Librarian characters in popular culture media are often viewed as stereotypes. However, these characters actually make up a new set of archetypes of the Librarian. First, literature reveals three common trends in professional and academic articles regarding librarian stereotyping in popular media: identification and discussion of 2 main stereotypes; librarian characters in popular culture; and male librarians in popular culture. Next, 5 new archetypes and several sub-archetypes are proposed, followed by examples and explanations of shared traits to prove their validity as everyday archetypes. These examples are studied using close readings of characters from popular media, and a combined lens of Interpretational Phenomenological Analysis, Reader-Response Theory, and Archetypal Criticism. Finally, this paper suggests that it is more constructive to view past and future librarian characters through the lens of these archetypes, rather than assuming they are negative stereotypes.

Headings:

Librarians -- Attitudes
Librarians -- Popular Culture
Librarians -- Stereotypes
Librarians in literature
Librarians in motion picture
Librarians on television
STEREOTYPE, OR ARCHETYPE?
THE LIBRARIAN IN POPULAR CULTURE

by
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Introduction

Librarians are sensitive to their image. Many have experienced the pain of seeing the old librarian on the silver screen, shushing patrons and giving them sour looks. Even more have complained that these types of characters are negative stereotypes, harmful to their profession by filling patrons’ heads with falsities about librarians’ personalities. However, what if these characters were not seen as stereotypes, as negative and outdated images, but as archetypes, strong and enduring characters that show some positive aspects of the profession?

Stereotype and Archetype

To define the two terms broadly, an archetype is a recurring character, symbol or theme found in literature (usually in mythology), painting, etc. A stereotype is “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.”¹ At first, these two concepts appear to be irreconcilably different – where one is a standard representation of some aspect of humanity, the other is a negative and more recently developed image of a certain type of person. They both, however, define the portrayal of a character in a story. Working from that shared aspect, a stereotype and archetype, as far as this paper is concerned, are not wholly different.

When a character is modeled after a stereotype or an archetype, it means that there is a set of traits that the character possesses that makes him or her easily identifiable
to the audience as ‘that’ character. Consider Freddy from *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* As a stereotype he is a jock: he is strong, attractive, and always hangs out with the beautiful girl, Daphne. As an archetype, he is a hero: he is strong, resourceful, and leads the group on their mystery-solving adventures. As a character, he possesses traits of both a stereotype and an archetype, and these traits allow the audience to identify him quickly as the jock or the hero. Both archetypes and stereotypes allow the audience to quickly identify the ‘type’ of character in a story. Even so, there are differences between the two terms.

Stereotypes, for example, do not necessarily have to have a negative impact, but can serve to create a group identity (Attebury). Stereotypes can also be used to insert ‘ready-made’ characters into a story, giving the author/creator less work to do with character development. Characters who fit popular stereotypes are easy for audiences to recognize and give them an immediate sense of what these characters are going to be like: their habits, their pet peeves, etc. While this seems lazy, it’s very similar to the way archetypes are used in folk tales and mythology. However, stereotypes tend to be simple, whereas archetypes are usually more complex and have a longer history.

According to the “Archetype” entry in *Folklore: an encyclopedia of beliefs, customs, takes, music, and art*, archetypes are seen as both a literary device and a psychological concept of separate personality systems. Characters, situations, or repetitive imagery can all be defined as archetypes. Carl Jung interpreted archetypes as externalized versions of “intuitive notions, bits of common knowledge, or apprehensions
recurrent to mankind” (McCorkick, 131). In the Finnish School theoretical approach, archetypes are assumed to be the original form of tropes that have endured throughout history. The most important aspect of archetypes is that they are “experienced as emotions and mental images associated with such significant events in the life of a human” (132). In that sense, archetypes are not so different from stereotypes.

Most of the literature about librarian characters focuses on the stereotypes these characters take after. While this is explored more deeply with the Literature Review section, the stereotyped characters are usually regarded as negative and unrealistic of real librarians. Some have attempted to view librarian characters through a new set of archetypes. Paul Mosher suggests four Librarian archetypes in his article “The Research Library Director: From Keeper to Agent Provocateur”: The Keeper, The Collector/Bookman-Librarian, The Organization Man or Woman/Scientific Librarian, and the Networked Librarian/Change-Agent (Smith, 33). However, I propose a different list of archetypes for these characters.

Combining the literary archetypes described in classical literature with the similarities between library characters in popular culture media, I have come up with five archetypes librarian characters tend to fall into. I believe these archetypes and their sub-archetypes are more relevant to librarian characters than Moshers’ are because they account for the place of an archetype character in a story. The archetypes I propose are also different from typical archetype descriptions in literary canon because they do not represent a personified aspect of humanity. Rather, the archetypes I suggest are defined
from the most common aspects of the characters I will examine. My archetypes represent
the different roles librarian characters occupy within stories. While I’ll go into them in
more detail in the main body of this paper, a brief summary of each archetype will be
useful.

