Librarians in literature: the situation and reactions to it

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Librarians in literature: the situation

and reaction to it

by

Christine M. Basra


June, 1984

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Department of Library and Information Studies

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Introduction

The stereotype of the librarian is, and has been, a burden which many librarians find difficult to bear. Illustrating the unease felt in the profession there are numerous articles in the professional press and books about the image of the librarian. Many suggestions have been put forward by librarians as to how the image might be improved but the traditional image still remains firmly embedded in popular culture.

That it is seen as a problem at all by librarians is interesting. Other professions are often plagued by an equally bad image but fail to display the constant desire to prove the image false which is seen amongst librarians. For example school teachers also suffer from belonging to a 'female profession' and the image of the policeman has become especially unfavourable during the 1980's.

The stereotype which causes so much disquiet among librarians is certainly not flattering to the profession although it is not actually evil. The stereotype librarian is depicted as a middle-aged spinster with her hair in a bun or coiled around her ears and an old-fashioned taste in clothes. She is conservative, suspicious, unfriendly and bureaucratic. However, this timid, lonely and physically unattractive woman is often dedicated to her work and well-educated, if a little eccentric. The stereotype male librarian is also timid, bureaucratic and often naive and neurotic about women. The image is of the 'limp-wristed' male librarian or the ferocious 'dragon'. Pearce (1) sums up the stereotyped librarian as ineffectual, confused, myopic, elderly (at all ages)" and C.P. Snow (2) says that he has a "kind, gentle, terrified expression, frightened of something he might have left undone". Positive elements in the stereotype such as a talent for observation and for unearthing information are usually given a negative quality by implying that the librarian is curious to learn other people's business. Librarians are also thought to be hardworking and patient people, dependable and objective but these qualities too are distorted in the stereotype to imply a person shackled to a humdrum job and lacking the initiative to escape.

Thus the stereotype contains both positive and negative elements but it remains a 'thorn in the side' of librarians everywhere because of it's
negative association with age, ferocity and an inability to succeed in
the 'real' world.

The librarian is often featured in fiction and here, although
this study only covers a brief sample of the titles available, the
profession can be seen through the eyes of an outsider. In this way it
is possible to consider whether the stereotype does actually provide
the model for the non-librarian's view of the profession. On examining
the literature, the reader is immediately aware of a problem of definition.
Is the character a librarian or a library worker? Many members of the
public will not be aware of any difference as all library workers are
commonly termed 'librarians'. In literature confusions of this kind
are common. Examples are Jenny Cavilliers in Love Story (Sagal) and
Neil Klugman in Goodbye, Columbus (Seth) where both characters are library
workers, not librarians. Cases such as these, have been omitted from this
study in the interests of brevity.

Introduction - Notes

1. Mike Pearce, "Is this still our image?" New Library World
   75 (December, 1974), 257.
   p. 241.
Chapter 1

The male librarian as a main character

Among the many librarians who feature as a main character in novels it is the men who seem to have the most negative traits. It is often a case of the author influencing the reader's perception of the character by his use of adjectives when describing his person or actions. A librarian who is tall and slim may be said, as in the case of John Lewis, the confused main character in That uncertain feeling (Amis), to have a long thin body and a round and rubicund face. (1) Another male librarian, Cecil Titmus in The small hours of the morning (Yorke), is described as an insignificant and solemn young man "slightly built, of moderate height, with thinning hair and blue eyes". (2) Yet this man is the object of a secret and ultimately disastrous passion. Both Cecil and John are examples of the stereotype being used to describe the character's physical appearance. The reader is lead to see the two characters as the weak, limp-wristed librarian. Their characters displayed later in the novel fail to comply with this idea, but nevertheless it is firmly implanted.

There are, however, some fictional librarians who do not, thankfully, evoke this image. Both the main characters, the sleuth and the villain, in the murder mystery Dewey decimated (Goodrum) are handsome men. The sleuth Edward George, a retired librarian of seventy, is an "expensively tailored, grandfatherly type" (3) and Dr. Welles, the murderer, is a "well dressed man with an appealing twinkle in his eye," who has no trouble in entertaining women. (4)

Richard Hindon in The library tree (Peake), a romantic novel, is the stereotypical romantic hero, but is also the chief librarian. He is the macho man, being tall with broad shoulders, flashing eyes and a darkly handsome face. (5)

The librarian is often used as a figure of fun as is apparent in the character of Timothy Lumsden in Sorry (Vincent). A short and dowdy person, he draws himself up to his full sixty inches and looks his mother "straight in the cameo brooch". (6) Barry Bowses also uses the appearance of his
Ken Pyne. Punch, December 3, 1975, 1046
librarians to add to the comedy of his text in Between the Stacks. Andy Egge, the branch librarian is five foot three inches tall and wears a hair piece and Nick Inkerman, the deputy librarian, has wild curly fair hair and one leg shorter than the other.(7)

Many librarians are seen as being dedicated to their work, Edward George, the sleuth in Dewey decimated (Goodrum), has been a librarian for many years (8) and Cecil Titmus in The small hours of the morning (Yorke) enjoys his work to the full. He is deputy librarian in Felsbury Public Library and "every time he entered the bright new premises he felt a thrill."(9)

Determination, not a trait usually seen to form a part of the stereotype, is also common especially among the librarian detectives. Edward George goes about his task in a quietly determined way, seeking out the facts without a fuss, and Cecil Titmus may be sad and crumpled at the end of the novel, but he shows an unusual amount of determination to keep his marriage alive. It seems unlikely that he will succeed as his wife is already looking around for a new lover but he is willing to suffer in order to keep her if possible.(10) Richard Hindon, the romantic hero of The library tree (Peake), is both dedicated to his profession and determined to get what he wants from the awkward library committee, namely a new library.(11)

The stereotype librarian is thought of as a bookworm, a person, who is well-educated but not necessarily intelligent. There are many examples of both the well-educated and the intelligent librarian. John Lewis in That uncertain feeling (Amis) is at least well-educated, being a qualified librarian with three years experience.(12) At times he becomes involved in some bizarre situations, mostly because of women, but he has a dry sense of humour and a very vivid imagination and manages to extricate himself. Edward George, the sleuth in Dewey decimated (Goodrum), is a cultivated and scholarly man, but is a realist who did not persuade the director of the treasure house library, which is the scene of the crime, to become a librarian by promising him a "quite life of reading and reflection." In fact Edward George chuckles at the thought as library administrators rarely have the time to look at a book. George is well respected in the profession for his knowledge and the director says of him
that "there aren't five men in the profession that have your breadth of experience."(13) Edward George is also observant (14) and understands people. He is, therefore, able to piece together scraps of information. In fact, he is enjoying using his brain and by the end of the book he feels rejuvenated and more sure of himself.(15)

It is also an asset for a villain to be intelligent, especially if he has a sleuth like Edward George on his trail. Dr. Welles, the villain in Dewey decimated (Goodrum), is described as having a vast knowledge of architecture as well as a creative brain. Welles is able to throw George off the scent both by his charming manner and by the crafty way in which he casts doubt on to the other members of staff. For example, he reveals the friendship between Miss Brewer, an elderly librarian, and the murdered bookbinder Schwartz.(16)

A vastly different character is the public librarian in Gavin Lambert's remarkable novel In the night all cats are grey. This character, who is never given a name, is quite mad, but well-educated and he "passed the examination very easily." He can hold an intelligent conversation with his superior or with the borrowers on many subjects. He reads extensively on religious and philosophical topics, hoping to find a meaning for life.(17) It is even suggested that working in the library and discovering all kinds of disturbing information in this work, has helped to unbalance his mind.(18) Richard Hindon is intelligent, knowing that patient determination is the only way to handle the chairman of the Library Committee.(19) Even Timothy Lumsden, the inept librarian played by Ronnie Corbett in the television series Sorry (Vincent) is intelligent, able to carry on witty exchanges with his mother which he never wins.(20)

Bravery is not a characteristic readily used to describe a librarian but it is shown by a great number, especially those in detective stories. Edward George in Dewey decimated (Goodrum) tries to talk the murderer out of hiding so that others are not put at risk.(21) However, although there are examples of brave and unselfish librarians there are rather more of self-centred ones. Lambert's main character in In the night all cats are grey is quite mad and thinks constantly of himself, living in his own world. John Lewis in That uncertain feeling (Amis) is also self absorbed. Too concerned with his own desires to see how miserable he is making his wife.
Yet he becomes very suspicious, and even insulting, when he discovers her with her new lover. After he himself has committed adultery he becomes really worried about what he has done, and fears that he may have wrecked his marriage. He does not feel any compassion for all the pain he has caused but guilt. He is like a small child who has to admit to being naughty so that he can be punished and feel forgiven. (22) Actually his problem is that he does not know what he really wants; he just lets things happen, then feels guilty and blames everyone else. (23)

Dr. Welles, the murderer in Dewey decimated (Goodrum), in the manner of all villains is unconcerned for other people. He is ruthless in his efforts to keep his own life running satisfactorily and he feels no remorse. As Edward George, the librarian - detective, says at the end of Dewey decimated, he was "an authentic Live-and-let-live Epicurean" who was used to having money and when he was threatened could be amazingly detached and cold-blooded. (24)

The librarian in novels is also seen as a hardworking and efficient member of society. Richard Hindon in The library tree (Peake) is both. His library runs smoothly but he is keen to make changes and improvements (25) and Edward George in Dewey decimated (Goodrum) has a reputation for efficiency as well as a curious nature, essential to a good librarian, and a detective.

Cecil Titmus, the unlikely hero of The small hours of the morning (Yorke), is also efficient, remembering to fill in an accident form when a reader faints in the library. However, he does not allow bureaucracy to stand in the way of friendliness and helpfulness, even going so far as to take the reader's book to the hospital, although she has left no tickets. His argument is that she will need something to read if she is ill. (26)

These librarians may, therefore, be efficient but they are independent of mind, able to see the human problems beyond the rules and regulations. Many also have principles, as in the case of Richard Hindon in The library tree (Peake) who because he "stuck to his principles through thick and thin" wins the battle for the new library with the Library Committee. (27)
The stereotype librarian is often unapproachable and unfriendly, barking out commands or maintaining a frosty silence. The epitome of this unfriendliness would be the character in Lambert’s *In the night all cats are grey* who prefers to be alone, living a life of almost total isolation. (28) He knows only two people, both women who he feels are mother substitutes.

Other librarians do not, happily, fit so readily into the stereotype. John Lewis in *That uncertain feeling* (Alys) may like to strike poses when talking to his borrowers, and feeling superior, may even try to get the better of them, but mostly he is eager to be liked, especially by young and attractive women. (29) Cecil Titmus in *The small hours of the morning* (Yorke) is also a sociable character. He may be reserved in his private life but he is at ease with people, finding it natural to be helpful and friendly to the readers. In his position as deputy librarian of Felsebury Public Library most of his work is administrative, but he often steps out of his office to have a word with a reader in the library as he takes a real interest in them. (30) He is also a good father. He enjoys reading stories to his children, something he is good at, and he also helps them to make a birthday cake for their mother. (31) His hobby demands solitude and although he takes pleasure in his own company he also likes to be with people.

Richard Hinton, the chief librarian in *The library tree* (Peake), appears to be intimidating at first and displays a very suspicious nature but is really the ideal romantic hero. A perfect mix of kindness and cynicism, hiding his heart behind a tough and unbending facade. (32)

Edward George in *Dewey decimated* (Goodrum) is kind and friendly, realising that Crighton Jones, the young publicity officer, is overwrought and upset by the tragic events of the novel. He encourages Crighton with sound and realistic advice. (33) However, he can be objective about the events which have taken place in the library and displays patience in his approach to the murder case. He realises why the police never considered that the death of De Veer, the manuscripts librarian, could have been murder. He was found dead in the stacks, and murders do not occur in libraries. When the police inspector remarks that it is difficult to imagine a librarian murdering someone, Edward George replies that the
the stereotype of the librarian is not true and that they are professional and ambitious people. (34)

Patience is often seen as a negative characteristic when applied to a librarian, as it implies someone who is weak and content to do merely routine tasks. Cecil Titmus in *The small hours of the morning* (Yorke) is a patient man. His hobby demands it, (35) he makes matchstick models of cathedrals. This is something which is scoffed at slightly in the book, as an unfit hobby for a 'real' man, but it requires a close attention to detail, a steady hand and an appreciation of beauty, all good solid characteristics.

Cecil may be seen as cold and invariable but this is really his realistic approach to life. He is trusting and it does not even occur to him that his wife is seeing another man, however, when the police question him about her movements he goes to the college to find out whether she actually went to her evening classes. He uses the pretext that he is doing research so that he will know which books to purchase. On discovering she only went to two classes he remains calm and even manages to take notes on all the other classes. He has great dignity and does not let his feelings show. (36)

Other characters are shown as naive, for example John Lewis, the amorous librarian in *That uncertain feeling* (Mis), finds it hard to believe that strings really are pulled so that certain people are promoted. When he believes that he has got the job of sub-librarian purely because of his involvement with Elizabeth, the chairman's wife, and to spite the chief, he reacts like a spoiled child, rejecting Elizabeth and the whole "dirty deal", even though, as Elizabeth points out, he will only be able to save his marriage if he manages to make some extra cash. (37)

The stereotype of the male librarian contains the suggestion not necessarily of sexual deviance, but more of weakness when confronted with the opposite sex. This is perfectly embodied in many characters. There is Timothy Lumsden, the comic figure in *Sorry* (Vincent) who is incapable of holding an intelligent conversation with a woman and is always terrified that they will find out what he does for a living. (38) Presumably he is ashamed of being a librarian. He always manages to say the wrong thing.
and becomes tongue-tied and nervous when speaking with women. Cecil Titmus is neurotic about sex although he is married in Yorkes The small hours of the morning. He feels guilty when he makes love to his wife and wants to apologize to her because "their lovemaking had strayed from weekends."(39) In fact, he feels lucky to have June as his wife although she is not as "biddable" a wife as he had hoped for. After their marriage he learns that she married him on the rebound and "his attitude towards her, always humble, grew less assured."(40) Cecil seems to be diminished as a man when June is present. In the library, he is in control and can handle all kinds of situations but when we see him through June's eyes he is a weak and pathetic man. She sees all his kindness and trust as weakness.

