



# LIBRARY NOTES

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER  
VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1, JANUARY 1998



## LYRIC POETRY AND SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS



Helen Vendler



Thursday, February 26, 6:30 P.M.

Temple Israel, 112 East 75th Street

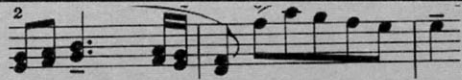
Helen Vendler is A. Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard University. Her most recent book, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, was published by Harvard University Press in November. Arion Press has published a 196-page, hand-printed, hand-bound edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, introduced and edited by Dr. Vendler and limited to 200 numbered copies. Dr. Vendler's previous book with Harvard University Press, *Part of Nature, Part of Us: Modern American Poetry*, won the National Book Critics Award. Her other books include *Soul Says: On Recent Poetry*; *The Odes of John Keats*; *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham*; and *The Given and The Made: Strategies of Poetic Redefinition*.

"How do ideas take on lyric form? How does someone who wants to portray social corruption, for instance, make a convincingly broad canvas within fourteen lines? How does someone find models to distinguish the aging of the body from that of the mind and that of the heart? In what way can the poet suggest, with lyric feeling, a rivalry between the Platonic triad (the Good, the True, and the Beautiful) and the Christian Trinity? I will discuss the way moral ideas are symbolized in lyric poems, using the example of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. The *Sonnets* deserve detailed and particular commentary because they comprise a virtual anthology of lyric possibility--in the poet's choice of subgenres, in arrangements of words, in tone, in dramatic modeling of the inner life, in speech-acts.

"To arrive at these understandings, I found it necessary to learn the *Sonnets* by heart. I would often think I 'knew' a sonnet; but then scanning it in memory, I would find lacunae. The recovery of the missing pieces always brought with it a further understanding of the design of that sonnet and made me aware of what I had not initially perceived about the function of those words. No pianist or violinist would omit to learn a sonata by heart before interpreting it in public performance, but the equal habit of knowing poetry by heart before interpreting it has been lost. I first memorized many of the sonnets in the heartfelt way of youth, and I hope I have not lost that 'heartfelt' sense of the poems. But I have since learned to love in a more conscious way Shakespeare's elated variety of invention, his ironic capacity, his astonishing refinement of technique, and, above all, the reach of his skeptical, imaginative intent."

Members and guests are welcome to this special event. Tickets are \$15. To reserve a seat, send a check made out to the Library to the attention of Nancy McCartney. For questions, call her at (212) 717-0357. No reservations will be taken by telephone or at the circulation desk.

C A L E N D A R	For Children ages 4 to 8 "Winter Tales: Warm Stories for Chilly Days" Saturdays, 10:30 A.M. January 31 February 7, 14, 28 March 7 The Library	Author Series Barbara Goldsmith <i>Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull</i> February 3, 6:30 P.M. Temple Israel 112 East 75th St.	Special Event Helen Vendler "Lyric Poetry and Shakespeare's <i>Sonnets</i> " February 26 6:30 P.M. Temple Israel 112 East 75th St.	Special Event Trio Bell'Arte "New York Music in the City's Oldest Library" April 1 6:30 P.M. Members' Room The Library	Author Series Mystery Writers of America "An Aura of Mystery: Donald Westlake and the 1998 Edgar Award Nominees" April 28, 6:30 P.M. Temple Israel 112 East 75th St.
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**NEW YORK MUSIC  
IN THE CITY'S OLDEST  
LIBRARY**

**Trio Bell'Arte**

**Wednesday, April 1, 6:30 P.M.  
Members' Room**

The Trio Bell'Arte will present a program developed especially for the Library of works relating to the Library and the City. The music will include a sonata by John Christian Bach, Court Composer to George III, from whom the Library received its charter, and the *Late New York Rags* of Scott Joplin.



The trio is comprised of distinguished instrumentalists: Elaine Comparone, harpsichordist, who will provide a verbal setting for each piece; Marsha Heller on the oboe and oboe d'amore; and Daniel Waitzman on the flute, baroque flute, and recorder.