*The Five Archetypes*

The first and most common archetype² is The Librarian as The Woman. The
overall archetype is that of a woman who works in a library as a librarian. However, the
sub-archetypes reveal that there is much more to this archetype than sex and gender. The
first two sub-archetypes, the Frumpy Shusher and the Closet Sexpot, come directly from
Katherine Dodds’ presentation on librarian stereotypes in advertising (1, for more see the
Literature Review section). These are also the two main stereotypes most audiences are
familiar with. The Frumpy Shusher and Closet Sexpot are usually women who occupy
traditional librarian positions. The Frumpy Shusher is typically an older woman, and
usually a curmudgeon with a penchant for enforcing rules. The Closet Sexpot is normally
a younger woman, who is attractive but is seen as repressed until her ‘true’ nature comes
to light, usually in the form of letting her hair out of a tight bun and shaking it free while
simultaneously removing her glasses. Accompanying these two is my contribution of The
Mouse. The Mouse sub-archetype is closely related to Dodds’ Closet Sexpot. Like the
Closet Sexpot, she is usually a younger woman, perhaps attractive but dressing as if she
is not. While a Mouse librarian may be revealed to be a Closet Sexpot, I argue that the
Mouse usually exhibits a meekness that is not normally attributed to the Closet Sexpot.
Then there is the Perfectly Prim and Proper sub-archetype. This character is also a
younger woman, highly organized and a stickler for a schedule and rules. However,
unlike the Frumpy Shusher, she is not uncomfortable with sex. She is simply so prim and proper that she appears to be a prude, much like Queen Victoria.³

Although this research concentrates on librarians, I want to briefly mention a sub-archetype that applies specifically to information professional characters. Most non-librarian information professional characters in popular media belong to the final sub-archetype of The Woman: The Quirky and Attractive Ingénue. Information professional characters usually work for a group with a hierarchy of leadership and are often in charge of researching. As a sub-archetype, the information professional as Quirky and Attractive Ingénue is extremely varied as far as appearance and personality is concerned. In general, a Quirky and Attractive Ingénue usually performs information-seeking miracles when called upon to research, hacking or using other skills to produce information that only she was ever capable of finding. Protagonists heavily rely on her for this research, and sometimes form a strong familiar (and usually innocent) bond with them. While “ingénue” usually implies a naïve young woman, the information professional sub-archetype is certainly not naïve in her personal life but is often portrayed with an innocence of professional duty: she is happy, willing, and excited to perform the information seeking that the protagonist needs. Rather than being naïve in her personal life, she is usually somehow ‘alternative.’ The alternative aspect differs greatly from character to character, but there is always something unusual about her: she’s a Goth, has a plus-sized figure, suffers from a mental illness, works as a subversive, etc. However, due to the length of this paper and concentration on characters that are employed as librarians, I will be unable to go into further detail on this particular sub-archetype.
The second archetype is The Librarian as The Farce. In the literary canon, the archetype usually related to humor is The Joker or The Trickster, who consciously plays tricks and pranks others. However, most librarians portrayed in comedic stories do not actively play pranks or make jokes. Instead, they gain their comedic aspect by being in a farce. A farce is a work that uses improbable, exaggerated, and overly dramatic situations to create a comedy. While farce is not typically an archetype of a character, librarians are often portrayed through farce, which changes the meaning of the character. The portrayals are usually closely related to The Woman sub-archetypes, often employing them in humorous situations. The humor – the farce itself – and its abundance in popular culture are what make this a separate archetype from The Woman. This is also where the male librarian character that has characteristics of The Woman sub-archetypes goes. While male librarians are usually portrayed as a different archetype in most stories, the humorous retention characteristics from The Woman used in these portrayals greatly affects the way audiences might receive these characters. Because the situation is a farce, these characters are also viewed through the same comedic lens. Therefore, a male Frumpy Shusher librarian, placed in a farce, is seen instead as a comical figure first that comments upon whatever stereotypes are associated with Frumpy Sushers, rather than an example of what a real-world Frumpy Shusher is.

The first two archetypes – The Woman and The Farce – almost always appear in stories that are set in the real world. Even if the worlds are somewhat exaggerated, they closely resemble everyday life. The characters, too, are often exaggerated versions of
regular people. The rest of the archetypes may appear in a setting that may appear to be similar to the real-world, but there is either an element of the supernatural or exist in an alternate universe. As such, the librarian characters tend to be more ‘realistic,’ that is, they are primarily rooted in everyday life and are somewhat believable as ‘real’ people, unlike the rest of the archetypes.

