

REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

A small but historic ceremony took place on May 19: George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens presented to the Library a replacement copy for a book Washington checked out in 1789 and never returned. These were some of Chairman of the Board Charles G. Berry's remarks on the occasion.

I am pleased to welcome you today on the happy occasion of the gift to our Library of a book borrowed by the first President of the United States but never returned.

Our library is the oldest in New York City. We were founded in 1754, just before the French and Indian War, when the city was mostly located south of Wall Street and had only 15,000 people. George Washington was 22. We received our charter from another George—King George III of England. Our founders were a group of leading citizens dedicated to promoting culture and learning in a town that needed both.



The October 1789 ledger page showing Washington's transaction

For more than 250 years we have been a repository of literature, history and popular reading and a unique resource for many of our country's greatest writers: Washington Irving and Clement Clarke Moore were trustees; Ralph Waldo Emerson lectured to our audience; Herman Melville borrowed books on whaling when writing *Moby Dick*; members have included Willa Cather, W.H. Auden, John Cheever, David Halberstam, Wendy Wasserstein, Tom Wolfe and many more.

But today we are here to celebrate an association from our earliest days. In 1789, New York was the seat of the federal government, and on April 30 of that year George Washington was inaugurated as first President of the United States in what had been City Hall and was renamed Federal Hall. The Library was located in a room on the second floor of that building, at the intersection of Wall, Broad and Nassau Streets. Many of the founding fathers used the Library, which had reopened its doors just the year before. (We were closed from 1774 until 1788 during the Revolutionary War and occupation by the British, which included the burning of much of New York on September 21, 1776.)



Head Librarian Joan Stahl and President James C. Rees from Mount Vernon present the volume to Chairman of the Board Charles G. Berry

But in 1789 things were looking up, and the leaders of the nation were among our regular patrons. One of those was President Washington himself. According to the scrupulous records maintained by our librarian George Wright, on October 5, 1789, our foremost founding father took out of the Library a serious tome, Emer de Vattel's *The Law of Nations*. Not bedtime reading, but the kind of work that the greatest architect of our great nation might be expected to digest.

In fact, this book was an important one, particularly popular and influential in the early days of the Republic. A treatise on international law and relations, it became a classic text in the universities and for 100 years or more was cited as legal authority in scores of decisions by the United States Supreme Court and other courts of law. First published in 1758 by Vattel, a Swiss diplomat, lawyer and philosopher, *The Law of Nations* sets forth a theory of the rights of nations based on principles of the rights of the individual that historians view as central to both the American Revolution and the French Revolution.

We don't know exactly why Washington wanted to read this popular book. Maybe he was prompted by the events in France: the French had helped us win the war against Great Britain and were entering into their own revolution that very year, with the storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789. Or maybe he was thinking about the cohesiveness of his own country: his journal for that day of October 5 shows that he spoke with Treasury Secretary (and Library patron) Alexander Hamilton about making a tour of the eastern states to gauge support for the new government.

But we do know one sad fact. President Washington never returned the book to the Library. We recently undertook a project to restore and digitize our original charging ledger for 1789-1792, which shows every book borrowed and lists the name of the borrower and the date the book was taken out and returned. Vattel's *Law of Nations* was due back on November 2, 1789, but the ledger shows that it didn't arrive. A recent check of our rare books confirms that the volume is still missing, and there is no record of its having been borrowed after the first President took it out.

The fine for overdue books at that time was three pence a day. Some have speculated that the accumulated fines for 221 years would amount to many thousands of dollars. The Library was not about to pursue such a fine, but we were delighted to learn recently that a copy of this long-missing volume would be coming back to us. When the press broke a story a few weeks ago about Washington's library fine, word reached Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens. Their President, James C. Rees, and Head Librarian Joan Stahl contacted us to say they had located a copy of the same edition as the missing one and wanted to give it to us.

We are very pleased to have this important part of our history back with us. And I am particularly pleased to welcome Jim Rees and Joan Stahl, who are in the process of launching an important library of their own at Mount Vernon.