*Tickets are \$30. Space is limited. To reserve a seat, send a check made out to the Library to the attention of Nancy McCartney. For questions, call her at (212) 717-0357. No reservations will be taken by telephone or at the circulation desk.*

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**OTHER POWERS: THE AGE OF SUFFRAGE,  
SPIRITUALISM, AND  
THE SCANDALOUS VICTORIA WOODHULL**

**Barbara Goldsmith**

**Tuesday, February 3, 6:30 P.M.**

**Temple Israel 112 East 75th Street**



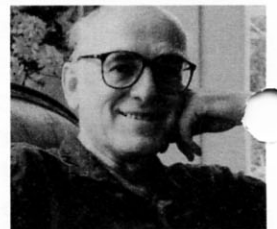
Social historian and author Barbara Goldsmith's non-fiction works include *Little Gloria...Happy at Last* and *Johnson v. Johnson*. Her essays and articles have appeared in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. She has spearheaded initiatives in book conservation, including persuading the United States Government to print its publications on acid-free paper. Ms. Goldsmith will discuss her upcoming epic book, *Other Powers*, which captures a vivid scandalous era where women fought for equality in a world of robber barons and corrupt politicians. Into this volatile mix came the infamous Victoria Woodhull, who became known as "the prostitute who ran for President." Ms. Goldsmith serves as a trustee of The New York Society Library.

**MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA**

**AN AURA OF MYSTERY:  
DONALD WESTLAKE AND THE 1998  
EDGAR AWARD NOMINEES**

**Tuesday, April 28, 6:30 P.M.**

**Temple Israel 112 East 75th Street**



Author of more than 40 mystery novels, Donald E. Westlake will host a panel discussion of the mystery novel genre. The participating authors are all nominees for the Edgar Award, the prestigious annual award for mystery writers, to be granted by Mystery Writers of America on April 30. Mr. Westlake has won four Edgar Awards, as well as the organization's highest honor, the Grand Master Award. Aply, the names of the panel participants must remain a mystery until Edgar Award nominations are announced to the public this winter.

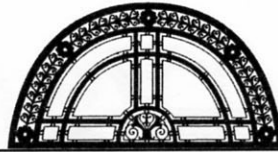
*The 1997-1998 Author Series is sponsored by Thirteen/WNET and The New York Society Library, with the cooperation of the Mystery Writers of America and with the generous underwriting support of The Chase Manhattan Bank. The program is free for members and guests of the Library, Thirteen/WNET Patrons and Associates, and guests of The Chase Manhattan Bank, and tickets can be picked up at the Library's circulation desk or at the door. Tickets are \$10 for the general public and can be purchased at the door.*

**WINTER TALES: WARM STORIES FOR CHILLY DAYS: Saturdays at 10:30 A.M., the Library**



Come listen to best-loved tales from around the world as storyteller Eleni Constantelos takes us on a magical journey. We will visit China, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Haiti, Ireland, Japan, Norway, and Russia as we circle the globe on the wings of words. The programs, at 10:30 A.M. in the Children's Room, are free for children of Library members. The dates are: January 31; February 7, 14, and 28; and March 7. Ages 4 and over.





## ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION

Readers soon will be able to access the Library's collection not only by the card catalog but also by online catalog terminals throughout the building. A terminal will replace the microfilm reader in the southeast corner of the Reference Room and there will be other terminals in a renovated 5th floor study area, in the Children's Library, and in Stack 1.

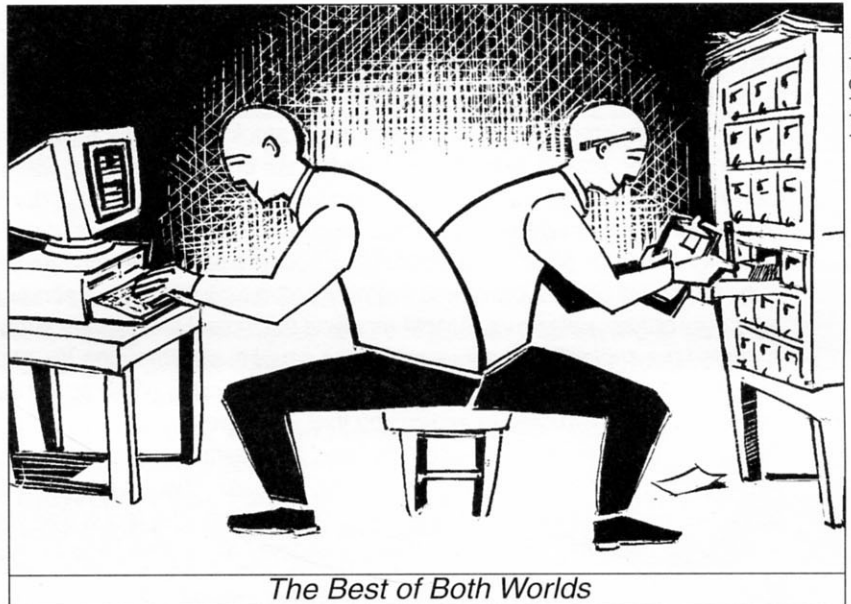
For those who prefer it, the card catalog will remain and will continue to be updated in the regular way. But for those who are even slightly familiar with computers or who would like to become so, staff and volunteers stand ready to guide and to reassure. There will be written instructions, too, as well as instructions within the online catalog screen. The online catalog system is

both simple and powerful. As with the card catalog, readers can search alphabetically by author, title, and subject heading. But--impossible with a card catalog--readers also can arrange, or even limit, searches by date of publication and can search by adjacent call numbers. This latter process is like browsing through the Library's entire open stacks, including books currently circulating.