The third archetype is The Librarian as The Hero. What specifies a librarian character as the Hero archetype is whether or not he or she leaves the library during the story arch. Hero archetypes often have to take a journey during their story, which means they cannot be bound to a traditional library (see “Library as Place” for more details). These librarians are often the protagonists of their story. The sub-archetype of The Librarian as The Hero is The Warrior. The Warrior leaves the library as well, but usually to fight a particular, recurring enemy. Many Warriors are Heroes, but not all Heroes are necessarily Warriors: they may leave their libraries on a quest and fight against a singular enemy, but that enemy is not a recurring one (in other words, that enemy is not a nemesis).

The fourth archetype is The Librarian as The Guardian. Librarians in the Guardian archetype differ from the Hero archetype in that they are usually bound to their library and their duties as librarian. Guardians also tend to have an obligation to assist protagonists in seeking vital information that will help them continue their story. These librarians are usually side characters instead of protagonists, although they are usually vital to the plot of a given story. While this is similar to the Threshold Guardian literary
archetype, the vital difference between the two is that the librarian as Guardian archetype is not a challenge for the protagonist to overcome. Instead, they actively assist the protagonist in his or her journey. Information professional characters (The Quirky and Attractive Ingénue) are not considered part of The Guardian archetypes because, while they do assist the protagonists by finding information for them, they are not bound to a particular place. The sub-archetype is The Librarian as The Mentor. Mentor librarian sub-archetypes exist between the Hero and Guardian archetype. While not bound to their library, they are also not the main character of their story. They often give advice to the protagonist and are vital in helping the protagonist develop as a character. Mentor characters may be minor side characters, or they may be recurring secondary characters, and their relationship with the protagonist varies in the same way.

The final archetype is The Librarian as The Monster. Similar to the Monster or the Creature of Nightmare literary archetypes, The Librarian as Monster archetypes are usually dark, villainous characters that pose some sort of threat to the main character. Some of The Monster characters are nemeses of protagonists, but they may also be less aggressive obstacles that the protagonist must defeat. The Monster archetypes appear to be human, or may appear directly as non-human creatures. They usually have supernatural abilities, whether they are able to control it or are themselves supernatural in origin.

These five archetypes and their sub-archetypes describe most of the librarian characters I have encountered in popular culture. While there are no doubt numerous
characters that do not perfectly fit in a given archetype, they are broad and inclusive
enough to at least partially fit the majority of librarian characters in existence. As for
those characters, I intend to limit the characters I study by the media I will examine.

**The Media Examined**

The first requirement for the media I examined, with a very few exceptions, was
that they needed to have been published by the year 2000. Given that it’s now 2014, this
is still a very large range to be covered. The cut-off year was decided due to a lack of
contemporary examples in the literature I found regarding librarian stereotypes. Most
eamples were from the 1990s, and despite a few articles mentioning more recent
television shows there is a general lack of discussion about the most recent librarian
archetypes (at least in academic literature). Therefore, deciding to limit the range to just
less than 15 years allows me to discuss well-known and up-and-coming characters alike. I
mainly intend to study the first appearances of these characters from their media. In most
cases, this will mean examining the first book or movie in a series, or the first episode of
a television show or podcast in which the character appears. However, not every
librarian/information professional character appears in the first installment of a story,
which may cause some confusion. I will try my best to give appropriate and brief context
to these situations.

The second requirement was that the media had to be aimed at an audience range
of teens to adults, again with a few exceptions. This decision, in my opinion, limits the
media to an audience that is more directly and immediately affected by the librarian
archetypes presented to them. Some teens-through-adults may even make important life
decisions based on the media presented to them, such as suddenly deciding to pursue a
library science degree after viewing a particularly powerful librarian character. Through
media, they are also more often exposed to the information professional character than
young children are (for instance, in television shows for mature audiences, such as Arrow
and Criminal Minds) and as such there is a higher population of these characters than
those intended for a much younger audience. The exposure and impressions that the
teens-to-adults audiences have with librarian and information professional characters is
therefore more abundant than those had by young children. Focusing on this specific age
group also allows me to concentrate on the immediate stereotype judgments made by this
audience, instead of focusing on the long-term influences these images may have on
younger minds (which I am very unqualified to study).

The final requirement was that the non-print media had to have been broadcasted
at some point in time. This means that a given piece of media has been published at a
given time in such a way that a large audience can access it. In this paper, I have three
general formats of media that I will be covering: books, television shows, and movies.
Because I have limited the non-print media in all three formats to something that has
been broadcasted, I will not be discussing media objects such as dolls or tee shirts.
Rather, I will focus on media that can move freely and be accessed more widely than any
physical object. ‘Broadcastability,’ I decided, was important because it increased the
likelihood that these Archetypes would spread to a large audience, whereas physical
objects tend to have a smaller reach unless they ‘go viral’ and images of them are sent
around the Internet. Librarian and information professional archetypes in broadcasted
media are also more capable of character development and relationship dynamics than objects are, and are therefore more intriguing to study.