When receiving the volume, Mr. Berry added:

On behalf of The New York Society Library, we are pleased to accept this generous gift, which rekindles our ties with the man who was and is "first in the hearts of his countrymen." We are proud of our ties with George Washington and his ties with our great city. He was with us in good times and bad. His courage and resourcefulness helped avoid what came very close to defeat by the British in the Revolutionary War on this very island of Manhattan in September 1776. And his inauguration here in 1789 served to focus all the positive energy of our young nation. This book will be cherished as part of The New York Society Library's special connection with this great man.

And by the authority vested in me by no one in particular, I hereby absolve George Washington and his representatives from any and all overdue fines, and I am pleased to extend the privileges of membership in our Library to Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens. Thank you.

More information on Mount Vernon and its upcoming Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington at Mount Vernon can be found at www.mountvernon.org. Members may view the new copy of The Law of Nations in the Head Librarian's office on the third floor.



The handsome new (old) copy of The Law of Nations

FROM THE HEAD LIBRARIAN

Summer is usually a quiet time at the Society Library, but this year projects large and small are carrying right on through the warmer months.

Our ability to carry on is due in no small part to your support as users and as donors. This spring we made a special appeal to raise funds for the Library's archives. We are extremely grateful to those who lent their support for either general operating funds or our archives, which include ledgers representing the reading of members from 1799 to 1825. This month, we sent four of these ledgers to the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, Massachusetts, for evaluation and a project proposal. The NEDCC already did excellent work on our first charging ledger; you will hear more about it in the fall. If you would like more information about the conservation of our historic ledgers, feel free to talk to me at the Library or email mark@nysoclib.org.

Our events season finished in June, and I'm pleased that so many of you expressed appreciation for the variety and quality of our programs. This issue of *Library Notes* includes photos from many events, including our receptions for the opening of the exhibition *Literary Lives: The World of Francis Steegmuller and Shirley Hazzard*, the New York City Book Awards, and the Young Writers Awards. Our new season begins in September with a very special event about Mark Twain. More details will appear in the newsletter you will receive around Labor Day.

I'll bet you a dollar that Twain would have found an element of humor in the recent stories about President Washington and his overdue books. The Chairman's column provides more details, including Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens's donation of a copy of Vattel's *The Law of Nations* (1759). My experience with the media's attention the last few months has been unforgettable—I suspect that the Library has never before answered so many questions about such a specific element of our long history. I was delighted to do telephone interviews with both BBC London and BBC Radio Scotland. After all, the other book Washington borrowed was Volume 12 of their country's debates in the House of Commons.

By now you have received a membership letter about this summer's renovation, which is underway. The Library's Board of Trustees approved three projects that will enhance our landmark building and help improve services, collections, and programming. These are a) making our main entrance wheelchair-accessible; b) building out the third, fourth, and fifth floors into the lightwell; c) increasing the seating in the fifth-floor Large Study Room by ten seats and the number of individual study rooms from two to six, while also adding shelving on that floor; and d) restoring the skylight above the main staircase, which was part of the original John S. Rogers home built in 1917. We so appreciate the valuable support of the Hornblower Fund, the primary funding source for the fifth floor and lightwell project, the support of the Estate of Marion O. Naumburg for the wheelchair-access project, and the donations of members and trustees to fund other aspects of the work.

The Library's website now has a renovation news update section at www.nysoclib.org/renovation.html. Our summer hours are noted on the main website. I am pleased that Andrew Corbin, who many of you know as a familiar face at the circulation desk, will act as our Renovation Projects Librarian through September. We promise to provide regular updates on the progress of the work, including photos, timeline changes if any, answers to frequently asked questions, and general announcements. Our digital camera will be busy documenting the work. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time.

Very best wishes from me and my colleagues for a summer filled with the three "Rs": relaxation, reflection, and reading.