This evolutionary change is the result of many years of work. To pay for this and other improvements, members and trustees contributed close to \$700,000 during the 1993-1995 Capital Campaign. As funding became assured, the staff selected expert systems providers and conducted the year and a half of inventory and bar-coding necessary before these systems could be implemented--all the while managing to carry on the regular work of the Library in serving its readers.

The next stage in the Library's evolution will be a computerized circulation and book reservation system put into place later this year after further refinements are effected. This computerized circulation system will instantly flag requested books, show the status of members' requests, and indicate whether a title is available, checked out, or in repair. Members also will be able to learn how many books they have out: information we cannot provide at present. Most important, staff no longer will have to examine the Library's entire file of books on loan--roughly 2,750 bookcards--card by card, twice a month.

Further improvements under consideration include small, quiet printers attached to online catalog terminals to transcribe pertinent bibliographic data at the push of a key; access to the Library's catalog from computers outside the Library; Library access to the Internet and, with it, other library catalogs; and provision for scholarly access to our Rare Book collections.



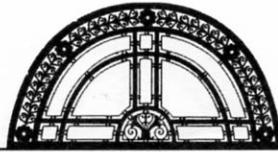
*The Best of Both Worlds*

Laird Ogden



### Steven Baumholtz--New Head of Technical Services

It was while wandering through Widener Library stacks solving bibliographical dilemmas that I realized this could be a career. I spent three years plus at several Harvard libraries while earning a master's degree from Simmons College. Employment opportunities brought my wife back to New York--and me with her. A series of positions at the H.W. Wilson Company, the Fashion Institute of Technology, the Whitney Museum, the Borough of Manhattan Community College, and New York University followed. Along the way, I accumulated a wide variety of cataloging experience. I'm happy to be involved with the Library's rich historical collection.



## IN MEMORIAM--Brendan Gill (1914-1997)

Brendan Gill was an involved, active trustee of the Library for twenty years from 1973-1993. How this may have come about can best be told in his inimitable voice:

*I had inherited from an uncle a share of stock in the New York Society Library....When Arnold (Whitridge), as chairman of the board of trustees of the Library, learned of the transfer...he congratulated me on my good fortune, and I replied (boldly, for me) that while I had long served on the boards of directors of a variety of not-for-profit institutions throughout the city, I had done so as a civic duty; the board of the Library was the only board I could imagine serving on not as a duty but as a pleasure. Arnold received this broad hint silently and we changed the subject. About a year later he caught up with me on the street. "My dear Brendan," he said. "I have just come from a meeting of the board of the library, and I am instructed to inform you that you have been elected a member of the board." Magisterially, he raised his hand to forestall any thanks that I might be preparing to offer. "I may as well tell you," he said, "that I have grave doubts as to the wisdom of the board in acting in this fashion. The fact is that you are a much older man than we like to recruit these days." At the time I was in my early sixties; Arnold was eighty-seven.*

Brendan was a consummate board member. Minutes indicate many occasions when his pithy interventions forwarded the necessary action yet soothed egos. Widely recognized in New York City as a writer, preservationist, and a critic of architecture, film, and drama, he brought great intellectual, literary, and cultural resources to bear on Library concerns. Even nearing retirement, he was instrumental in launching and bringing to fruition the Library's Capital Campaign of 1993-1995. He announced his retirement in typical fashion: "Now that I'm over 80, I'm cutting back on boards, but if you ever need me for anything, just call. The old fire horse will still be first out the stall, racing to the scene." And so he was.

Brendan Gill brought unique knowledge, talent, and zest to the life of New York City. He will be missed by many people and many organizations, of which the Library was privileged to be one. We extend our sympathy to his family and friends.

*The Library has twelve titles by Brendan Gill. A list is available at the circulation desk.*



Dave Cortiz

*Brendan Gill at the Library's Annual Meeting in May, 1997, honoring Library trustee Jeannette Watson Sanger for her support of the Library's permanent exhibition.*

Please write to Jenny Lawrence, editor of *Library Notes*, care of the Library, with any comments and suggestions.

**THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY**  
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