In regards to the specific examples I discuss, I have attempted to balance the need to have enough media to do a general survey of even the rarest archetypes, with having a smaller number of examples to stop myself from attempting to make a complete collection of every instance of a librarian in media ever created. As a result, and due to the fact that I am attempting to concentrate on more recent publications, some of the characters may be from more obscure media. Even so, I attempted to choose characters that were well-developed and presented several aspects to examine. The intended result is, hopefully, to have an amalgamation of interesting librarian and information professional characters that may be obscure, but present vital aspects of their particular archetype. Most of the librarian characters are major characters in their stories, although they may not always be recurring characters (for example, they may appear in one story arch in a given series). A number of the characters examined in this paper will be at least somewhat familiar, especially after the Literature Review section, and may even be considered to be ‘famous’ Librarian characters. While it’s tempting to simply bypass these particular characters as footnotes, most are too important to leave untouched. They are also so widely mentioned in the literature that I do not find it necessary to go into overwhelming detail about them either.
Methodology

*Reader-Response Criticism meets Archetypal Criticism*

The methodology for this paper consists of three theoretical frameworks taken primarily from literary criticism. The actual method used to dissect these characters is close reading - each character is examined by appearance (either actual or described), speech, actions, and context in story. The close reading is then interpreted using a mix of several theories. The first theoretical lens is interpretive phenomenological analysis, specifically in relation to literary texts. Interpretive phenomenological analysis, outside of literary criticism, deals with how a subject constructs certain events, or phenomena, in the general context of his or her own mind. Within literary criticism, it is used to understand how a reader might interpret a character based on the factors revealed through the close reading. Next, these interpretations are enriched using reader-response theory. In reader-response theory, particularly the uniformist school of it, researchers seek to understand how a reader makes meaning out of a piece of work. Particularly drawing from Wolfgang Iser, these texts and characters will be approached “not as an object itself but an effect to be explained” (N.N.H., 1015). These effects are usually studied as psychological interpretations.

While both interpretive phenomenological analysis and reader-response theory employ psychology to study readers’ interpretations of texts, I intend to approach these possible interpretations through a ‘mundane’ version of archetypal criticism. First, the stories must be redefined as ‘modern myths.’ While the myths and legends typically studies in archetypal criticism are usually aimed at explaining and reinforcing ideas about
the natural world and social expectations of a given society, this paper considers ‘modern myths’ to be narratives that have certain traits and outcomes in common. Next, I must first clarify what I mean by ‘archetype.’ Archetypal characters, for the context of this paper, are not first forms of character types that have endured for thousands of years in myths and legends. Rather, in this paper, they are a type of character that has established itself in storytelling and shares characteristics and expectations of their roles within a given narrative.

Archetypal criticism combines social anthropology and psychoanalysis to seek out elements in literature that reflect both “natural or cultural phenomena” and “deep-seated psychic meanings” (Gillespie, 116). Northrop Frye, who synthesized the anthropological archetypes of James Frazer with the psychological archetypes of Carl Jung, claimed that all stories, new or old, could be reduced to a few enduring storylines: romance (summer), tragedy (autumn), satire or irony (winter), and comedy (spring) (Gillespie, 118). While the term ‘archetype’ can refer to characters, settings, and thematic elements, I only intend to consider the character archetypes.

Thus, my methodology relies on close reading of characters and interpreting their appearance, speech, actions, and context as ‘everyday’ archetypes portrayed through modern myths. Uncovering these librarian archetypes requires me to consider how a general audience may recognize a particular character as a certain archetype, and what those archetypes signify about the role of the librarian in the audience’s life. These everyday archetypes say much about a librarian’s role in modern myths, and may also say
much about a librarian’s role in the everyday life of the audience. Using an intersection of interpretive phenomenological analysis and reader-response criticism, I can better reveal the librarian archetypes’ place in the modern myth and how these archetypes should not be considered stereotypes.

**Literature Review**

Librarians are very fond of talking about their public image. Stereotypes have been applied to librarians by many people, and in many ways. One of the first stereotypes appeared in Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s painting *The Librarian* in 1566 – a portrait of a pile of books, stacked so that they look like a man with a beard holding a book (Stevens, 62). Melvile Dewey recorded another early mention of stereotyping: “The time was when a library was very like a museum and a librarian was a mouser in dusty books.” This was written in the first issue of *American Library Journal* in 1876 (Stevens, 62). There is a surprising amount of literature dedicated to librarian stereotypes, and most of them share one trait in common: they all despair at the general stereotype of obsolescence. Whether the article is about stereotypes of librarians in popular culture or from patrons, recent stereotypes or historical ones, they all lament the fact that stereotypes of librarians almost always show them as obsolete – a by-product of days when there was no Internet and people relied exclusively on books. From there, most of the recent literature focuses on one of three subjects: the two main stereotypes of librarians, librarians in popular culture, and male librarians.