Art movers from Gander & White take the stairwell statue of Hagar and Ishmael away for safekeeping

Mark Bartlett

Mark Bartlett
Head Librarian

INTRODUCING THE GOODHUE SOCIETY

The New York Society Library is pleased to announce the establishment of The Goodhue Society, created to acknowledge, honor and thank those who have included the Library in their estate plans now and in the future. Trustee William J. Dean is its Chairman, and we are extremely proud that there are 48 inaugural members. Their names will be listed in this year's Annual Report, except for those who have requested anonymity.

Since its founding, the New York Society Library has been the grateful beneficiary of many patrons who have included it in their estate plans. We named our new society in honor of Sarah Parker Goodhue, whose bequest in 1917 enabled the Library's move from University Place to the Rogers family home on 79th Street and provided the core of our present endowment.

With Sarah Parker Goodhue's portrait gracing the Members' Room, the Library paid tribute to Goodhue Society members at a special reception on June 9th. The festive evening included remarks by Library Chairman Charles G. Berry, William J. Dean, and Christopher Gray—*New York Times* "Streetscapes" columnist, former Library trustee and Goodhue Society member—who spoke about the history and many wonderful architectural details of our building. The Library plans to make this an annual celebration.

If you would have any questions or desire further information about The Goodhue Society, please contact Director of Development Joan Zimmert at 212-288-6900 x207 or jzimmert@nysoclib.org.



Sarah Parker Goodhue by Samuel Worcester Rouse, 1900.



*Above:
Alma Moore; Mark Bartlett and Edmée Reit;
Nancy Winslow Parker;
Michael Kowal
and Reily Hendrickson.*

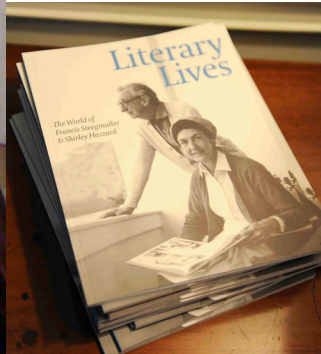


*Right:
William J. Dean,
Charles G. Berry, Mark Bartlett,
and Christopher Gray; Arlyne Krum
and Rhea Tabakin.*





This page, left to right: Alexander Sanger with Nimet Habachy and Anka Muhlstein after Ms. Muhlstein's lecture on Proust, April 6; Molly Haskell at the New Members Party, June 15; ten-year staffers Carrie Silberman and Sara Holliday, April 21; Children's Poet Laureate Mary Ann Hoberman and an audience member, March 16; juror Meg Wolitzer and host Adam Gopnik, New York City Book Awards ceremony; A.E. Hotchner and Mark Singer at their Author Series event on Hotchner's memoir Paul and Me, April 28.





This page, left to right: Shirley Hazzard and her publisher, Jonathan Galassi of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, at the Literary Lives exhibition opening on March 24; Ms. Hazzard with Opus Nine Ensemble, who played in her honor on April 29; Ms. Hazzard at the podium on March 24; children's author Steven Kroll with a fan, April 16; at the New York City Book Awards ceremony, May 5, Book Awards chair Roger Pasquier with winners Kathleen Eagen Johnson, Ayala Fader and Constance Rosenblum, plus Head Librarian Mark Bartlett

THE 2010 YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

The 2010 Young Writers Awards were presented on May 19. Judges Robert Quackenbush, Dave Johnson, Carol Weston, and Edra Ziesk gave the awards and spoke about the winning entries and the writing life. The Library received over 150 entries in prose and poetry from member families and invited schools.