The unnamed main character in In the night all cats are grey (Lambert) has an extremely unusual attitude towards women. He has no girl-friend as such, and spends his Sundays taking long walks or masturbating whilst he builds up fantasies about women he has met. He is totally without feeling and finally murders his mother after making love to her.(41) It appears that he will not be discovered.

This ambiguity about sexuality found amongst these characters is unsettling as it may brand all male librarians with these dubious characteristics. It is to be hoped that readers will recognise the fact that the characteristics displayed by these fictional librarians need not find models in real life.

The librarian is often imagined to be a shy and timid creature, who chooses librarianship as a means of escaping from the real world into the womb-like safety of the library. Here again examples can be found in Timothy Lundden from Vincent's Sorry and Cecil Titmus from The small hours of the morning by Yorke. Timothy is not at his best in society, being inept and accident-prone. He is even afraid to throw a drunk out of the library and finally pays him to leave.(42) The reader is inclined to believe that it is his mother holding him back but, as his friend Frank points out, it is himself, "always worrying about what people think! Always making things complicated!" He is afraid to leave home, even being reduced to creeping about the house at night when he wants a nightcap. He realises that his life is dominated by his mother but pretends that he is in
fact in control, the master of the house. He dreams of living in a penthouse with several model girls, but is secretly happy to believe that his parents need him too much for him to leave. (43) Cecil Titmus in The small hours of the morning (Yorke) remarks that he prefers a quiet place to work, (44) he dislikes the hustle and bustle of the shopping centre where his wife works.

Although the librarian is sometimes depicted as a shy and timid character, he can also be ambitious. John Lewis in That uncertain feeling (Amis) is ambitious, and this leads him to deceive his wife in order to gain a better salary and social position. At the end of the novel, however, he leaves librarianship to sell coal. No doubt there is more money to be made here. Cecil Titmus is also ambitious, realising that he can help his career by mixing socially (45) with the elite of Felsbury and Richard Hindon also displays ambition in The library tree (Peake).

Cecil Titmus is accused of being predictable by his wife, although this was the characteristic which first attracted her to him. She says that although they met and married within three months, it was the first and only impetuous action of Cecil's life. (46) Cecil may be predictable and careful, doing the same things at the same time every day and always taking care to lock up his car, but he is also a capable man, who can be depended upon in a crisis. He plans ahead, for example, by taking a course in First Aid he is able to take charge when an accident occurs (47) and he is an optimist.

Finally librarians are depicted as being old. Either old in fact like Edward George, the seventy year old detective in Daisy Decimated (Goedrum) or old in character like Cecil Titmus, whose wife says of him: "Cecil was like a man of fifty already, he had been born middle-aged" (48) or Timothy Lumsden, who at forty-one is really too old to behave like a schoolboy.

The male librarian seems to emerge as a predominantly unattractive character. He is often balding, badly dressed and unable to cope with life or the opposite sex. There are, however, positive elements in his personality. He is well-educated, if a little hairbrained, and he is generally kind and helpful. As in anything, it is difficult to generalise but the male
"I won't pay the fine! I won't, I won't, I won't!"

'Albert'. *Punch*, August 10, 1977, 222
librarian in novels seems to adhere closely to the stereotype of a weak and malleable character, afraid of the outside world, living a hermit-like existence, retiring from life. The characters do tend to have a rounded personality, as befits a main character, but the phrases used to describe their characters are negatively weighted and the reader is left with an overall impression of weakness.

The stereotype may also be the reason for an author choosing librarianship as his character’s profession. This is the case for Cecil Titmus, a librarian is expected to be predictable, patient and kind and so it is even more shocking for the reader when the adultery and the murder occur. In Timothy Lundsden’s case librarianship has been chosen as it provides a decent career for the typical mother-dominated man. He is kindly and obliging but unsanely and afraid so as a librarian he can be intelligent and bookish but is not expected to be dominant or to display any qualities of leadership.
Chapter 1 - Notes

8. Goodrum, p.67
9. Yorke, p.14
10. Yorke, p.169 & p.164
11. Peake, p.12
12. Amis, p.13
14. Goodrum, p.79
15. Goodrum, p.297 & p.430
16. Goodrum, p.148 & pp.244-245
18. Lambert, p.73
19. Peake, p.152 & p.61
20. Vincent and Davidson, p.9
21. Goodrum, pp.400-401
22. Amis, p.222-227
23. Amis, p.212
24. Goodrum, p.425
25. Peake, p.10
26. Yorke, p.17
27. Peake, p.190
28. Lambert, p.4
29. Amis, p.23
31. Yorke, p. 20 & pp. 89-90
32. Peake, pp. 187-188 & p. 26
33. Goodrum, pp. 60-61
34. Goodrum, pp. 192 - 193
35. Yorke, p. 59
36. Yorke, pp. 160-165
37. Anis, p. 225
38. Vincent and Davidson, p. 14
39. Yorke, p. 53
40. Yorke, p. 20 & p. 33
41. Lambert, p. 2 & pp. 147-151
42. Vincent and Davidson, p. 12 & p. 117
43. Vincent and Davidson, p. 103 & p. 145
44. Yorke, p. 27
45. Yorke, p. 100
46. Yorke, pp. 7-8
47. Yorke, p. 16
48. Yorke, p. 54
Maclachlan. *Punch*, October, 29 1980, 724
Chapter 2

The Female Librarian as a Main Character

The female librarian also occurs quite frequently in a major role in novels and here also the treatment is mixed. The stereotype librarian is quickly detected although it is often subsequently modified.

The female librarian too can be either attractive, like Laura in Jealous God (Draine), who has large eyes and dark hair and makes the most of her looks by wearing bright and noticeable clothes,(1) and Helen Marsh in Rest you merry (McLeod) who, although mature, is a stylish lady. The reader is led to expect "some old-maid aunt"(2) but this co-sleuth is a small woman of forty or so with a good figure, good dress sense, fair curly hair, a fine peachy skin and blue eyes.(3) It is soon clear that a romantic involvement with Professor Shandy, the amateur detective with whom she joins forces, is inevitably. Marion Paroo, the music teacher and librarian in The music man (Willson), is also lovely and accomplished, although at twenty-six she is said to be 'on the shelf', (4) and Holly, the young librarian in Holly qualifies as a librarian (Lonsdale), is attractive in a wholesome kind of way.(5)

There are the unattractive librarians though, Bowen describes Gail, the children's librarian in Between the stacks, as having a shaky figure, a ruddy complexion, a square jaw and a penguin walk and Liz Daible has "freckles, frizzy ginger hair, split ends, sparrow's ankles" and is very accident prone.(6) Victoria Welch in the thriller The man who loved zoos (Rosse) is the 'Miss Marple' type of investigator, and thus is endearing but unattractive, having small eyes, a big nose and grey frizzy hair.(7) She does however, have a smile which dominates her face.

Just like Miss Marple, Victoria Welch shows a quiet determination and dedication. She is determined to find out why her nephew, Warren, was killed and, as her husband is dead, she knows she will have to find out herself. After pacing up and down she reaches her decision and she halts, whipping off her glasses with all the determination of a "man preparing to enter a street fight."(8) Helen Marsh, the stylish detective in
Rest you merry (McLeod), is determined to help solve the mystery and dedicated to her profession but she retains a lively sense of humour (9) and Marion Paroo, the heroine of The music man (Wilson), is dedicated to introducing the inhabitants of River City to the classics even if she seems to be fighting a losing battle. She even sings a song in which she reaffirms her resolve to keep trying. (10)

Many of the women librarians are well-educated and intelligent, as librarianship has long been thought a suitable career for a scholarly woman. Both Helen Marsh and Victoria Welch are intelligent and well-educated, useful qualities in a good detective. Victoria Welch is clever at obtaining information and quick to realise it's significance. She compares detective work with the thrill of tracking down a difficult piece of information for a reader. (11) Helen Marsh, as well as being able to speak Swedish, is very highly qualified, having a doctorate in library science, a fact which impresses Porble, the university librarian. (12) This is one of the few examples of an author actually stating that a person needs qualifications for librarianship.

Molly, the young woman in Molly qualifies as a librarian (Lonsdale), is intelligent and passes her examinations without too much trouble. She has been conditioned by her times and her aspirations are typically middle-class, a good (but feminine) job and a nice husband. When choosing her subjects at library school she makes it clear that too much ambition is not suitable in a girl. (13) One must remember that the novel was written in 1950 predominantly as a career guide for young middle-class women and hope that such ideas do not prevail today. This enforces the stereotype of librarianship as a means of getting a qualification, a satisfying job, nice friends and a decent husband.

Laura, the good-looking librarian in Jealous God (Braine), a novel about personalities and social choices, is also well-educated. She is able to use English correctly and is conversant with Irish history. (14) She is intelligent, although she still makes mistakes, being a real character with emotions as well as brains. Marion Paroo in The music man (Wilson) is intelligent enough to see the good effect which Harold, the Music Man, has had on the townspeople even though she has not been hoodwinked into believing his stories. She decides not to give the mayor the information.
proving that he is a fraud.(15) She even goes so far, later on in
the play, as kissing another salesman in an effort to prevent him from
giving the mayor evidence of Harold's fraud.

As well as being intelligent, a good detective must be observant
and shrewd. Victoria Welch, the amateur detective in The man who loved
zoos (Bosse) has both of these talents. She is able to assess a
character quickly, usually by using astrology, (16) and she is observant
of detail. Adding all this to her intelligence, she is able to assess
the relevance of snippets of information. She realises, on reading the
report of a plane crash, that she must be in danger herself. (17) Some
people from the agricultural research station, which she has just visited,
were killed and she is certain that the research station is somehow
implicated in her nephew's death. She is enjoying being an investigator,
however, "feeling pleasure in the exercise of her powers of observation", (18)
even if it is at her nephew's expense. When she meets Boyle, the secret
service agent who murdered her nephew, she intuitively feels that he is
a man ruled by "darkness and violence", and Boyle is aware that although
she looks harmless in her flowered blouse, the "plump little woman ... was
obviously no fool. Her tiny blue eyes seemed to miss nothing". (19) He
later adds that she was "stereotypically dumpy ... and at the same time
she had the sharp eyes of a trained investigator, resoluteness of a marine". (20)

Another investigator who is observant is Helen Marsh in Rent you merry
(McLeod) as she discovers how the Buggins Special Collection in the library
is involved in the murders by noticing that some books are missing. She
is also astute enough to be able to assess people quickly and accurately.
The director calls her a "perspicacious lady". (21) Marion Paroo, as already
noted, is observant enough to see the difference wrought in the townspeople
by the Music Man and is shrewd enough to understand that a travelling
salesman is unlikely to settle down. (22) Laura, the librarian in
Jealous God (Brain), is observant too, realising that her boyfriend,
Vincent, does not like her to smoke. (23)

These women also display great independence and high moral
standards as well as being physically brave. Victoria Welch realises
that she is putting herself in danger by investigating her nephew's death
in The man who loved zoos (Bosse) but believes it to be the right thing to
do. (24) Laura is prepared to suffer misery to do something in which she believes, that is, to go back to her husband. (25) Helen Marsh also puts herself at risk to bring the criminals to book in Least You Merry (McLeod) by deliberately letting the murderer know that she and her co-sleuth are on his trail in order to flush him out. (26) Marion Paroo stands up to a rowdy mob, who want to throw the Music Man out of town after tarring and feathering him, because she has fallen in love with him. (27) These women are not prepared to lay aside their beliefs in order to conform or to protect themselves. Helen Marsh, for example, has been sacked from her last two jobs because she did what she thought was right and refused to be dictated to, even by someone in authority. (28) Her independence may have contributed to the fact that she is unmarried. This is certainly the case with Marion Paroo, who is not prepared to lower her standards and marry just anyone (29) even if this would give her more status. She prefers to stay single and independent and is not worried by the gossip about her, but knows her own mind. She is a romantic but is not looking for a saint, just an ordinary man.

Laura is a realist, yet returns to an unhappy marriage to which she feels morally bound. She has an open nature, knowing her own likes and dislikes and speaking her mind. (30) She promises Vincent her boyfriend in Jealous God (Braine) that she will never tell him lies, "sometimes not the truth, but never lies", and he says of her that she "had her pride but she also had her own kind of honesty". (31) She is loyal to her husband even if he does not deserve it.

Victoria Welch is independent enough to set off alone to investigate her nephew Warren's murder and it is loyalty to Warren, her only family, which prompts her to undertake this quest. She is determined to prove his innocence, (32) even if he has been wrong in the past. She stands by him, (33) not only because he is a relation but because she feels compassion for him. He has been through a lot, including the Vietnam War and his mind has been affected. She has a strong sense of right and wrong and yet, at the end of The man who loved zoos (Rosse), we leave her unable to decide if she has been right. She has been determined to vindicate all the dead and Boyle, the secret-service man, realises that money and threats would only "stiffen her resolve" and not keep her silent. So he decides to appeal to "her own idealistic
"Whereas the other one wouldn't even give you the time of day."