**Two Main Stereotypes**

While literature on librarians in popular culture claims that more exist, quite a few
articles focused on two main stereotypes of librarians. Katherine Dodds gives the two stereotypes the names of Frumpy Shusher and Closet Sexpot (1). In her presentation “Advertising the Librarian Image: Stereotypical Depictions of Librarians in Advertising,” Dodds describes the two stereotypes in detail: the Frumpy Shusher comes “[c]omplete with eyeglasses, buns, conservative dress and stern facial expressions, this librarian lives for quiet” (1); the Closet Sexpot is “sexy but usually repressed. This understated sexiness often comes as a surprise to not only the audience but the librarian as well” (9). Dodds chooses to concentrate on these stereotypes in advertising because most librarians see them as negative and, when they show up in a magazine or on a commercial, they “cannot help but focus on” them (1).

It’s the Frumpy Shusher stereotype that most librarians focus on in the literature, because it has been around the longest. While one article, called “Move Over, Marian” by Will Manley, states that the initial concern and fight against this stereotype was started by Clara E. Breed in 1949, another article states that both the stereotype and the fight start much earlier than that. Norman D. Stevens’ article “The Last Librarian” is written from the perspective of an information professional in the far future, researching librarians for a speech she is preparing, and provides an interesting historical look at libraries and librarians. Stevens cites both Arcimboldo and Dewey as the first historical stereotypes, and Dewey’s statement can also be read as a challenge to the very stereotype he mentions. Dewey, however, was speaking of the Frumpy Shusher as a man, because “at that time most real librarians were still men and…the stereotype remained attached primarily to the male members of the profession for a number of years” (62). Stevens
states that the Frumpy Shusher was primarily male until the stereotype of the Frumpy Shusher female “found its way from the inner circles of libraries and library users into the wider world of popular culture. Certainly by the 1930s it was well established and regularly appeared in comic strips, movies, and even advertising” (62).

This stereotype persists for both male and female librarians, no matter how many positive aspects it is combined with, in more modern Young Adult literature. The article “Librarian Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature” discusses the similarities and differences between the Frumpy Shusher female and male images. Female Frumpy Shusher “traits include primness, introversion, and sexual anxiety” who is also inept at technological tasks, while the males “are portrayed as fussy and timid, poor, respectable, with ‘feminine’ qualities of mildness, civility, and intelligence” (24, 25). In adult fiction, authors Michelle Peresie and Linda B. Alexander write, librarians who may be endowed with positive characteristics like nurturing and intelligent do so within “the caricature of ‘professional-virgin sharp-tongued desiccated sex-starved shapeless spinster [or terminal bachelor]” (25).

Librarians in Popular Culture

Along with writing on the use of the Frumpy Shusher stereotype, there is much literature devoted to librarian characters in popular culture television shows and movies. Popular culture works often feature in literature because of their ability to perpetuate some stereotypes and debunk others. Some articles, like Leonard Kniffel’s “What We Can Learn from Junk TV – and Vice Versa,” praise newer images that have appeared in recent years. Kniffel mentions in “What We Can Learn from Junk TV - and Vice Versa.”
Speaking of the made-for-TV movie *The Librarian*, Kniffel points out that the main character is “bookish, brilliant, and socially inept” but is not a typical Frumpy Shusher. Instead of a dowdy female librarian, the lead is a “hunky” male actor who is “not gay or even fey; in fact he winds up with two delicious babes.” Other articles focus on inaccurate – or altogether absent – depictions. Julie Teglovic and Chelsea Jordan-Makely exemplify this frustration in their piece “Hey ‘Glee.’ Get Real.” The piece is both a critique of the show’s lack of prominent school-media librarian, despite being set in a high school, and a call for a unique, ‘realistic’ portrayal. They want neither a Frumpy Shusher, nor a Closet Sexpot, on the show.

Popular culture depictions of librarians have their own set of stereotypes that these characters usually follow. For example, Paul Moser’s article “The Research Library Director: From Keeper to Agent Provocateur” lists four specific types: The Keeper; The Collector (or Bookman-Librarian); The Organization Man/Woman (or Scientific Librarian); and The Networked Librarian (or Change-Agent). Gary P. Radford and Marie L. Radford broach the subject of librarian as (gate)Keeper in their article “Libraries, Librarians, and the Discourse of Fear.” Operating, as the Radfords posture, out of a discourse of fear, librarians are seen as stalwart guardians of both information and the sacred repositories where it lies. In fact, they say that libraries are often portrayed in popular culture as holy labyrinths where the patron must tread lightly and respectfully to come out alive (1).