Winners:

- “Katelyn and Will’s Great Adventure” by Emma Yeston
- “A Hump of Gold” by Silver Liftin
- “Pickle Rage” by Jacob Aufzien
- “Knitting” by Mary Miller
- “In the Shadow of the Cross” by Philip Clark
- “Snow Flight” by Annabel Barry
- “Clearing a Field” by Gautama Mehta

Honorable Mentions:

- “An Osprey in a Tree” by Grace Alexandra Chiong
- “I Am From...” by Bryson D. Wiese
- “Poem in Three Views” by Asher Liftin
- “the” by Isabel H. Adler
- “Civil War Journal” by Anna Hitchcock



Top: Asher Liftin, Robert Quackenbush, Dave Johnson, Jacob Aufzien, Gautama Mehta, Silver Liftin, Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner, Paul A. Wagner, Mark Bartlett, Annabel Barry, Edra Ziesk, Isabel Adler, Philip Clark, Anna Hitchcock, Carol Weston, Grace Alexandra Chiong, Emma Yeston, Mary Miller, Bryson D. Wiese. Bottom: Mary Miller and Dave Johnson; winner Philip Clark and his family.

The 2010 Young Writers Awards are generously underwritten by Jeanette Sarkisian Wagner and Paul A. Wagner.

OFF THE SHELF: A READER'S REVIEW

ANDREW CORBIN

Serious Readers, some would have us believe, only read Serious Books. This is, of course, utter nonsense, and there is no better time than the summer, with its promise of relaxation and rejuvenation, to explore the guilt-free pleasures of that often slighted literary form, the comic novel. What follows is an incomplete introduction to some of literature's frothiest, funniest and most entertaining writings.

BRITISH CLASSICS

When it comes to razor sharp comedies, nobody holds a candle to the British. A particular favorite of many Library members, including W.H. Auden, is **E.F. Benson (1867-1940)**, whose *Mapp and Lucia* series about two women battling for social supremacy over their small village have such a rabid cult following that many fans refer to themselves as Luciaphiles. Once readers have devoured the *Mapp and Lucia* novels (which begin with *Queen Lucia*), they should investigate Benson's lesser-known delights *Paying Guests* and *Secret Lives*. Another famous fan of E.F. Benson was **Nancy Mitford (1904-1973)**, herself the author of several splendid comic gems including *The Pursuit of Love* and *Love in a Cold Climate*. Not-so-loosely based on her family, this pair of novels serves up a cast of characters as eccentric as anything in English fiction. If Mitford's reputation were based solely on these two novels, her place in the pantheon of greats would be assured, but she did write several other highly amusing books worth reading, including *Highland Fling* and *The Blessing*.

Arguably the crown jewel of British comic novels is *Lucky Jim* by **Kingsley Amis (1922-1995)**. Set at an unnamed provincial English university, *Lucky Jim* recounts the exploits of one Jim Dixon, an unenthusiastic professor of medieval history seemingly hell-bent on making a complete mess of each and every aspect of his life, from his disastrous love affairs to his equally disastrous academic career. Amis went on to write several more comic novels, some funnier than others, but none ever quite matched the brilliance of *Lucky Jim*. The two that come closest are *That Uncertain Feeling* and *Take a Girl Like You*.

FURTHER READING:

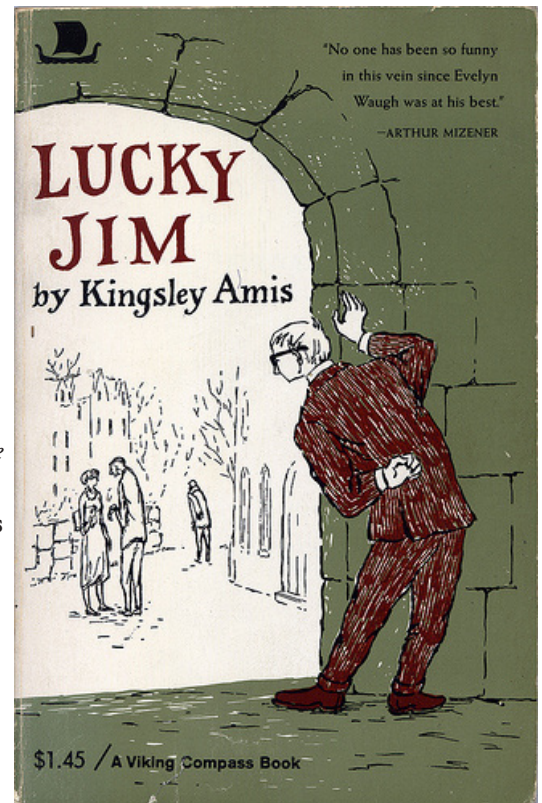
Delafield, E.M. *Diary of a Provincial Lady*.