Fig. (4)

temperament" and by involving patriotism he has "upset her belief in the clarity of what was right". (34)

Lady librarians are shown to be as hardworking and efficient as their male colleagues. Molly, Lonsdale's young heroine in the career novel Molly qualifies as a librarian, works hard both at her studies and in the library when she has qualified, thinking of new ways to help her readers.(35) Helen Marsh is efficient, finding the discrepancies in the Buggins Collection's stock very quickly. Marion Paroo also runs an efficient library until the Music Man comes in and sings to her, ignoring her pleas for silence, whilst the readers dance around the shelves. (36)

Women librarians are, if the stereotype is to be believed, unfriendly and unapproachable, but on examination these examples fail to bear this out. Molly makes friends easily and Helen Marsh is likeable and open, (37) understanding how people feel and ready to defend a fellow librarian, Porble. She is slow to take offence and yet she does not allow herself to be trampled upon. She easily manages to overcome the university librarian's resentment when she is engaged without his knowledge, as well as making friends with his wife. Marion Paroo, although appearing brusque at first, is soon shown to be a friendly and open-hearted girl. She eventually falls in love with the Music Man and does not take offence at the rumours which the other townswomen spread about her. Laura, Draine's heroine in Jealous God, has an open-hearted and pleasant personality and enjoys life to the full, easily making friends with her boyfriend's grandmother. (38)

Patience can often be misconstrued as a passive acceptance of routine but in the case of Victoria Welch it is clearly a positive attribute. The detective in The man who loved zoos (Bosse) takes time to observe and collate all her information, and being born under Aquarius the same sign as Darwin and Galileo, she takes a scientific approach to her investigation deciding to run it is they do in thrillers, (39) first assessing the information and only then taking action.

Female librarians may be portrayed as sensitive but they are realistic and, in many ways, not as naive as the men. This applies to Laura and Marion Paroo. Laura is portrayed as a pleasure lover, eager to take what is available and not to worry about the future. She tells her boyfriend, Vincent,
to "enjoy what you have now and don't yearn after what you'll never have". (40) For all this realism she is vulnerable and submissive, but is strong-willed when her principles are involved. She may be a little neurotic about getting too old, at twenty-seven, to start a family, (41) but she is decisive and always has a reason for her actions. She may give the impression of being wild but "she wasn't the sort of person to act purely on impulse". (42)

Marion Paroo is very similar in some ways. She is easily hurt when someone suggests that she is not the first woman in the Music Man's life and that he is using her, but realistic in her expectations of him. She is glad to have had the happiness he has brought. (43) Victoria Welch is realistic, knowing that she does not have enough time to indulge her grief after the death of her nephew in The man who loved zoos (Roose). This can appear cold-blooded but "all her life Victoria Welch had faced calamity and misfortune in this forthright manner, with dogged self-control" and in better circumstances, this could have saved her husband's life when he died of a heart attack. She puts her faith in "clear thought, immediate action, and a strong will," preferring "function to aesthetics." (44) However she does show her naivety when she fails to hide her feelings on guessing that Boyle is the killer. She realises that this reveals her for what she is, a librarian who is out of her depth. (45) Helen Marsh is also realistic and sensible, knowing that taking unnecessary chances will do no good. (46)

Although women are not often associated with ambition, and in many cases this is seen as a bad characteristic for a woman to possess, some of these librarians are ambitious. Nelly is ambitious in her own quiet way wanting to postpone getting married until she has qualified and made her name as a librarian, (47) although she accepts that she will not have a top position.

In fact, from this brief survey, it is clear that the female librarian, when used as a main character, displays many more positive traits than her male colleagues. There are no examples of weakness or sexual neuroticism. There is femininity, of course, which is acceptable for women but is also often attributed to male librarians. There are, in fact, very few negative traits present amongst these librarians and those that are seen as weaknesses in the men, such as the patience and carefulness of Cecil Titmus in The small hours of the morning (Yorke), are seen in quite a different light when referring to a woman.
Victoria Welch is careful and patient, a creature of habit, but when, before commencing her investigation, she sorts her information into piles and then classifies them carefully, we are told that this is the "fastidious care of a skilled librarian". Marion Paroo's careful avoidance of any association with men is not due to a neurotic nature or an aversion to the opposite sex, but to her intelligence and discrimination. She soon seizes her chance when the right man appears.

The women librarians are well rounded characters, not perfect, although some, such as Helen Harsh do come dangerously close, but real. They have weaknesses and strengths and fail, in many ways, to conform to the stereotype. They are all strong characters, however, strong willed with inner conviction and this is perhaps their most obvious similarity with the stereotype. whereas the male librarian is thought as weak, the female is a 'dragon', fierce and frightening. These women are not frightening but they are all determined to be people in their own right, living their lives for themselves, obeying their own rules and following their consciences. Here there are no neurotic spinsters or frightened mice turning to librarianship as an escape from life, but rather a body of outgoing and professional women grasping life with both hands.
Chapter 2 - Notes

2. Charlotte MacLeod, Rest you merry London: Collins, 1978, p.44
3. MacLeod, p.73
5. Betty Lonsdale, Molly qualifies as a librarian London: Bodley Head, 1958, p.42
6. Barry Bosse, Between the stacks London: Jay Landesman Ltd., 1979, pp.7-8
8. Bosse, p.75
9. MacLeod, p.98
10. Willson, p.20
11. Bosse, p.120
12. MacLeod, p.93 & p.100
13. Lonsdale, p.32
15. Willson, p.43
16. Bosse, p.98
17. Bosse, pp.145-146
18. Bosse, p.99
19. Bosse, p.112
20. Bosse, p.182
22. Willson, p.57
23. Braine, p.107
24. Bosse, p.76
25. Braine, p.235
26. MacLeod, p.211
27. Willson, p.63
28. MacLeod, p.75
29. Willson, p.20
30. Braine, p.83
31. Braine, p.223 & p.251
32. Bosse, p.76
33. Bosse, p.10
34. Bosse, pp.182-192
35. Lonsdale, p.174
36. Willson, pp.34-35
37. MacLeod, pp.96-100
38. Braine, p.200
39. Bosse, p.78
40. Braine, p.192
41. Braine, p.235
42. Braine, p.250
43. Willson, p.54 & p.57
44. Bosse, pp.83-91
45. Bosse, pp.146-147
46. MacLeod, p.110
47. Lonsdale, p.165
48. Bosse, p.79
49. Willson, p.56
Chapter 3
The Librarian as victim

In crime novels the librarian has been featured as both the sleuth and the murderer but it is more usual to find him cast as the victim. Filstrup in her article "The shattered card: libraries in detective fiction" points out that the use of the librarian as a victim is common because it conforms with the idea that librarianship is a 'feminized' profession. Librarians are seen as passive and, therefore, fit readily into the role of the victim. (1) Also the use of a librarian as a victim helps the author to create an atmosphere of tension and horror. When such civilised and unadventurous men and women are murdered the reader's belief in a stable order of things is shattered, and so the relief, when all is set right, is more profound. Filstrup also points out that it is very rarely the personality of the librarian which leads to his murder, but it is more often caused by knowledge, either real or potential. (2) The killer cannot risk the efficient librarian discovering or disclosing the vital truth. It is therefore the librarians' dedication and efficiency, their desire to explain and uncover the facts, which is their undoing.

A very good example of the librarian as victim is Battie Bluett in Night walk (Daly) who becomes the murderers second victim. He believes that she may find a piece of incriminating evidence in some books which have been donated to the library recently. Battie, "a square-faced, square-bodied woman who looked at Gamadge sharply through pince-nez", (3) is hard-working and dedicated to her village, Frasers' Hills. She has spent all her life there and intends to remain for the rest of it. (4)

Battie is well-informed about books (5) and runs the library efficiently, if in her own way. She has the reputation in the village of being brusque, unfriendly and intimidating, although Gamadge, the bookish detective, gets along very well with her. She is even willing to lend him her key to the library whilst she is away on holiday, (7) so that he can use it in her absence.

Battie is a proud woman, especially aware of her reputation of fearlessness and so although she has been badly shaken (8) by an event at the library, which, even with her limited imagination, she believes may have been an attempt on her life, she returns to the library the next day to continue her work. (9) In fact it is this determination to get her work
finished before she goes on holiday which is the cause of her death as the murderer cannot be sure that she has not discovered the evidence in the books. It is stated that should she have found anything, "duty and self-importance" would have prevented her from keeping silent and that she was morally incapable of blackmail.(10)

Although Hattie Bluett does not conform exactly to the stereotype, there are enough similarities to convince the reader that this is a typical librarian. She is single, unattractive, generally unfriendly, single-minded and morally correct. A very unprepossessing character. She does have positive qualities, like intelligence and a trusting nature, but these are heavily outweighed by the negative traits and it is significant that when she is murdered there is no one to mourn her or the closing of the library, which was in dire need of funds.(11)

Another librarian victim, again a woman, can be found in Le Carre's A small town in Germany. Here poor Gerda Eich, whose name the authorities cannot manage to spell correctly, is murdered before she is even introduced to the reader. The librarian at the British Library in Hanover, Gerda is fifty-one years old, a retired school teacher, who has been decorated for her services to Anglo-German relations.(12) This is all the information revealed about her in the book along with the fact that she has been dragged from her library and beaten up by an anti-British mob. This woman, who is innocent and dedicated and is destroyed by the forces of a world outside her own, immediately arouses the sympathy of the reader.

The victim in Dewey decimated (Goodrum) is also a librarian, this time a man, Murchison De Veer, the head of the Manuscripts Division of the Wernher-Bok library. He is described as "tall, lanky and ... a stuffed shirt".(13) However, he is an expert in his field and takes great pleasure in letting everyone know about it, with the result that he is cordially hated by all. After his murder, a particularly grisly one, he is described by the director, (a ruthless administrator, who is going to sack the new publicity officer when she has given the library a "livelier image") (14) as "a mixed blessing" who brought great prestige and yet diminished those who worked with him.(15) A library user calls him "a sanctimonious son of a bitch" who knew his subject but who gave information grudgingly, almost as a favour, and who stalked around "like a blooded aristocrat".(15)
Though he was so thoroughly disliked, it was his dedication not his personality which was the cause of his death. He was respected if not liked. De Veer was incensed that vast amounts of money were being 'wasted' on rare books when he needed money to buy unique documents for research. He began to send cryptic messages to the press, hinting at forgeries in the holdings of the Rare Books Department, knowing that this would cause uproar and hoping that the cash would be re-allocated as a result of the ensuing investigation. Unfortunately for him, someone actually was substituting less valuable books for priceless ones. Thus he became a threat as the thief could not be sure just how much he knew. Here again it is a case of knowledge or potential knowledge signing the librarian's death warrant.

In her article Filstrup (17) mentions many more librarian victims adding that many authors might do well to discuss their settings with real librarians. From two of the three examples here, it is evident that the librarian is often murdered because they have, or may have, discovered something and so they are not murdered because of their personality or their private life. The examples given by Filstrup bear this out further and with this in mind it is obvious that the author has no need to spend a vast amount of time and effort describing the personality of the victim, as it has virtually no bearing on the murder. All the librarian needs is an inquiring mind and efficiency in discovering information, two characteristics ascribed to the stereotype librarian, if not in such a kind way. It is easier, therefore, to merely suggest that the librarian is a typical example by giving the least description necessary to imply this to the reader. Thus Hattie Bluett is a spinster, brusque, unambitious and underpaid but is dedicated and morally beyond reproach. Rich is unselfish and idealistic and De Veer is unfriendly but well-educated and successful. All bear some characteristics of the stereotype but, generally, not all of them.
Chapter 3 - notes


2. Filstrup, p.322
3. Elizabeth Daly, Night walk London : Hammond, 1950, p.117
4. Daly, p.14
5. Daly, p.15
6. Daly, p.34
7. Daly, p.122
8. Daly, pp.16-17
9. Daly, p.106
10. Daly, p.202 & p.177
11. Daly, p.154
14. Goodrum, p.77
15. Goodrum, p.57
16. Goodrum, pp.90-91
17. Filstrup, p.325.
"Have you a story about a shy young heroine who meets a rich handsome aristocrat and they get married and live happily ever after—but without sexist overtones?"

Chapter 4

The librarian as a minor character

Apart from appearing briefly as a victim the librarian can often appear as a more general type of minor character, who is only briefly and superficially described. Many are used by the author to provide information necessary to the plot, to help define the main character's personality in the mind of the reader by providing an opposite character, or to give a sense of atmosphere to the setting.

These minor characters appear in all kinds of novels. Dr. Levanthal in Look at me (Brookner), an investigation into a young woman's personality, is the director of the small reference library of a medical research institute. His work is described as looking through reference books "in search of maladies and images of maladies", (1) which he then passes on to his assistant, the main character in the book. Dr. Levanthal stays in his office all day, only emerging when he hears the voices of his staff or readers to remind them of the rule of silence. (2) He is described as "easy to work for, a mild, heavy man, probably shy, probably lonely, very correct, easily tolerated". He is not portrayed as a dynamic professional man but as someone willing to spend his life in a backwater with few users and staff. He is not a sociable person, staying in his office whilst the others enjoy a Christmas drink and appearing to suggest they all go home when he feels they are becoming too noisy. (3) His main function in the story seems to be to provide the staid and pathetic background in the library, a place outside the real world where weird people go, and where the heroine works.

Simone de Beauvoir in When things of the spirit come first, a book of short stories following the lives of several girls, describes a librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale as a "grey faced young woman with plaits coiled over her ears", who merely received and stamped books. She never saw anything but her clients fingertips. (4) This brief description influences the reader to think of the stereotype. The girl is unattractive, old-fashioned and the job is routine and boring. However, de Beauvoir does, at least, point out that the girl has passed an examination to get this "sterile job". The purpose of this description may be to provide contrast to the two bright young things who have come to the library to study and who are full of great hopes for a dazzling future.
Fig. 6

Charles M. Schulz, *Slide, Charlie Brown! Slide!*

A similar feeling of pallor and age comes from Philip Roth's descriptions of the colleagues of Neil Klugman in the Newark Public Library in his novella, *Goodbye, Columbus*. (5) John McKee, who at twenty-one, dresses like an old man with rubber bands around his sleeves and distrusts a black child who comes into the library, thinking that he can be up to no good. The reader learns that "his breath smelled of hair oil, and his hair of breath and when he spoke, spittle cobwebbed the corners of his mouth". Of the other people working there Mr. Scapello is portrayed as "an old eunuch who had learned somehow to disguise his voice as a man's" and Martha Winney is so old and decayed that she is hardly a woman any longer. Neil believes that he has 'strange fellows' in the library and he lives in fear of the day when he suddenly notices the thin cushion of air under his skin, separating the blood from the flesh, as under that of the other three. Librarians here are portrayed as being half-dead and living in a kind of numbness from which Neil is careful to exclude himself, saying that he does not intend to spend his life in the library, he will get out before it is too late. (6)

Roth has been accused (Moynahan, 1974) of using not only the librarian stereotype to help portray these characters but also ethnic stereotypes, so that Mr. Scapello becomes the 'sweaty Italian', Miss Winney, the 'decayed W.A.S.P.' and John McKee, the 'Irish bigot'. However, he maintains that the book is well written with a fine final tableau. (7)

Another clear use of the stereotype on a minor character is the portrayal of the librarian in *Re* (Nines). Dilly enters the library keen for information and is foiled at every step by the unsympathetic and bureaucratic "girl behind the counter",(8) who will not even let him in to look at the books as it is against the rules. The girl leaves Dilly no alternative but to steal a book from the bookshop and has, in this brief interview, probably put Dilly off libraries for life. With such obvious use of the stereotype it will surely occur to most people that if cannot be true. *Re* is, however, commonly read as a classroom book in schools and it may reaffirm children's suspicions about the imposing-looking library so that they never venture within its walls.