One of the most interesting pieces on librarians in popular culture is Abigail
Luthmann’s “Librarians, Professionalism and Image: Stereotype and Reality.” Luthmann notes that popular culture depictions of librarians “are often distant from both stereotype and reality, and as such provide a useful third perspective for examining the nature of professional image” (776). She goes on to note a distinct shift in the portrayals over time:

The infamous portrayals of librarians are often older, for example, the film *It’s a wonderful life*… As the profession has modernized, characterisations have become somewhat more positive. In the original Batman stories first published by DC Comics in the 1960s, the alter ego of Batgirl was introduced as Dr Barbara Gordon, a PhD in library science who is head of Gotham City Public Library. (776)

Luthmann’s article offers two specific perspectives on the images of librarians in popular culture that differs from any other article in this review. First, she claims that it is the library profession as a whole that prevents the Frumpy Shusher stereotype from retiring, “both through a lack of workforce diversification and a certain sensitivity over self-image” (775). In popular culture, Luthmann found, librarians were praised for innovation and for being “future-focused, dedicated, enthusiastic, knowledgeable and organized,” while the stereotype she was originally searching for existed almost completely in professional literature (775). She does concede, however, that librarian images in popular culture can be unique while still “hobbled by a traditional stereotype,” making the study of these images in popular culture a good point for advocating the profession (777).

Finally, there are quite a few pieces that list many images of librarians in popular
culture. “The Long, Strange Trip of Barbara Gordon” by Doug Highsmith is essentially an annotated bibliography of librarians and libraries in comic books and graphic novels, with notes specifically on whether the portrayal can be considered to be positive or negative. Jon Noble takes a more historical approach in “From Tom Pinch to Highliber Zavora: The Librarian in Fiction,” listing librarian appearances in fiction in chronological order from supposed first to the most recent at the time the article was written (in 2001). Noble also includes a wide range of genre in his list, including romance novels, children’s literature, horror, and fantasy. As a final example, Ruth Kneale’s book *You Don’t Look Like a Librarian: Shattering Stereotypes and Creating Positive New Images in the Internet Age* includes an entire chapter dedicated to librarians in popular culture. She includes books, comics, television, movies, and music, to name a few.

**Male Librarians**

A particularly interesting depiction of a male librarian in popular culture is the character Rupert Giles in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. While the next few articles certainly fall into the “Librarians in Popular Culture” type of literature, they mainly concentrate on Giles as a male librarian. Some view Giles as a positive example of a male librarian in popular culture. GraceAnne A. DeCandido’s article “Bibliographic Good vs. Evil in Buffy the Vampire Slayer” views Giles as a hero, a “SuperLibrarian.” She views his lack of social skills and general, tweed-clad dreariness with affection in light of the heroics he performs in the show. John Cullen, however, concentrates on those same traits as a negative portrayal of yet another Frumpy Shusher. In fact, the title of his article states exactly what he thinks of the portrayal: “Rupert Giles, the Professional-image Slayer.” Cullen rails against Giles’ portrayal, saying that if people “are brought up
on a diet of popular movies and TV shows that never realistically portray the services librarians offer, none of them will value our skills and expertise enough to keep us in business.” Complicating matters even more, the article “Watchers, Punks and Dashing Heroes: Representations of Male Librarians in Generation X Mass Culture” claim that Giles, as well as two other male librarians in popular culture, represent a new type of masculinity found only in Gen X-ers. This masculinity, authors Rafia Mirza and Maura Seale state, take a criticism of masculinity from feminist thought into account while at the same time fighting against being effeminate. Therefore, the three male librarians they examine – including Giles – “retain some traits associated with earlier, female representations of librarians [while their] narratives work to construct them as powerful, authoritative, and masculine gatekeepers” (136).

Even so, the male librarian stereotype still shares many characteristics with the female Frumpy Shusher, as Paul Goodson points out in “Male Librarians: Gender Issues and Stereotypes.” Besides having their sexuality and masculinity called into question constantly, they are also stereotyped as having “social ineptitude, lack of ambition, and [being a] failure at other fields.” For male librarians, gender bias and sex discrimination are a huge concern as librarianship is still considered a female-dominated field. However, men originally dominated the library profession until more modern times, Thad E. Dickinson points out, and therefore the male Librarian stereotype has actually been around the longest. In his article “Looking at the Male Librarian Stereotype,” Dickinson reveals that the original stereotype was “grim, grouchy, eccentric, and male” and that a male librarian was usually seen as a “bibliophile, a pale, undernourished man who lived
Dickinson postulates that the duties of the early librarian during America’s colonial times contributed to the modern stereotypes of being unapproachable. Early academic librarian’s duties mostly included keeping the library clean, preserving books (that only professors could check out), and even some student admissions work. The “effeminate” part of the male stereotype only occurred when the profession was overrun by women, feminizing the profession and then the professionals: “The masculinity of librarians was never an issue when libraries were wholly the realm of men, but by the beginning of the twentieth century the societal concept of masculinity was redefined in such a way that made male librarians suspect” (104-105).