Waugh, Evelyn. *Scoop*.

Wodehouse, P.G. *The Code of the Woosters*.

AMERICAN CLASSICS

One of the most iconic creations of American comic writing is **Anita Loos's (1888-1981)** deathless Lorelei Lee, the far-from-dumb Roaring Twenties blonde bombshell of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, who gold-digs her way around the world, setting down her experiences (visiting the "Eyefull Tower" or meeting "Dr. Froyd") in a diary as artless as it is hilarious. Sadly, over the years Lorelei Lee has been divorced from her literary roots and become associated in the minds of most with Marilyn Monroe's brilliant portrayal of her in the 1953 film. Similarly, the original novel *Auntie Mame*, written by **Patrick Dennis (1921-1976)**, has largely been forgotten in favor of the classic film starring Rosalind Russell. This is a dire mistake, as Dennis's *Auntie Mame* is a true American comic classic, with a more risqué sense of humor than the film and far less sentimentality. Dennis' other masterpiece is unquestionably *Little Me*, the divinely absurd memoirs of a made-up actress named Belle Poitrine. As a spoof of celebrity culture *Little Me* has no equal, in part because of the 150 photographs that accompany the text depicting various scenes from the ever so slightly sordid career of Miss Poitrine. She is the only actress in the world either dumb enough, or cunning enough, to turn Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* into a movie musical about a varsity football player and a cheerleader. The essence of camp humor, it really must be seen to be believed.



Anita Loos

Dawn Powell (1896-1965) is a novelist whose works languished in obscurity until the 1990s, when she was rediscovered by a whole new audience who thrilled to her witty and unsentimental satires of New York life. Though she had perhaps more in common with Evelyn Waugh than with Anita Loos or Patrick Dennis, Powell's sensibility was unquestionably American; at her best, she was a sort of literary Preston Sturgis, deftly balancing screwball comedy with keen social observation. Readers new to Powell should begin with *A Time to Be Born*, featuring the brilliantly conceived romance novelist-cum-arch-villainess Amanda Evans Keeler, or *Angels on Toast*, a satire of bohemian culture and the publishing industry in post-World War II New York.

FURTHER READING:

Toole, John Kennedy. *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

Twain, Mark. Anything by.

CONTEMPORARY HUMORISTS

For the last half century, **David Lodge (b. 1935)** has been writing comic novels that rank among the very best his native England has produced. His particular forte is the academic comedy, with *Nice Work*, about a feminist professor and a factory manager who are forced to shadow each other at work as part of a government program, and *Small World*, a scathing sendup of academic conferences and all of the attendant shenanigans, being excellent introductions to Lodge's consistently brilliant body of work.

Another contemporary English voice that bears comparison with the classics is that of **Helen Fielding (b. 1958)**, whose *Bridget Jones's Diary* introduced readers to one of literature's most endearingly hapless heroines. Single, on the wrong side of 30, and something of a disaster at work, Bridget emerged fully formed as a sort of modern Everywoman for the 1990s. Her anxieties, frustrations, and hopes suddenly seemed to sum up the zeitgeist—so much so that she spawned an entire genre, the somewhat derisively named “Chick Lit.” With her sharp wit and healthy appreciation of life's many little ironies, Bridget is a character for the ages.