A similar librarian is found in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Orwell) when Gordon Comstock, a young man struggling to become a writer, goes to the library for some information on pregnancy. The librarian, although young and,
and a university graduate, wears pince-nez and is colourless and intensely disagreeable. (9) She cross-examines Gordon when he asks for a medical book, as she believes all men are looking for pornography, but finally gives him the book as this is her job and she seldom refused then to anyone, except to children. This librarian, although young and intelligent, has no warmth or genuine desire to help her clients. She is unattractive and appears to be a male-hater, even spying on Gordon to see if he is after the 'dirty bits'.

Miss Crail in The spy who came in from the cold (Le Carre, 1963) is also unpleasant and suspicious. She dislikes Leamas, her new assistant, from the very beginning and makes no attempt to introduce him to the work, leaving this to her other assistant while she argues fiercely with her mother over the telephone, something she does frequently. (10) Miss Crail's library, the Bayswater Library for Psychic Research, is run to strict rules and since Leamas breaks these rules, basically because he has not been told about them, he quickly becomes Miss Crail's enemy and "enemies were what Miss Crail liked. Either she scowled at him or she ignored him, and when he came close, she began to tremble..." Miss Crail finally stops speaking to him at all, and each of his minor mistakes is followed by a long whispered telephone call to her mother. When Leamas tells her that his name has been misspelt on his pay envelope "she was seized with a veritable palsy, rolling her eyes and fumbling erratically with her pencil until Leamas went away, she conspired into the telephone for hours after that". Her suspicions become apparent when Leamas leaves. At first she is overjoyed and then she checks the shelves to see if he has stolen anything.

Given the fact that Leamas, at this stage of the novel, has let himself go downhill and so does not look very respectable, Miss Crail's reaction to him is still extreme, typifying that of the neurotic old-maid librarian stereotype, heavily dependent on a parent and distrusting the opposite sex. She is completely wrapped up in herself, unable to detect the bond between Leamas and his fellow worker, Liz, and unwilling to believe that Leamas will not return for the back pay, which is owed to him. (11)

Dewey decimated (Goodrum) is a murder mystery set in a treasure house library, the Werner-Bok, in which nearly all the characters are librarians. When writing about the way in which his book was received by his colleagues...
at the Library of Congress, Goodrum (1977b) was surprised at the identifications they made. They could only find models for the villains, and not the upright characters. Yet he claims that only the latter could be said to be identifiable from library life.(12)

The novel gives a good insight into the running of a large private library with its conflicting interests and financial problems. The characters, however, do seem to revert to the stereotype occasionally. Dr. Rose, for example, the eminent and qualified rare book librarian who is "a sort of hussed, walruslike uncle with more of the absentminded scholar about him than anyone else on the staff,"(13) or Elsie Brewer, "tall, grey, severe, and in her sixties"(14) who presides over the issue desk.

Miss Brewer does give the investigators some useful information and she worships Dr. Rose, believing that he has had a rough deal.(15) She is the epitome of the neurotic spinster, whereas Speidel, the assistant in the manuscripts division, is a snooper. Eager to discover everyone else's business, even going so far as to stay late in the evenings to go through the waste-paper baskets. Speidel usually wears black, quotes Marlowe all the time and has a "waxen, arthritic appearance."(16) He is like a vulture eagerly feeding off of other people's troubles, enjoying the whole situation and laughing in a high-pitched giggle. He has no scruples, and is not bothered about being disliked as he enjoys the power which his ill-gotten knowledge brings him. However, he is skilled at his work and is the only one, apart from Edward George, the sleuth, to have any idea of what has been going on in the library. Miss Hester, the cataloguer, is a neatly groomed, if large, woman who makes the most of herself. She is competent and efficient and is cordial and helpful.(17) She is really only introduced to give the reader some background information about the library, but still manages to show the human touch of losing her temper a little when asked a particular question once too often.

This thriller, in which the murderer, the sleuth and the victim are all librarians, provides an entertaining narrative coupled with some well-drawn characters. The minor characters do tend to revert to the stereotype but perhaps this is because such people are found in libraries along with the sleuths and the villains. There is, after all, no reason why those people who work in a library should form any less of a cross-section of society than those employed anywhere else.
Mr. Anstey in *A girl in winter* (Larkin) is the chief librarian at the library where Katherine, a German girl living in war-torn London, works and she dislikes him heartily. He is constantly rebuking her but the reason is not exactly made clear, and the impression given is that he is jealous of her education. (18) Later this is verified by the information that he has risen from the ranks to his present position which is only a temporary arrangement, probably for the duration of the war. (19) The other girls in the library do not think him so awful, even seeing him as a joke and Miss Holloway, one of the assistants, remarks that because he is afraid of losing his job after the war he is "suspicious of everything and everybody, and he longs to be efficient, but he just isn't a big enough man for the job." Anstey is not an attractive man being thin and wizened, about forty with a narrow face and spectacles. He also has no dress sense, his suit is grimy. A nervous and neurotic man, his face twitches constantly. (20) He feels overworked and is struggling, against all the odds to keep the library running efficiently. For this reason he pounces on every misdemeanor and enjoys bringing the culprit to book.

Katherine also feels that he has "a curious professional furtiveness about him, as if he were a guardian of traditional secrets." (21) He does not want her to find out anything more than she needs to know and yet is keen to impress upon her mind that librarianship is not something anyone can do, even someone with a good education. (22)

Katherine discovers that Anstey, whose wife died five years before, has a lady-friend who looks after an ageing mother. Anstey has offered to help pay the nursing home fees so that the two of them can be married. So he does have feelings and a more human side to his character. By the end of the novel the reader begins to feel sorry for him as a weak man, with no real power, who also has an unhappy private life.

Kingsley Amis' fine novel *That uncertain feeling*, which has an assistant librarian, John Lewis, as its' main character, also contains several librarians in minor roles. The first is Ieuen Jenkins, John's fellow worker, who is also in line for the sub-librarian's job at Aberdare Public Library. Ieuen is in his late forties and not very attractive with a red face, thick lips and hair which makes his look like a shaving brush. (23) He is a timid man with a high pitched voice and a strong Welsh accent, who is proud of his Welsh heritage and pretends not to understand English slang. Ieuen desperately needs the promotion as his wife
is ill and he needs the money to pay for her treatment. He is upset
to learn that John has put himself forward for the promotion and when
a 'friend' on the Council tells him that John has influential 'friends'
he tries to get John to reassure him that strings will not be pulled. (24)
He is really neurotic about the promotion, seeing things out of all
proportion, and he apologises to John for breaching the matter. He is
a man who 'admired and wanted power' but is a bag of nerves at the interview.

The interviews, (25) said to be a literary masterpiece by many,
introduce us to the other two candidates for the job. The first is an
Oxford graduate with a first class degree who has just got his A.L.A.
and is totally out of his depth in the Welsh atmosphere. The second is
O. Killa Leynon, "a very broad man of fifty-one who'd already demonstrated
the fact that he was almost the same height standing up as sitting down." (26)
He is full of bustle and confidence, and quickly undermines the little
confidence which the Oxford man had at the beginning.

Although these characters do not give the impression of being
dynamic professionals they are given many positive qualities, but basically
the author relies on the stereotype. For example Ieuen is weak, timid and
naive, as is John Lewis in many ways. The most apparent link between Ieuen
and John is lack of money. They receive such poor salaries as librarians
that Ieuen is desperate for promotion and John Lewis leaves the profession
altogether.

Ellery Queen in Four men called John, a detective thriller, introduces
a librarian, John Thompson, as one of the four Johns suspected of murdering
a young and beautiful girl, Mary. John Thompson is a library stack
superintendent who is a "compact, sunburned man of thirty-five" with an
air of easy competence. He is not involved, pointing out that although he had
considerable power over the girl, who worked for him, he knows nothing of her
murder, (28) saying that he was working on his book that night. He adds that
all librarians write books. John is aware of what happens in the library
and knows that Mary was seeing John Pilgrim. He closed his eyes to the odd
rule that was broken during their friendship. He said nothing when they had
wine with their lunch as he enjoyed watching them as if watching a play.
However, he sacked Pilgrim as his mind was not on the job, he intends that
the library is run efficiently even if he does bend the rules occasionally.
John Thompson likes to keep his weekends for himself and his family, leaving the city behind and driving his scarlet MG very fast to his home in the country after he has changed his clothes so that he looks "more like a construction worker or a surveyor than a librarian." (39) This is a sensible arrangement as he knows that his family will have a better life in the country and he himself enjoys life there. It is too far to travel every day though, so he has a flat in the city near the library. He has obviously planned out his life very carefully and is a successful and happy man. Even though he does not fit in with the stereotype, being good-looking and successful, the image is still hinted at by implying that this man in his fast car and casual clothes, is the exception to the rule.

Gavin Lambert's strange and unsettling book In the night all cats are grey has a librarian as the main character and also has Miss Simpson as his superior. Miss Simpson may have been introduced as a more normal counter-weight to the main character's obvious maleness. He describes her as a handsome woman, tall and strongly boned who wore no perfume and who preferred brisk tweeds and paisley scarves. (30) Miss Simpson's first name is, inappropriately, Nigton, a fact she tries to keep secret. Although she shares a flat with another woman and enjoys looking at pretty girls, the narrator says that she is not necessarily a lesbian but may never have had the opportunity to discover her true inclinations. She is superstitious, believing that "an act of magic" has been directed at her, but is also methodical and intuitive, understanding people and why they behave as they do.

'OId Sackman' the chief librarian in The man who loved pets (Dosse) would not read novels because they lack educational value. (31) Victoria Welch, the heroine, who sees everyone in terms of their astrological sign, classes her as "a low Cancer, possessive and devious, with a cruel streak running behind her fixed smile". She is an incessant talker, eager to obtain information about anyone. This is clear when Boyle, the secret service man visits her to get information about Victoria. He describes Sackman as "a small, elderly woman ... perhaps in her mid-sixties" whose creased clothes are too bright and youthful for her and whose brown hairpiece no longer matches her grey hair. (32) She wears her spectacles on a cord round her neck and prides herself on being aware of everything happening in the library and the breadth of her knowledge of human nature. She is suspicious of some of the readers, especially the periodical readers, who, she is certain, are plotting something. A pretty tyrant reprimanding the staff
on each minor infringement of the rules, she prides herself on her orderliness and attention to detail, making lists all the time whilst complaining that she is dreadfully overworked.

On comparing Sackman with Victoria Welch, it is evident that in many ways they are very similar, both elderly, both painstaking and careful, both inquisitive but with Sackman these qualities are given a negative slant, whereas in Victoria they are positive attributes. It would appear that the author has used them as a sort of 'Jekyll and Hyde' partnership, displaying the same characteristics, whilst one is good and the other evil.

In complete contrast with Sackman and Miss Simpson, who are eccentric old-ladies, the young librarian, Barbara, in Forbush and the penguins (Billing), is beautiful, generous and has a sense of humour. Forbush, the hero, who spends the summer months watching the penguins in the Antarctic for a scientific study, meets her at a dinner party and when told that she is a university librarian is amazed that she can like it as she is so attractive. (33) They go dancing after the dinner and then back to her flat where he spends the night with her. He describes her as capable and self-possessed (34) and when a friend, hearing that she is a librarian, says "Not one of those" he tells him that she is beautiful and makes him feel more alive. (35) Barbara does not believe in God, but is calm, as if she understands the world. Yet she is a realist who takes charge of her life, taking a day off, pretending to be ill, so that she can be with Forbush before he goes away. (36) She is the complete opposite of the stereotype librarian, young, beautiful, and sexually active, as well as being intelligent and self-possessed. Nevertheless the stereotype is inferred by other characters when they react negatively to her profession as something with which an attractive woman would not be involved.

Another librarian in a minor role who does not completely conform to the stereotype is Graham Cotes, the assistant chief librarian in The library tree (Peake). Graham is a kind and sincere man, honest and friendly, who makes Carolyn, the new girl who is not welcomed by the chief librarian, at ease in her new job. (37) Graham Cotes encourages her to keep trying and not to allow the chief librarian to put her off librarianship on her first day. He is approachable and keen to keep his staff happy but Carolyn notices that he is lonely and greyer than his age merits. (38)
He is forty-one and a widower, and after Carolyn rejects his advances, he begins to court Pearl, also a librarian, who is friendly and who Graham feels is nice but needs to break away from her parents. (39)

All of the librarians and library workers except Richard Hindon, the chief librarian and typical romantic hero, are friendly, but both Graham and Pearl are described as lonely, and yet they have worked together for years without realising that they would be ideal for each other. They are in love at the end of the novel, a state which has made Pearl "almost pretty". (40) Once again librarians are seen as lonely people, old for their age who retire into the sheltered world of the library and who are not very successful at sorting out their emotions.