Todd J. Wiebe’s article “Issues Faced by Male Librarians: Stereotypes, Perceptions and Career Ramifications” confirms this, pulling in some of the redefinitions of masculinity mentioned by Mirza and Seale: “In this new generation of librarians that consists primarily of women, the men in the profession are ‘…doubly stigmatized. They are stereotyped because they work in a female-dominated profession and reflect the traditional negative image of librarians.’” (11). Wiebe’s article shows that stereotypes of male librarians include effeminate/gay, unable to succeed in other professions, there to be in charge of technology, or to be a manager. Yet, Wiebe points out, male librarians have other masculine stereotypes to deal with, such as being called on to do physical tasks, and are often fast-tracked to highly influential, upper-management positions (13). Finally, on a more humorous note, Kneale briefly mentions that male librarians also have their own
physical stereotypes as well, stating that the male stereotypical equivalent of the female
Frumpy Shusher bun is a bow tie (60).

A Final Selection

This is not the first literature review to attempt to gather a representation of
articles and books on the librarian stereotype. Several other articles and books are
devoted to doing this. The article, “May the Bun Be With You: An Annotated
Bibliography of Librarians and Their Image” gathers academic literature and opinion
pieces from the twenty years between 1985 and 2005. Grant Burns lists novels, short
stories, and plays as early as 1938 in his Librarians in Fiction: A Critical Bibliography.
In her book practically written for librarians, Kathleen Low’s Casanova was a Librarian:
A Light-Hearted Look at the Profession lists historical librarians, interesting librarian
groups on the web, librarians in politics and porn, and articles about the image of the
librarian. Of particular note is her section on perfect accessories for the librarian (male,
female, child, or dog) in your life. Finally, the newer book This Book is Overdue! How
Librarians and Cybrarians Can Save Us All by Marilyn Johnson is an overview of
modern librarians and their very non-traditional roles in society as a whole, from doing
reference on the streets to literally being a virtual librarian in the online virtual world
Second Life. The final two books listed do offer examples of certain stereotypes, but
concentrate far more on real librarians both in history and in modern times.
The Librarian As…

*The Woman*

As previously mentioned, The Woman archetype has four main librarian sub-archetypes. Rather than going over all four sub-archetypes, though, I will only be investigating the sub-archetypes of The Mouse and Perfectly Prim and Proper. I believe that there are enough examples of both the Frumpy Shusher and Closet Sexpot sub-archetypes in characters that have very small roles in storylines. Because these roles are small, they are numerous. There are simply too many characters that are too small to properly dissect the Frumpy Shusher and the Closet Sexpot. I also believe that general audiences know them well, and it would serve this paper better to spend time on the sub-archetypes that are not as well known.

**The Mouse: Rachel Robinson from *What the Librarian Did***

The protagonist from Karina Bliss’ romance novel, *What the Librarian Did*, is a perfect example of The Mouse sub-archetype. Rachel Robinson is a 34-year-old business and finance librarian at Auckland University in New Zealand. She is a librarian with a past: as a senior in high school, she gave up a child born out of wedlock for adoption, so that her son could escape being raised in the same house as her verbally abusive father and passive mother. The fact that she, as The Mouse, has had previous sexual encounters does not mean she is actually a Closet Sexpot. The encounter, and giving her infant son up for adoption, has left her wracked with regret and guilt, contributing to her social helplessness. She wears vintage clothing and buys vintage furniture, which serves a dual purpose: as a style that she enjoys, but also as a means to afford clothing and furniture.
Rachel is described by her rock star love interest as having a “quirky nerdiness” (Loc 1039).

As I mentioned before, The Mouse has a meekness that sets her apart from the Closet Sexpot. Rachel, although the protagonist in a romance, resists love and sex in order to assert herself as a person of esteem in her love interest’s eyes: “I wear cardigans because I like vintage. Not sleeping with a guy on the first date doesn’t make me a prude, and if you ever call me a book nerd again I’ll ram my mountain bike down your throat” (Loc 1257). Times when she is not personally displaying this resistance, others notice and comment on her attractive but unsexy style. One encounter between her and her love interest, Devin Freedman, leaves him feeling that he might have felt sexually aroused near her “if she wasn’t wearing a fifties-style calf-length dress…Did this woman own any clothes from this decade?” (Loc 717, emphasis in original). This provides a lot of opportunity for flirtatious banter, for example, on Devin and Rachel’s first date: She retrieves a cardigan, and in response to Devin’s question “Haven’t you got anything sexy?” she curtly replies, “Yes, my mind” (Loc 852).

The Mouse, Rachel proves, is capable of enduring extreme suffering. Despite their flirtations and the fact that her mouth looks so full and lush that it belongs on a stripper (Loc 281), she spends much of the novel resisting her relationship with Devin and despairing over her estranged son, who has come to the university to find his birthmother but does not know it’s Rachel. After enduring giving up her child for adoption, her parents evicted her from their house, causing her to take up residence in a
youth hostel and making her work two dead-end jobs. Still, she strives for betterment, because during that time she also worked on her library science degree (Loc 2989). Rachel maintains a professional and friendly attitude, though: “You’re too nice, Rachel. If you ever want tips on how to behave badly, come to the master [Devin]” (Loc 952). Even at the end of the biological son and is about to marry Devin, yet she still sports vintage styles and has not radically transformed herself over the course of the book (Loc 3503).