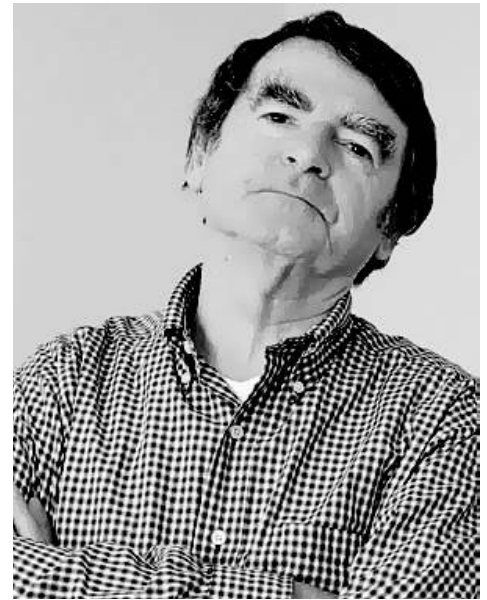
Novelist, playwright, screenwriter, diarist, critic, and monologist **Alan Bennett (b. 1934)** has become, for better or worse, an English National Treasure—“better,” because he deserves it; “worse,” because it makes him sound fussy and genteel, which he resolutely is not. He is, however, a master at exploring a particular brand of English comedy, the bittersweet kind in which melancholy haunts every laugh. Those going on a long car trip this summer would do well to bring along the audio version of Bennett's *Talking Heads*, a collection of 12 monologues originally written for radio and here performed by the likes of Patricia Routledge, Anna Massey, Thora Hird, and Bennett himself. His deceptively simple novella *An Uncommon Reader*, about Queen Elizabeth II's headlong plunge into the world of reading and the political anxiety that ensues, would also make terrific vacation reading.

FURTHER READING:

Lipsyte, Sam. *Home Land*.

Maupin, Armistead. *Tales of the City*.

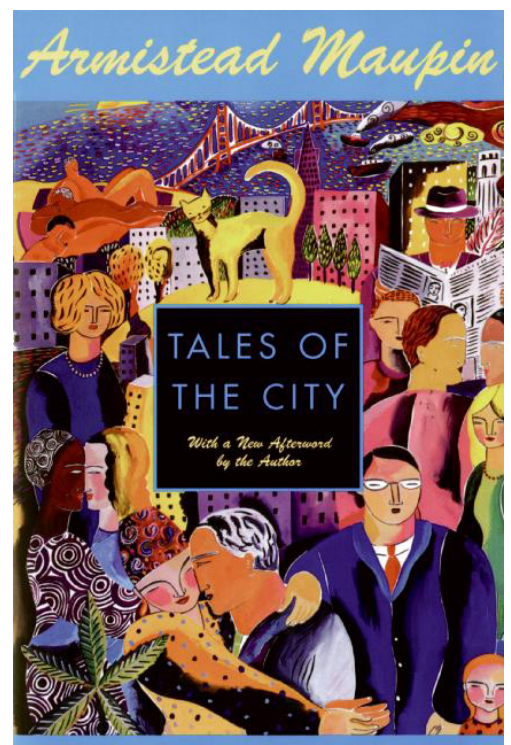
Julian Fellowes. *Snobs*.



David Lodge



Alan Bennett



RENOVATION REMINDER

**The Library will be closed for renovation beginning on July 6.
We plan to reopen on July 19.**

**The fifth floor is closed until the early fall,
reopening date to be announced.**

News about the renovation is on our website at www.nysoclib.org/renovation.html, on signs throughout the building, and on Facebook and Twitter. Please call the front desk at 212-288-6900 or email renovation@nysoclib.org with any questions. We appreciate your patience as we improve our beautiful building.

- Library Main Page.....www.nysoclib.org
- Online Events Calendar.....library.nysoclib.org/iii/calendar/month
- NYSL Writers Blog.....www.tinyURL.com/NYSLblog
- The Library on Facebook.....www.facebook.com/nysoclib
- The Library on Twitter.....www.twitter.com/nysoclib



This summer's renovation will restore the amber-colored skylight over the main stairwell. This image dates from when the building was the private home of John S. Rogers and his family. The photographer was standing beside what are now the doors to the Members' Room.

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY
53 EAST 79TH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10075

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