In Jealous God (Draine) Laura's flatmate and her boyfriend Vincent's sister-in-law, Ruth and Jenny, are also librarians. Jenny, who Laura, the heroine, knew at library-school is portrayed as an "interfering little bitch" (41) who feels that it is her duty to tell Vincent's mother all about Laura's past life. It is hinted at in the novel that Ruth is a lesbian (42) and she is described in a very unattractive way with great emphasis placed on her doubly and old-fashioned clothing and on her sexual unattractiveness, which at first repels Vincent and then evolves his compassion. She also has a weight problem yet eats too many cakes too quickly when speaking to Vincent in a cafe. Ruth is described as being terribly lonely, (43) which is why she is so upset when Laura says she is going to leave the flat. Ruth is helping to drive Laura away by being too possessive but she does care for her. Ruth tells Vincent about Laura's previous marriage in order to save them both pain at a later date. (44) She decides it is the only thing to do after much careful thought and prayer. Ruth is a really pathetic figure, unattractive in the extreme and she realises that Vincent finds her repulsive. He is forced to recognise that she is not a lesbian and that her interest in Laura is more that of an elder sister or of a school prefect, who is doing something for Laura's own good.

Both of these characters are unpleasant in a different way. Jenny is cold and calculating, absorbed with her own affairs of family and household, whereas Ruth is physically unattractive and painfully lonely. Although they do not entirely conform to the stereotype, there are elements present, such as unattractiveness, unfriendliness, dubious sexuality and loneliness. All in all they do not reflect much credit onto their stated
profession. This is surprising considering that John Braine was himself a librarian for a few years. In fact it appears that librarianship is only fit for those women who cannot find a husband. Ruth it seems, has no chance and so devotes herself to her work and Jenny gave up her profession as soon as she married.

Finally the librarian in the Oxford-based thriller *Operation Fax* (Innes) is referred to throughout as "Bodley’s Librarian" and is first introduced as "an elderly man with a high, dour forehead, quite bald, on which were symmetrically disposed several tiers of spectacles." (45) The librarian "took a fatherly interest in his flock" and is amiable and helpful to all. (46) The denouement of this curious detective novel takes place in the vaults of the Bodleian Library by night and the librarian is there as he has been summoned to open up the building. Two young investigators have gained entrance by a secret passage and one remarks that the only link between the millions of books in the library and the readers is "Bodley’s Librarian." (47) This is indeed a solemn and awesome responsibility, but one which is the basis of librarianship. It is rare to find it so clearly described.

The culprit is finally exposed, falls to his death and the reader discovers that the old librarian knows all about the secret passageway, having used it to first enter the library in his youth. He emerges as a real person who is not as dowdy as first appeared. He admits that the secret formula means nothing to him but, as a good librarian, he is keen to know the facts behind the case, acting as the author’s foil so that the reader can learn how the sleuths reached their conclusions. (48) He has a sense of humour and is prepared to bend the rules if the need arises.

In this case a more rounded character emerges from the original stereotype but this does not always occur. Many of the librarians which feature as minor characters are given particularly negative personalities. From the examples cited here most are female and unattractive (Ruth in *Jealous God* (Braine)), many are shy or timid (Lena Jenkins in *That uncertain feeling* (Rut)), or unsociable and unfriendly (Dr. Levantini in *Look at Me* (Brookner)). They are bureaucratic and unhelpful (the librarians in *1984* (Orwell) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Orwell)) and suspicious (*Man Claus in The spy who came in from the cold* (Le Carre)). They are prejudiced (*Oliver in Goodbye, Columbus* (Roth)), neurotic and eccentric (Miss Clapton in...
In the night all cats are grey (Lambert), as well as being ill-at-case with the opposite sex (Miss Crail) or even possibly homosexual (Ruth and Miss Simpson).

Even the positive qualities are turned against them, patience becomes submission to routine and intelligence and education are shown to be the cause of pride and aloofness. In general all of the minor characters examined, which conform to the stereotype, have had their good qualities far outweighed by their negative ones. In this way the reader is left with a negative image which reinforces the stereotype already held as true.

The author may even purposely choose a librarian as a minor character to give information, to provide a vital link in the story-line or to give definition to the main character because the stereotype is so widely known. The librarian can be introduced with very few words as the reader is already familiar with such a character and the librarian is a neutral character, whose information can be relied upon and believed. The librarian is, therefore, ideal as a colourless character outside the real world of emotions and violence, who is already submerged in the readers experience and who can be believed.

The librarian is also used as a comic relief, someone unable to cope with life, one remembers Miss Crail, who had to tell her mother everything, or as a pathetic figure, a foil for the main character, as in the case of Ieuan Jenkins.

It is clear that although many minor characters are stereotypes, this is not always the case and some do actually appear as real people, if only briefly, as one discovers with Noley's Librarian and Barbara. It seems a pity then that the stereotype is often used as a convenient vehicle for authors, thus enforcing it in the public mind, when with very little extra effort a more human and lifelike character could be portrayed.
Chapter 4 - notes


2. Brookner, p.11

3. Brookner, p.148


5. Philip Roth, *Goodbye,* Columbus London: Andre Deutsch, 1969, pp.36-38

6. Roth, p.56


11. Le Carre, pp.99-101


14. Goodrum, Dewey, p.29


17. Goodrum, Dewey, pp.313 - 319


19. Larkin, p.222

20. Larkin, p.16

21. Larkin, p.25

22. Larkin, p.206


24. Amis, pp.133 - 141

25. Amis, Chapters 13 & 14

26. Amis, p.166


28. Queen, pp.76 - 77

29. Queen, p.106

32. Bosse, pp. 85-97
34. Billing, p. 125
35. Billing, p. 137
36. Billing, p. 124
38. Peake, p. 69
39. Peake, p. 71
40. Peake, p. 104
41. John Braine, Jealous God London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, p. 131
42. Braine, pp. 60 - 90
43. Braine, pp. 105 - 106
44. Braine, pp. 113 - 123
45. Michael Innes, Operation noon London: Collins, 1974, p. 171
46. Innes, p. 172 & p. 274
47. Innes, p. 233
48. Innes, pp. 300 - 304

46.
I did just what you did, Charlie Brown...

I took out a book from the library! The librarian was so excited!

She kept shuffling through all those cards on her desk and then she'd move her ink pad back and forth and she stamped everything in sight!

I feel that for at least one librarian I have made "national library week" a complete success!

Charles M. Schulz, *Slide, Charlie Brown! Slide!*

Chapter 5

Librarians in the media

Librarians are found surprisingly often in the media both in magazines and newspapers, featured in cartoons and advertisements, and on television and in films. Very often these form merely a passing reference to the librarian or to the profession in general, like the librarian featured briefly in the early series of *Last of the Summer Wine* (B.B.C.T.V.) or the occasional 'throwaway' line used by a character along the lines of "He's a quiet timid man" to which someone replies, "Is he a librarian?" These brief mentions do not of course, help the profession to shed its image as they are constantly feeding the popular belief that the stereotype is the truth.

This belief is also reaffirmed by such programmes as *Sorry*, the B.B.C. television comedy show starring Ronnie Corbett. The character of Timothy Lumson was examined earlier but it is clear that as a librarian he falls very short of the ideal whereas as a comedy character he is excellent.

Librarians have fared slightly better in films as Cheshire points out in his resume of the films featuring librarians. These librarians range from the "bouncy bespectacled spinster librarian" enforcing silence in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) to Katgirtl, who is a librarian in her fictional private life.(1)

There are, in fact, quite a number of films featuring a librarian, often played by a famous actor or actress. Alma Hull, the librarian in *Storm centre* (Columbia, 1956) was played by Bette Davis. Alma risks her livelihood in order to protect the values in which she believes, when she is sacked for buying a 'banned' book. She may not be a young and attractive woman but she is a dedicated librarian, with principles and moral courage.

Peter Sellars played John Lewis in *Only two can play* (1962) the screen version of *That uncertain feeling* (Auss), and Shirley Jones played Marion in *The music man* (Wllson) when it was filmed by Warner Brothers. Ralph Richardson in *Rollerball* (U.A., 1975) plays the "mad professor" librarian who presides over the only books left in the world on 2019, and
Fig. 9

'RF'. Punch, December 20-27, 1979, p. 30
in the comedy thriller *Fair Play* (C.I.C., 1973) Goldie Hawn plays Gloria
Mundy, a recently divorced librarian who has a tendency to find dead bodies
scattered about the library.

Thus the librarians which can be found in films are many and varied
and although they may often be silly or unattractive, they are not usually
evil and are likeable enough. (2) As to the stereotype, it would appear that
these librarians do not wholly merge with the stereotype, but here again,
they do display common characteristics, such as high moral standards,
dedication and withdrawal from the real world.

The use of librarians in advertising can perhaps best be
illustrated by that well-known Vodka advertisement of a few years ago.
A young woman, of some charm, was shown with a caption, "I used to be
the mainstay of the public library, until I discovered _______". The
inference is clear, that by consuming this particular drink the young
woman in question was released from a humdrum existence in order to
experience 'better' things. This advertisement caused a major stir
amongst librarians. It seems that they were not offended but actually
wanted copies themselves. (3) The advertisement works upon the fact that
the public will see the librarian as a person constrained to a boring
existence, a person in need of a miracle. In this case the librarians
seem to have taken it fairly well and, on the whole, to have seen the
humour in the advertisement.

This was not the case when Nabisco produced an advertisement
in America for a brand of snack, which showed several types of people
enjoying this food. The town librarian, Mildred Mason, was one of these
and she found the snack "thrilling", eating it wearing a high collar and
a 'bouffant' expression. A protest was organized and the news item "The
munch is off" in *Library Journal* reports that fifty librarians marched on
the Nabisco Company Headquarters protesting that the advertisement
"perpetuated the worn-out, but all-too-familiar, stereotype of the librarian
as a turn-of-the-century old hat." (4) This protest was reported in the
New York Times and the Washington Post but Nabisco refused to withdraw
the advertisement. Librarians then picketed the Nabisco Headquarters but
all to no avail as Nabisco merely issued a statement that the advertisement
was humorous and that no slight was intended. It offered no apology.
Fig. 10

"Shh!!!" Punch, May 26, 1976, 929
Another advertisement which caused an uproar among librarians in America was one issued by American Motors for a new car, the Javelin. The advertisement implied that this sports car was too fast and modern to appeal to stuffy, timid and conservative librarians. The response from librarians was so swift and forceful that American Motors issued an apology in the professional journals.\(^5\)

Finally the stereotype is very often used in cartoons and can easily be recognised in some of the examples seen here. The stereotype of the male librarian is obvious in figures 1 and 2, and that of the female librarian is equally so in figures 3 and 5. The familiar hairstyles of 'earphones' or buns are common, as are spectacles and sour expressions. In figure 4 the borrowers are even commenting on the unfriendliness of one librarian, whilst the other is obviously a man-chaser. Both women are middle-aged, unattractive and dressed with appallingly bad taste.

Librarians are also depicted as frumpy, as in figures 2 and 3 and they are shown sometimes to be people caught up in circumstances beyond their control, such as the lack of funds (Fig.10), a common theme in many cartoons, which place the librarian in the role of a helpless cog in the wheels of power. In fact it is so outrageous to common expectations that a librarian would down 'date-stamp' and strike for any reason that it is found as a joke in a comical review of the year.\(^6\) Again the librarians are depicted as ladies with old-fashioned clothes, spectacles and buns.\(^{\text{Fig.9}}\)

Many cartoons do rely heavily on the stereotype, a fact especially obvious in figures 4 and 11, but it may be that librarians, with the stereotype forever on their minds, read more into the figures in the cartoons than is really there. Many of the cartoons are used to illustrate a point, such as the severe cuts in library services both in the past and unfortunately, to come (Fig.10), or the introduction of Public Lending Right (Fig.11), where the librarian is used as the mouthpiece of the cartoonist. In these cases the cartoonist may be using the general stereotype of the professional and educated person, bespectacled (always a feature of the studious or academic type), soberly dressed and of unimpressive appearance.

It remains a fact that most cartoons show a female librarian, often a staid and unattractive one. This is obviously an inheritance of the stereotype which impresses that librarians are predominately middle-aged.
"I'm sorry, but there's a limit to the number of times per day authors may take out and return their own books."

D. Langdon. *Punch*, September 15, 1982, 413
women with some education. However, the majority of these cartoons are not anti-librarian in that their message is not directed against the librarian himself, but against the system.

The above cartoons are all from Punch, figure 7 is from The Lena. Here the cartoon shows the librarian as an overworked and frustrated woman whose library is full of silence notices and who throws children out indiscriminately. It is interesting to note that here the 'studious' boy also wears spectacles, but it is sad to see that even young children are being indoctrinated with the stereotype.

The last examples, are taken from the famous 'Snoopy' cartoons by Schulz. Linus obtains a much-prized library card but is then too afraid to go to the library because of the fearsome librarian (Fig.6). Later both Charlie Brown and Linus go to the library in 'National Library Week' because "it does something for their morale ... Librarians like to feel needed" (7) (Fig.8).

These two examples demonstrate clearly two of the basic elements of the stereotype. The first is the idea that the librarian, within the domain of the library, is a dragon, is a woman and is something to be feared. The second is the idea that the librarian is someone low in status, to be pitied and patronised. Someone whose job is so routine and boring that they are grateful for any effort in, or recognition of, their efforts.

The stereotype used by cartoonists need not always be as obvious as it is in figure 11 but often elements of the stereotype are present. It may be that the librarian is not actually shown in the cartoon but that the other characters use the stereotype to portray the librarian to the reader. The impression given is often of a person who is out of touch with, the real world or, on the other hand, of someone aggressive and threatening. These two, seemingly conflicting images, are both present in the stereotype, and after all the natural reaction of a frightened or threatened creature in violence.

