adaptation of Shakespeare's text.