The reason why the stereotype is so easily and quickly recognisable from cartoons is because the cartoonist uses the least effort to portray the situation, therefore he incorporates the most basic and widely believed elements in his description. In this way he obtains the maximum impact and
recognition for the least time and effort expended. This will also explain why the stereotype is used in advertising and on television; it leaves the writer free to concentrate either on the plot or on other, more rewarding, aspects of the work, whilst offering immediate and universal comprehension.
Chapter 5 - notes

1. David Cheshire, "Librarian at large"  
   New Library World 80 (September 1972), 167

2. Cheshire, pp.168-169

3. "A walking contradiction - the library image"  
   Assistant Librarian 65 (December 1972), 183

4. "The lunch is off," Library Journal  
   97 (September 1972), 2009-2910

5. Jeanne Osborn, "The ghost of the hairy Javelin."
   American Libraries 2 (July/August 1971), 747


7. Charles M. Schulz, Slide, Charlie Brown!  
Chapter 6

Librarians write about their image

The distress which librarians feel about their image is reflected in the large body of literature concerned with the problem of the stereotype of the librarian found in the professional press. These articles range from studies on the image of the librarian in the media to suggestions as to how members of the profession can help to destroy the image and build up a newer more 'comfortable' one.

On numerous occasions librarians have sought to point out to their colleagues, by means of investigations into literature, that the image of the librarian portrayed by authors is not always as bad as many would believe. The fine article by Pilstrup has been mentioned earlier. There the characters in detective fiction, both sleuth and victim, are described. The library is also common as the scene of a major crime for as Pilstrup (1) indicates the setting out of clues is easy in such an ordered environment and also the 'body in the library' is a detective story cliché. Especially effective when the body is outrageous and the library staid and ordinary. This cliché is, however, more commonly associated with the private country-house library, than the public library, although such settings have been used and often with good effects. Pilstrup also points out that the investigator is the reasoning intellect of the true detective story and so when the librarian takes on this role it's a true ''mixture of professions'' (2).

Many of the characters referred to by Pilstrup have been mentioned earlier but some of her examples were written by librarians as spoofs. Two of these (3) are The Dewey decimal system by Breza, a librarian on the West Coast of America, and The cataloguing on the wall by Poole, a Librarian in New York. However these authors do not appear to give the librarians in their books any better characters than other authors treating them usually as figures of fun, probably in an effort to remain as true as possible to their source material.

Fiction can also have an effect on real life as Larry Towers, a Harvard University librarian discovered after Vernon Kinkle dedicated his thriller Music to murder by to him (4). The novel introduces H. Martin Webb, a sleuth who is an intelligent, if eccentric, librarian. Towers, who provided
the model for the character, now finds that his students leave clues around the library for him to find and ask his views on worldly crises.

Filstrup demonstrates that both good and bad images of librarians can be found in detective fiction and that the library detective story is often fairly light-hearted, with the librarian sleuth taking charge of the investigation as the police feel out of their element in the feminized library world.(5)

Julian Hoynahan (1974) commenting on his own library novel Pairing off, which he wrote after working in the Boston Public Library as a cataloguer and assistant in rare books, describes his anti-hero Hyles McCrorack as well-educated and a bit neurotic. He goes to work in a library to escape from the world but finds that this is not possible. His colleagues, "some attractive, some horrible, some fools, some wise," all force him to live in the real world.(6) Hoynahan points out that libraries are not places of retreat but are "at the very eye of the societal and political storm of today," sometimes even being involved in bomb scares and riots, and that librarians are "highly trained and cultivated people". However, he concludes from his brief survey of librarians in fiction, which includes several of the characters referred to earlier, that they are a sorry bunch, losers who are missing out on the richness of life.(7) He identifies two distinct images of the librarian in fiction, that of the shy, introverted and eccentric individual seeking a retreat from the world, and that of the energetic and ambitious professional. He sees no future in describing these two images as he feels both are represented within the profession.(8) and most librarians, if they are honest, would have to agree with this dichotomy.

A. K. Dalby also investigates the character of the librarian in fiction (9) from the frightened mouse of a man with his "kind, gentle, terrified expression" described by C. P. Snow in The Light and the Dark to the hideous and criminal Brock, the chief librarian of Glass Town, depicted by Charlotte Brontë in the Brontë juvenilia. Dalby also exposes the character of the amorous librarian such as Norman in The Norns in Conquest (Nyckbourn), who during a family week-end manages to make passes at his two sisters-in-law as well as his wife, and remain on good terms with all three.

Dalby treats the subject in a light-hearted manner and yet the feeling of dissatisfaction with the image he portrays of a librarian who
is unprofessional, unethical and downtrodden, is present throughout.

Neal Edgar examines the images of librarians portrayed in various areas of the media including newspaper, magazines, television and advertising as well as literature. Looking at the articles written about libraries and librarians as well as those written by librarians, he bemoans the fact that most are written by authors without any knowledge of libraries. This is not unusual but if these authors had done some research "inaccuracies and misinformation"(10) could have been avoided. His general complaint is in the overall lack of library input to both newspapers and magazines outside the professional press.(11) If the public do not have the opportunity to read about libraries and librarians and to learn of the recent changes, how can they ever change their opinions or expectations?

When examining the librarian as she(1) appears in literature he concludes that "she is an old maid, lacking style, taste, charm and the will to compete, but having high morals, virtue, gentility, a scholarly mind, little training, and less salary."(12) This image is very close to the stereotype and is often true of the minor librarian characters, if less true of the main characters of a novel. Edgar concludes from his study, which is mainly based on American examples, that the image of the librarian in the media is not at all good.

Other librarians have indeed attempted to redefine the image by introducing the public to a new view of the library. Ken Hornsby in his autobiography Is that the library speaking? attempts to describe his work as an assistant at his local library very much in the manner of the Jeeves Harriot books, detailing the events, both comic and poignant, which make up library life. His colleagues in the library (13) are Beaver, the deputy librarian who has a squeaky voice and is eager to pick him up on petty faults, but willing to help when he asks for advice. Bill Davies who is "tall, distinguished, and rather military in bearing" and Toney, the lending librarian, who is tall and easy-going.

Life in the library is centred around the antics of the borrowers and this autobiography is very similar to the novel by Bowes, Between the stacks, discussed earlier. These are both examples of librarians trying to introduce the reader to the real world of the library where unusual things can, and often do, happen. Unfortunately the characters of the librarians suffer due to the emphasis placed on the comic content, and in both cases the
narrator leaves librarianship at the end of the book for a more 'rewarding' career. It appears that the librarian is either a stereotype or a figure of comic fun with no real substance or dignity. John Braine was also a librarian at one time and although the three characters in his novel Jealous God, which were described earlier, are not all attractive, they do perhaps reflect life. Many different types of people work in libraries and it is obvious that some of these will share characteristics with the stereotype.

Librarians have, therefore, spent a lot of time and effort examining the profession as it is portrayed by others in fiction and in trying to portray it themselves. In both cases the reader is often left with that familiar feeling of injustice. A similar feeling runs through most of the more serious articles on the image written by librarians. Librarians, when writing about the image often begin by detailing the stereotype. Pearce begins by using the words ineffectual, confused, myopic and elderly(14) and continues by stressing the fact that there is no reflected glory for the mother of a male librarian as there is for the mother of a doctor. In fact, she often sees it as "the first step to gay liberation." Of course, for a daughter it is a nice quiet job, clean and gentle, until they are snapped up by a young man. Pearce then cites cases of unhelpful librarians and suggests that it is up to the library schools and public libraries to improve the image of helplessness and unhelpfulness. However he has few concrete suggestions to offer.

Alma Priestley suggests that the "bookish, woolly minded, amateurish image" might be improved by using computer technology as long as this was seen to be done. Priestly points out two ways in which an alliance between computer science and librarianship could help the image. Firstly by encouraging new staff to enter the profession and secondly by the over-printing of the public's idea of computer expertise on to the librarian. As Priestley explains, most people do not differentiate between the professional and non-professional staff in a library and, therefore, do not recognise that any special skill or training is required. Computer science is a new discipline, recognised by all as requiring training and without any historical connotations. It is precise, whereas librarianship is nebulous, (although they both deal in that most nebulous of commodities - information), it is practical, where librarianship is scholarly and it is scientific, where librarianship is 'arty.'
Priestly does admit that there will not only be gains from this alliance, but that "something" may be lost. She believes that the resulting improvement in the image will be ample compensation. However, many libraries do now have computerised systems of both circulation and cataloguing, providing their users with the best and most efficient services available, and yet this has failed to alter the image. The librarian remains essentially a librarian using computers, as most people do today, and not a computer scientist.

Jock Murison prefers the 'purification' approach to the problem, affirming that the old-style librarian complete with late-stamp and raised issue desk, implying their elevated station, must be removed if the image is ever to be improved. (17) He also nominates other scapegoats, such as the library schools and middle management who damper the enthusiasm of the younger professionals by preventing their good ideas reaching fruition. He suggests that any improvement in the image must begin within the profession by improving communication so that all members have an opportunity to be heard and to have their ideas put into action without interference from doctrinaire senior staff. He asserts that courtesy and information given to both staff and users about the aims and achievements of the service will go a long way in improving the image in a time of financial difficulties. (18)

Two past presidents, Donald Urrubart of the Library Association and David Bartlett of the Association of Assistant Librarians, have also felt that the image is serious enough a topic to make it the subject of a presidential address in 1972 and 1974 respectively. Urrubart urges librarians to form closer links both with other librarians and with like-minded people so that they can overcome their difficulties by co-operation and can improve the image by making this co-operation public. (19) He asserts the need for the librarian to be seen as a man of action especially in times of economic difficulties, when funds are low and getting lower. The librarian must be the vital link in the chain of the dissemination of knowledge. (20) He also urges librarians to overcome their differences and to speak out on important current issues as a united body. (21) His article is full of constructive ideas, such as, co-operation, unity, adherence to strong principles and keeping the needs of the users foremost, which may help the profession to improve its image and to gain support in the struggles to come.

61.
David Bartlett advocates similar steps to improve the status of the profession by underlining the image of the ferocious or effeminate librarian bound by bureaucracy. (22) He suggests that the effects of financial cutbacks should be kept to a minimum so that the librarian appears to the user as the servant and friend of the community. Bartlett suggests co-operation between libraries and other bodies as a means of achieving this. (23) In both of these two articles the librarian is exhorted to do all he can to cushion the user from cutbacks. This is all very well in theory but the librarian also finds himself with fewer staff to run the library, it is then a question of priorities whether he should do his utmost to keep one good library running smoothly and to cut back on those duties, which in ideal times, he would be only too glad to take on, or whether he should, by spreading himself too thinly, do nothing to the user's satisfaction and thus cause more damage to the image.

Many believe that the only way to proceed in the situation the profession finds itself in during the 1980's is to speak out in strong terms about the basic principles of librarianship, the free access to information for all and the provision of materials for education and leisure. Librarians should not be struggling to keep their libraries open in the prevailing economic climate but should be striving to enlarge existing libraries and to open new ones so that the unemployed and the disadvantaged can attempt to fulfill their their potential. Librarians need to show the public that they are willing to fight for their jobs and their principles, just as some of the fictional librarians in earlier chapters have done.

The profession must also be careful not to be demeaned itself in the eyes of the public. A prime example of a librarian attacking her own profession in public occurred in 1981 when the British Library refused to publish Pat Coleman's report which suggested that librarians were generally too interested in materials rather than people. (24) The Times (25) quoted Mrs. Coleman as remarking on hearing the news:

"That typifies the attitude of librarians. They are too frightened to be outspoken. They are nice, quiet genteel people who do not want to be involved in anything strongly controversial." Mrs. Coleman excludes herself from these criticisms but suggests they refer to other librarians, thus reinforcing the stereotype. However, Mrs. Coleman's report was published...
by the Association of Assistant Librarians and many librarians, whilst agreeing with many of her views, find it difficult to divide an interest in providing materials and arranging them so that they are easily available, from an interest in the people for whom those materials are bought. In the most basic of terms, library without materials will not be a great deal of help to anybody.
Chapter 6 - notes


3. Filstrup, "Sleuth", p.394
5. Filstrup, "Sleuth", p.397


7. Hoynahan, pp.551-552
8. Hoynahan, p.553
9. A. K. Dalby, "Casanova was a librarian" New Library World 76 (January 1975), 5.


11. Edgar, p.307
12. Edgar, p.308
14. Mike Pearce, "Is this still our image?" New Library World 75 (December 1974), 257
15. Pearce, p.258
17. Jock Murison, "Images and real people." New Library World 76 (October 1975), 200
18. Murison, p.201
20. Urquhart, p.212
22. David Bartlett, "In pursuit of a new image."
   Assistant Librarian 67 (August 1974), 120.
23. Bartlett, p.130
24. Patricia N. Coleman, Whose problem? The public library and the 
25. Frances Gibb, "Dull librarians report refused publication."
   Times 7 May 1981.
Chapter 7

Studies on the character of librarians
and on their literature

By reading the documents produced by librarians and published in
the professional press a new member of the profession is quickly made
aware of the stereotype. Many of the articles published, even if they do
not actually describe the stereotype, use it as their starting point or make
oblique reference to it. In this way new professionals are led to be
ashamed of their profession and to be constantly aware of the stereotype.

Pauline Wilson has identified the components of the stereotype (1)
from documents written by librarians themselves as well as those written
by members of other professions. These components are:

1. Orderliness, meticulousness and acquisitiveness.
   Preoccupation with rules and routines; possessive
   and proprietary.

2. Conformity and conservatism.
   Conscientiousness, traditional and conventional
   attitudes and behaviour; aversion to change; neutrality;
   caution, lack of imagination and responsibility.

3. Passivity and subserviency.
   Non-representative nature; uncomplaining; lack of
   vigour and qualities of leadership; unadventurous.

4. Introspection.
   Non-social behaviour and attitudes; detached, aloof and
   impersonal, "bookish".

5. Anxiousness and lack of self-confidence.
   Timidity, shyness; inclination toward worry,
   lack of decisiveness; defensive attitudes, inhibited;
   irritable.

These terms neatly define the stereotype, which is not only found
in documents but is a living entity, quickly discovered by new librarians.
The situation can become so deplorable that the librarian fears being asked
his profession and having to face the embarrassment or incomprehension of the
The questioner. The standard reply, as Wilson points out is "Well, you don't look like a librarian."(2)

Wilson continues by looking at the hypothesis that librarians handle the stereotype as a minority group and to prove this she cites a study(3) which examines responses to the stereotype in articles from the library press compared to those made by a minority stereotyped group.

The study(4) covered articles, news reports and book chapters in the period between 1921 and 1978. Four hundred and ninety-nine documents were examined and seventy-seven of them were included in the study, all were published in the United States library press and all the authors were, or had been, in the library profession. All of these responses fit into the five classic minority group responses which are as follows:

1. **Acceptance of the stereotype**, when the author seems to confirm the negative view of the librarian by setting out the stereotype.

2. **Concern with in-group purification**, when the author puts forward the minority group idea that the stereotype is the result of only a few members of the group, who do indeed have the characteristics of the stereotype, and that if they were disposed of, all would be well.

3. **Denial of difference**, when the author denies that there is any difference between other people and members of the group. This can range from a calm denial, to placing the blame on some external cause, to a vigourous denial of any truth at all in the stereotype.

4. **Denial of group membership**, when the author excludes himself when referring to the stereotype, for example, a male librarian emphasising that the stereotype only applies to women, or by someone using a different title, for example "information officer."

5. **For group action**, when the authors recommend the combat of the stereotype through group action.

The complicated results of the study, which Wilson details in full, prove that librarians, show a very strong acceptance of the stereotype with 62% of the responses fitting into either category 1 or 2. It is interesting that when the seventy-seven documents included in the study were
broken down chronologically, most case from the 1960's and 1970's, so that it would appear that librarians are generally becoming more sensitive about their image.

One reason for this increased sensitivity may be the current economic climate when the library service has to fight even more energetically for its funds. Librarians branded with a negative image may feel it a particular drawback in the struggle for credibility in today's world. This may also have its effect on the personal level as the librarian, regarded as well-educated but unambitious and essentially a clerical worker, is overtaken in salary terms by other professions.

However, whether librarians feel unhappy about their image or not, they are not helping themselves by reiterating the characteristics of the stereotype or reinforcing it in other ways in their own literature. Wilson, indicates that librarians cannot complain about others using the stereotype when they are themselves using it all the time. The illustration(5) used by Wilson to underline this point is that of an outsider reading the library press in order to write a conference paper, and being confronted with librarians criticising each other, their training and their administration. In the paper which he produced he therefore reinforced the stereotype of the librarian for all of those at the conference, librarians and non-librarians alike.

This example is taken from the United States but many such articles can be found in the British library press, detailing complaints about the standards at library schools, as well as suggesting what should be done, usually by others, to improve the image. Wilson suggests, and it seems reasonable, that nothing should be published regarding the image, unless it has something new and constructive to add to the debate,(6) and librarians should try to refrain from criticism unless they can provide a workable solution.

Murison remarks that librarians did not get their image by chance(7) and, as Hewmyer points out, the idea of the librarian as a "kindly maiden lady in Red Cross shoes" and of librarianship as a female occupation is not mere folklore but is thought to be based on scientific proof.(3) In his historical study of the image he states that before the 1870's there was nothing 'feminine' about the librarian who was "grim, grumpy, eccentric"
and pale" and he puts forward examples of such librarians, such as, Dinkley Randine, librarian of the Bodleian from 1813 to 1950, and even Melvil Dewey. It was not until the period between 1876 and 1905 that the lady librarian made an entrance. It was at this time, when women were flooding into the profession as it was deemed 'suitable' for ladies, that librarianship gained its predominantly feminine image. For example, by 1910 73.5% of library workers in the United States were women.\(^{9}\)

Melvil Dewey has often been blamed for this 'feminine image' not just because he opened the profession to many women, but because the persistence of the image is a result of his obsession with efficiency. He introduced the 'personality inventory' and 'scientific management' to libraries and thus took a transitory situation in the staffing of the libraries and, by various 'efficient' tests, made it into a 'scientific' truth. The image of the 'old-maid' librarian has proved durable because, in the public mind, it is a proven fact thanks to these tests carried out in the 1910's and 1920's\(^{10}\)

Newson points out that these tests, which are thought to be so scientific have little merit,\(^{11}\) especially in modern times when values are constantly changing. Many of the tests used today are based on the question and answer format, and still rely on questions similar to those used in the 1930's and 1940's. He cites, as an example, the questions used to determine the respondents personality type on the masculine/feminine scale in the California Personality Inventory (C.P.I.). It is clear that changes in education and the gradual breakdown of social classes have made many of these questions, which may have had clear cut answers for the sexes in the 1940's, ambiguous in today's world.

An example of a question used in the masculine/feminine scale was: "I think I would like the work of a librarian." The 'feminine' answer to this would be 'true', therefore male librarians would score high in femininity. Several of the other questions would have similar results if applied to any group of educated people today and therefore it is to be expected that men will score higher in femininity and women higher in masculinity as the sexes are defined less and less by role.

However although male librarians score high in femininity, as expected, thus reinforcing the stereotype inherent in the question, female
librarians score high too. Newmyer suggests that, as the 'feminine' answer is so obvious, they may fake their responses in order to appear more feminine.

These tests are by no means objective, being steeped in the male/female stereotype, as well as others. The adjectives used to denote the results of this test clearly illustrate this point. Men who score high in femininity are weak, nervous and complaining, and yet women who score high are generous, gentle and warm, as they conform to the female stereotype. Newmyer concludes that until the personality inventory is seen as scientifically unsound and the general status of women improves, the image will not change.

Wilson also examines the C.P.I. along with other personality tests and the results obtained from their use with librarians. He states that a person's concept of his personality is important when he is choosing a career as he will choose a work environment consistent with his personality traits. For this reason vocational psychologists have developed a number of methods to help them judge a person's personality type in order to place them in occupational terms.

One of the first of these systems was Holland's Typology, a method designed to be used by counsellors when deciding on a subject's possible occupation. This placed librarians with bank-clerks and book-keepers in the 'conventional' category. It was later found to be incorrect.

Many of these tests rely on the use of adjectives, either within the questions or the results, which can have different meanings for different people, for example, 'aggressive' can be either positive or negative, depending on viewpoint. Wilson gives the results of three tests, which have been used on large numbers of librarians and which can therefore be considered fairly reliable. They are the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (S.V.I.B.) test which measures interest, that is, it will tell if the candidate has interests in common with a group of occupations; it does not measure ability. The second is the C.P.I., which is often used with younger people but is difficult to administer as it does not define the average response. Finally the third method is the Adjective Check List (A.C.L.) in which the respondent ticks the adjectives in a list of three hundred which he feels applies to himself.
The S.V.I.D. test shows the cluster of occupations with similar interests to librarians by using a question and answer test. Librarians score highest in this test in art, law, politics, music, public speaking, science and writing and are therefore placed in the Aesthetic-Cultural category. A result which, as Wilson points out, helps to reinforce the stereotype as it shows librarians have literary and cultural interests and are therefore 'bookish'. Wilson dismisses any idea that the profession may have changed significantly since the 1960's (16) when the S.V.I.D. was revised, as the interests of occupational groups change slowly and are therefore generally stable.

Wilson next examines the findings of a study using the C.P.I. in great detail and explains that the major drawback of such tests is that they give no clear cut conclusions. (17) The results must be combined and used by a counsellor. For this reason the results of such tests in the analysis of an occupation are often misinterpreted or misunderstood. The reader supplies his own answers by using the stereotype to interpret the findings as he wishes. As Wilson explains the typical manoeuvre of comparing the results of an occupation with those of another proves nothing, as different occupations have different tasks requiring different abilities and interests. It is also the stereotype at work when average scores, that is, those around 500, are seen as either high or low when they are neither.

The C.P.I. results are combined to form factors for ease of interpretation. (18) Factor 1 covers the use of reason over emotion. Here a good score means the person is calm, dependable and mature and a low score, the person is impulsive and volatile. Librarians score 50 - exactly the norm. Factor 2 covers social poise where a high score indicates a well-adjusted, outgoing person and a low one indicates passivity. Librarians score 53 and are therefore neither passive nor extroverted. It also shows that librarians place a higher value on intrinsic rewards, such as a sense of achievement, than on gaining power or money. In factor 3 the results indicate intellectual freedom and independence of thought against rigid conformity. Librarians scored 56.2 their highest score, and are therefore independent and logical thinkers. Factor 4 indicates that librarians, who scored just below average, are not conventional but are not eccentric either.

From this interpretation of the results of the C.P.I. the librarian emerges as someone quite different to that of the stereotype. A result
confirmed by the third and final test cited by Wilson when all of the
results were collected. (19) This final test did have a literary element,
however, which concluded that the image of the librarian in literature
was more negative than positive (20) and that he was "depicted as being
intellectual, introverted, conservative, deferential, orderly, rigid,
conscientious, and low in occupational status." A view not supported
by the results of these three tests, from which Wilson details the self-
concept of the librarian (21) as an intelligent artistic person with a
great respect of freedom and inner harmony, not motivated by money and
with a positive attitude towards life. Neither introvert, nor extrovert,
he is understanding, conscientious, self-controlled and reliable. The
librarian is tolerant and non-authoritarian, and although this description
does contain some elements of the stereotype, these need not be seen as
negative.
Chapter 7 - notes


2. Wilson, pp.10 - 11
3. Wilson, pp. 13 - 30
4. Wilson, pp. 14 - 16
5. Wilson, pp. 42 - 43
6. Wilson, p.130
9. Newmyer, p.45
10. Newmyer, pp.47 - 48
11. Newmyer, p.60
12. Newmyer, p.57
13. Newmyer, p.62
14. Wilson, Chapter 4.
15. Wilson, p.77.
16. Wilson, p.96
17. Wilson, p.101
18. Wilson, pp.103 - 105
19. Wilson, pp.123 - 124
20. Wilson, p.106
21. Wilson, p.124
Chapter 3

The Psychology of Stereotyping

The stereotype is often used as a shorthand method of portraying assumed qualities of personality. The stereotype librarian appears frequently as a minor character in novels, in cartoons and is also often alluded to, perhaps using just one line, in many different types of programs on television. Thus the stereotyped image of the librarian is being continuously reinforced until even members of the profession itself believe that it is an inevitable fact of life.

Librarians wishing to improve the image of the profession by destroying the stereotype, by any means, would be wise to acquaint themselves with the psychological processes involved in both attributing and maintaining a stereotype.

Tedeschi and Lindskold (1) state that "a stereotype is a cluster of traits that is attributed indiscriminately to all members of a group." This group can be identified by several factors including race, religion or occupation. They also point out that "although an individual may have a personal set of stereotypes, a social stereotype represents the consensus of the majority of a given group of judges."(2) Thus the efforts of an individual to alter another individual's view of the profession will have no effect on the social stereotype.

Several studies have been carried out among students in the United States in order to identify the stereotypes of different national, ethnic and racial groups. For example studies by Katz and Braly in 1933, Gilbert in 1951 and Karlins, Coffman and Walters in 1969. By means of these studies changes in the stereotypes have been observed over a period of approximately thirty-five years. It has been observed that although some of the more negative traits have softened over the years, many of the characteristics have remained remarkably stable. In the cases where the traits have changed it is difficult to ascertain whether the respondents really feel differently about that group, or whether it has become unacceptable to admit to such beliefs in public.(3)

Stereotypes are one of the basic tools used by people, usually
subconsciously, when they are interacting with each other. They are a means of assigning people, about whom little is known, to categories so that their responses can be gauged. (4) This can be readily observed in two of the most basic stereotypes which are those of male and female. Most people find it easier to talk to someone, for example, over the telephone, when they know their sex, as they can then modify their behaviour according to the responses which they expect that person to make. Stereotypes are neither good nor bad in themselves, being merely an inescapable part of human activity, helping to simplify the world and divide it into easily identifiable categories. (5)

It is not in the common interest, therefore, to modify a stereotype if it works well for those people using it. People in general are highly motivated to perceive their social environment as predictable, and therefore controllable, and view any change with alarm. As Tajfel and Fraser (6) point out these stereotypes are learnt early in life and are used by children before they develop any clear ideas defining the groups to which they apply. This is another reason why they are remarkably stable, only changing very slowly as a result of intense social, political or economic pressure. Also, any degree of hostility between the stereotyped group and the public in general will only serve to make the stereotype more pronounced and to intensify its negative qualities therefore rendering the achievement of any modification more difficult. (7)

Stereotypes are stable because they are continuously being reinforced in many different ways. (8) When outsiders come into contact with a member of a stereotyped group they will automatically minimise any differences displayed by the individual from their conception of the group and exaggerate any similarities to it. Thus enabling them to fit him into an already prepared category. Another way in which the stereotype is reinforced is by selectivity when the individual is remembered. Only those aspects of his personality which can easily be categorised in terms of the stereotype will be remembered by the outsider.

Added to the effects of these processes is the fact that most stereotypes are based on a kernel of truth, as pointed out by Teleschi and Lindskold. (9) Wilson (10) also states that "activities required of a librarian put a premium on order discipline, punctuality, neatness, precision, and control over the expression of affect. The librarian not in an administrative position is expected to be subdued, quiet, polite, respectful, helpful, sensitive,
etc." This is the kernel of truth of the stereotype which is often expressed in less positive terms but which remains true today.

The stereotype is essentially a group phenomenon, therefore any attempt to recast the image by demonstrating that members of the group do not conform to all of its assumptions will fail. A group does not need to consist of identical members for those members to be identified as belonging to the group. Wilson (11) illustrates this point by using the family, perhaps the strongest of all primary groups, as an example of a group whose members are all quite dissimilar. Each member of the group has more in common with other similar types, the baby with other babies, the wife with other women, than the other members of the group and yet they form a recognisable whole. Wilson suggests that it is "not similarity or dissimilarity that counts but rather social interaction, shared interdependence that best defines a group." (11)

This concept is vital if the stereotype is to be dealt with effectively. Although the library profession consists of different segments - public librarians, special librarians and so on - they all constitute a group, interdependent and therefore sharing a common image. For this reason, pointing out individuals who are not typical of the stereotype or removing librarians who others feel reinforce the image, will not result in any improvement. In the same way a member of a group cannot escape the group's stereotype by individual merit. Wilson (12) cites, as an example of this, the black American, who although he is relatively fair skinned, will still suffer from the black stereotype. All such attempts at solving the problem are doomed as this is a group problem and not one of individuals.

Harmful effects (13) may even result from such attempts to improve the stereotype, as the members of the group begin to feel insecure about their worth and standing due to the effects of the stereotype. They then become hyper-alert, waiting for the inevitable slights or insults, either from within or outside the group. Such a reaction is clearly visible in cases where people are unwilling to state their profession, afraid of the slight which they feel is inevitable. They are automatically on the defensive and this may lead to conflict within the group as members accuse each other of reinforcing the stereotype and those accused feel unable to correct it.
Not all members of a group will react in the same way to the stereotype. This depends on their involvement in other groups. No one is a member of just one social group and an individual's self-concept can be made strong enough to accept the stereotype of one group through his membership of others.

There are many ways in which people try to deal with an unfavourable stereotype in order to gain status. One method used is to go to the other extreme, making exaggerated claims for members of the group. Claims to beauty, intelligence, grace, etc., whereas no group has a monopoly of these attributes. Another is dissociation from the group, a play often used by male librarians who dissociate themselves from the predominately female stereotype by growing beards and smoking pipes and thus accentuating their masculinity. A further mechanism for coping with the stereotype is that of blaming other members of the profession either individually or as a group.

A librarian who practises any (or all) of these is clearly affected by the stereotype and is suffering from self-contempt and self-doubt brought about by seeing himself as others, using the stereotype, see him. This acceptance of the stereotype, even though it may not all be true, may then lead him to criticise the group, its standards, its education and from there to resent the group for holding the individual back and keeping his status low. He may then dissociate himself from the group and even attack it as a result of resentment and frustration at the feeling of helplessness and restriction. The individual feels unable to leave the group as he has invested too much time and effort in his profession. A person is tied to his occupational group and its stereotype just as securely as a black man is tied to his racial one.

Many stereotype groups operate 'caste' systems within them which assigns a greater status to one element of the group than to another. Just as blacks with a lighter skin are higher in status amongst the other blacks in the United States, certain sections of the library profession, such as academic librarians, are seen as having a higher status within the profession. These systems have no merit outside the group, all the members are seen as equal by outsiders.

So it would seem that the stereotype is a stable and essential element of human thought, difficult and slow to change and commonly used by everyone, both subconsciously and consciously in order to categorise and judge the
environment. A standard and constant set of stereotypes is essential to the individual in order to maintain his sanity. No one treats every situation as new, but searches his memory for a suitable pattern which can be applied. A good example of this is an individual attempting to cross a road. If that individual had no patterns with which to gauge his actions and their effects he would never reach the other side. A human being would be unable to cope with the complexity of modern life without stereotypes and patterns to aid him in his decision-making processes and to allow him to justify his conduct in relation to others.
Chapter 8 - notes


2. Tedeschi and Lindskold, p.164

3. Tedeschi and Lindskold, p.164

4. Tedeschi and Lindskold, p.166


7. Allport, p.204

8. Allport, pp.23 - 24

9. Tedeschi and Lindskold, p.166


11. Wilson, p.32

12. Wilson, p.32

13. Wilson, p.33

14. Wilson, pp.34 - 36

15. Wilson, pp.36 - 37

16. Wilson, p.37
Chapter 9

Conclusion and recommendations

Returning to the initial question of the stereotype qualities of the librarian in literature and whether the profession is treated fairly, it is evident that there is no straightforward answer. The uses of and approaches to the stereotype are many and varied. They range from the flib acceptability of an easily recognisable figure by cartoonists and authors of minor characters to ex-librarian writers and their friends seeking to undermine the stereotype by the portrayal of beautiful and intelligent librarians.

Generally the librarians examined here are treated neither badly nor well. Male librarians in literature do seem to fare slightly worse than their female colleagues, perhaps reflecting an acceptance by the author of librarianship as a female occupation so that the male librarian assumes some feminine characteristics. This is especially true in the case of the minor character where authors rely heavily on the stereotype. Yet the major characters are often good advertisements for the profession, sometimes being almost too good to be true. One remembers Helen Marsh, the attractive and intelligent sleuth in F Scotland's best you marry.

Unfortunately the largest number of the negative images seem to come from cartoons and advertisements which will, theoretically, reach a wider audience than any novel. Any result of a predominantly positive personality given to a librarian in a novel is certain, therefore, to have a smaller impact than the negative one used in a cartoon or an advertisement. The very nature of stereotypes also adds to the unlikelihood of any positive image of the librarian being successful in improving the image. Stereotypes can withstand and remain unaffected by any number of examples which do not conform to accepted characteristics. The previous chapter illustrated the point that stereotypes are a group phenomenon and that individual merit has no effect on them. These positive personalities, attempting to undermine the stereotype, are fighting a powerful adversary and any effect is certain to be minimal.

Given that the overall impression of a reader may be negative and that any positive aspects of a librarian's character in fiction will be forgotten or dismissed as the 'exception proving the rule', it must be considered if this...
is important. The consensus of opinion amongst librarians seems to be that it is important, especially in two areas. The first is in recruitment. A stereotype often self-fulfilling. That is, a quiet, bookish person, thinking that librarians are like this and that a library is a place of retreat from the "terrors" of the outside world, may be inclined to choose librarianship as a career. This is undesirable. A service profession in contact with the public needs progressive and outgoing people if it is to make its mark on modern society. If a person enters librarianship for 'bookish' reasons, his training will be gross waste of effort. Libraries should not be places of retreat but lively, bustling centres of activity from which the librarian is expected to go out into the community. The image may even deter the very people which librarianship needs. They may not even consider the profession as a possible career.

Another major reason for great concern about the image is that in a climate of economic recession, when funding is constantly under threat, librarians must continue to offer a useful and essential service to their communities and be recognised as doing so. Any funding body, be it public or private, which considers the stereotype of the librarian as true, will find it difficult to believe that such a person could offer an appropriate service, even though there are other parameters which could prove a more scientific valuation of the service.

On a personal level librarians find the stereotype uncomfortable as the literature examined in chapters six and seven illustrates. Undoubtedly the stereotype is not flattering but Wilson (1) indicates that most professional stereotypes, including those in very prestigious occupations, contain elements which members of those professions find unattractive. Wilson cites the accountant, "the antihero of the occupational world", but there is no profession whose stereotype is totally negative, and it is in the very nature of stereotypes to view attributes in a negative light. Many librarians feel that the stereotype demeaned their occupation, relegating them to the more 'staplers' of books and making them unwilling to admit their profession to strangers, (2) an idea used by Vincent (3) for his character, Timothy Lindsen, in the comedy Sorry.

The stereotype librarian is someone low in status, a fact which irritates librarians who consider themselves to be members of one of the professions. However, as North (4) points out, the scale of social class first used for the 1911 census places librarians with the managerial and technical occupations and not with the professions at all.
CLASS I Professional: Doctor; dentist; engineer; scientist; university lecturer; etc.

CLASS II Managerial and Technical: Manager; librarian; teacher; nurse; etc.

This scale has often been criticised for being too vague and too concerned with occupation to be a true guide to social status, yet it is still in use and its origins clearly lie in the general standing of the professions with regard to education, income and style of life.

Dunkerley (5) points out that there could even be a debate as to whether librarianship is a 'profession' at all. He sets down five requirements which an occupation must fulfil to qualify as a profession:

1. That the activity must be socially required and carried out by a group of people.

2. That they be members of an association with strict criteria for admittance.

3. That they need to pass an examination for entrance to the association and to start the activity, requiring a high level of intelligence - often degree level.

4. That they have a code of ethics to
   (a) guide the conduct of members and
   (b) to provide a mandate to pursue the activity, and that the public be aware of this.

5. That there be a licensing process.

The fourth requirement seems to be the one where librarianship falters. A code of ethics was introduced in 1984 but the public is unlikely to be aware of its existence. In most people's eyes librarianship is not a profession. Perhaps it is in public relations that the most good could be done quickly by making the public aware of the level of education and dedication expected of librarians.
Professionalism itself can have an effect on the stereotype. Stereotypes are reinforced by a lack of real information about a person, the more information known about someone the less possibility there is of assigning characteristics to him which are typical of his group. Professional people have often guarded their professional secrets from outsiders, a tendency observed by Larkin (6) in *A girl in winter*, in order to keep themselves aloof and to safeguard their interests and status. They have felt that this private knowledge is what sets them apart and makes them necessary to their clients but this secrecy has also helped to define and perpetuate the stereotype by making them seem mysterious.

The nature of occupational stereotypes also depends on the age of the profession. Compare the old-fashioned and negative stereotype of the librarian to that of a computer programmer, where the newer occupation has a neutral and more progressive image as well as a higher status and salary.

The librarian finds himself in a vicious circle where status and salary are concerned. He cannot improve his status without a rise in income, or recognition of his educational level, and he is unlikely to obtain a rise in income without an improvement of status. Any rise in salary in a time of economic recession is especially improbable. The majority of librarians work in the public sector and are paid by local authorities whose budgets are under severe strain and who may see libraries as expendable services. Other public services, such as housing and education are more obviously necessary. Many library authorities being faced with a reduction in financial resources are forced to reduce spending either on materials or on staffing. Libraries may close or staffing levels may be reduced in an effort to meet lower financial targets, thus placing more stress on the service and the staff remaining. Librarians who struggle to maintain a high standard of service in such conditions are perhaps depriving themselves of their primary ally, the client. Clients who are unaware of the damage being done are unlikely to rally to support a valued and necessary service. The librarian's duty may lie in protecting the fine network of libraries by being more vociferous and outspoken in their support.

Many suggestions have been made as to how librarians could begin to alter their image. A few of these have been examined earlier, including
the idea of borrowing the image of the computer expert to enhance that of the librarian put forward by Priestley (7). There are many such ideas, some maintaining that librarians should be more user-orientated, more charming and helpful in order to erode the stereotype. Others suggest a simple avoidance of the problem by using a different title, such as 'information specialist' in place of 'librarian'.

Given the nature of the stereotype it is unlikely that any of these will succeed. Many libraries already rely heavily on computers but as with other occupations using computers in their everyday work, this has had no effect on the stereotype. The second suggestion will also have a minimal effect as the nature of a stereotype prevents a pleasant and helpful librarian undermining the universal stereotype. The third solution will perhaps work for a time until the stereotype is transferred to the new title. Thisploy was tried by reporters when they began to employ the term 'journalist' instead. Now the two terms are virtually synonymous and equally pejorative. In fact many occupations have altered their official title only to continue to be known by the original one by the public. Refuse collectors are still 'bin men' to the man in the street.

Add to the selectivity of the stereotype its basic truth and the fact that many librarians have come to accept and even to identify with it, and it becomes very difficult to change. It is not enough to point out that certain personalities, such as Casanova or a Miss World (3) were librarians. This does not dispel the negative aspects of the stereotype, as outsiders will merely minimize their differences to the stereotype and then forget them. The only way to alter the stereotype by any meaningful degree is to make the change worthwhile for the outsider. In order to do this, librarians must follow the advertiser's example and try to make the public want what they want them to want. This is especially difficult in the case of library services as anything which is given 'free' will always appear to have little value to certain members of society.

A campaign such as this must be carried out on a large scale if it is to have any impact. It must identify those aspects of the stereotype which are widespread and most damaging and seek to modify them. An exercise of this kind will, of course, be expensive and time-consuming as such campaigns need careful planning and vast sums of money. This can be seen from the average budget of an advertising campaign for any product. The profession
must decide whether such outlay would be worthwhile given that the success of such an operation might be limited. The majority of people are happy with the stereotype. It serves its purpose very well. It is only librarians who have any motivation to change it, feeling themselves to be members of an undervalued group.

Librarians themselves do as much as anyone to reinforce the image by continuously writing about it. One local authority has even considered using a drawing of the stereotyped 'dragon' librarian on their publicity materials with the caption "Are librarians dragons? ... No! it's a myth". Wilson (9) suggests that such behaviour can only lead to the eventual acceptance of the stereotype and that librarians, as a group, should ensure that the stereotype is not reinforced in the professional press and also cease all pointless discussion of it.

There appears to be little doubt that librarians as individuals can have only a minor effect on the stereotype and that any changes in it will be gradual and probably slight. It appears that this is a problem with which the representative bodies for librarians, the Library Association, and others, could give a practical lead, either by co-ordinating nationwide efforts or by running a campaign, similar to a commercial advertising campaign, to remove or at least to improve an especially destructive or unpleasant element of the stereotype.

Every effort should also be made to publicise the achievements of the profession, such as library initiatives and co-operation, computerization and increased efficiency. Librarians should avoid inviting criticism from colleagues and outsiders. Finally the profession must be sure to make its opinions and beliefs heard, both to the press and to political leaders, especially those concerned with areas within the librarian's domain. Librarians are renowned as neutrals, favouring neither one side nor the other, and such as many believe that this should be the case, circumstances may sometimes demand a more positive stand to ensure that the resources required remain available for all to be treated equally. Fictional librarians have been shown to have high principles, for which they were willing to fight, to risk their livelihoods if necessary. Their living models may be asked to decide whether they too are willing to fight to preserve those services in which they believe and which have been taken for granted for many years but which may be threatened. These are the services which the people associate with the library.
and the librarian.

The profession must not be slow to defend them and to be seen to be doing so. Action may be necessary if librarians are to find a place in the information conscious world of the future, or they may indeed become the sanicane 'book-stampers' of the stereotype.

It is unimportant whether individuals, real or fictional, perpetuate or undermine the stereotype in their actions or personality, as only constructive group action is capable of changing the stereotype. The first step in the prolonged and possibly expensive exercise to mould a new stereotype for the future must surely be for librarians to learn to live with their image. They must realise that although as individuals they are powerless against the stereotype, their worth as librarians cannot be completely eclipsed by an image.
Chapter 9 - notes


2. Wilson, p. 10


8. "The mump is off." *Library Journal* 97 (September 1972), 2810

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