**Perfectly Prim and Proper: Miss Zukas and the Library Murders**

The Perfectly Prim and Proper sub-archetype is best exemplified by the title character from Jo Dereske’s mystery series. Wilhelmina “Helma” Zukas is a librarian at the Bellehaven Public Library in Washington state. She is very organized and keeps to a tight set of regulations for herself, noticing when items in her apartment are even slightly out-of-place, leading her to believe that there has been a break-in. She has a tight schedule of when she exercises and bathes, restrictions on what and how much she eats, and a set of rules that govern her own behavior. For example, when her friend Ruth speaks to her from a different room, she doesn’t respond to her because “Helma Zukas was not in the habit of shouting between rooms” (105). Helma also has strict feelings about flirting in the workplace, remarking to a male co-worker that it was “hardly proper for the public to hear its professionals of the opposite sex using a bantering tone with one another” (122). She even regulates her own expletives: her go-to expression is “Oh, Faulkner!”
As a librarian, she has an extremely professional bearing. In regards to her appearance, she prefers “coordinated clothing; the blue of her skirt exactly mirrored the tail feathers of the Brazilian enameled bird pin on her burgundy sweater” (8) and those who ask are no longer surprised that she is a librarian, although she attributes this to a changing stereotypes of the field (55). Even her conduct as a professional librarian is strictly controlled: “Miss Zukas rarely raised her voice beyond a conversational level. Instead, she had perfected a chilling calmness to her speech, like silver dimes dropping into ice water” (5). Her strict professional and personal rules of self-conduct are what place her into the Perfectly Prim and Proper sub-archetype. She places high value on order, control, and propriety, although she is not unaccustomed to dealing with others who do not share her view: her best friend Ruth is a messy artist and is almost a foil to Helma. She values proper procedure and proper recognition, especially when the body of a murder victim is discovered inside her library. She becomes involved with the case, and believes she has a right to be as a city employee (87). Even in extreme danger, while standing face-to-face with the killer as he holds a gun on her, she’s insulted that he impersonated a librarian in order to carry out his crime, asking “Do you even have a professional library degree?” (197). Because her professional and personal codes are extremely strict and often dictate her reactions to everyday events, she is a Perfectly Prim and Proper sub-archetype character.

**The Farce**

For the second archetype, The Librarian as The Farce, it is best to approach such examples using the idea of ‘Carnival in everyday life,’ inspired by Gulnara Kamirova’s article “Interpretive Methodology from Literary Criticism: Carnivalesque Analysis of
Popular Culture: *Jackass, South Park,* and ‘Everyday’ Culture.” She explains that using the lens of Carnival to read texts of everyday life, such as those portrayed in reality television shows, gives audience members “an alternative way of looking at the accepted order of life” (48), applying the Carnival trope of topsy-turvy to everyday life. Turning everything on its head (the topsy-turvy aspect) forces audience members to view everyday situations as humorous, thanks to the characters within the situations that are grotesque versions of real people.

**The Librarians**

Australian TV series *The Librarians* is about the everyday running of the Middleton Interactive Learning Centre library, headed by Frances O’Brien. A mother of two unruly girls with a husband she doesn’t like, she spends all her energy micromanaging staff and events at the library. The entire library staff is filled with diverse characters, all of who fit The Farce archetype: Dawn is a paraplegic who is new to being handicapped and constantly runs into things with her motorized wheelchair; Lachie is an attractive young man with dyslexia, making it difficult for him to issue library cards with the correct names on them; Nada is a Muslim woman who constantly attempts to assist Arabic-speaking patrons without Frances’ prejudices interrupting. As the Head Librarian, Frances exercises a passive-aggressive control over everyone. As one example, when Nada attempts to talk to a patron in Arabic during a staff meeting, Frances asks in a high-pitched voice “Can we do chit-chat after the staff meeting? Please?”
The show and its many librarian characters all belong in The Farce archetype because the aim of the show is to portray the characters and the situations they deal with as humorous. The librarians are made to be grotesque caricatures of everyday librarians, setting the idea of a librarian as an impartial professional upside down and instead portraying them as exaggeratedly prejudiced and controlling, or bumbling and ineffective. This is difficult to convey in an academic paper, especially since the deadpan quality of the show means that lines written out do not carry the humor they have when said within the context of the show. Certain situations that are also made grotesque in the show, such as having to deal with human excrement in the book return shoot. While these situations are funnier when Frances and her staff have to deal with them, if this was the case at a local public library the situation would be an outrage. Still, the diverse and grotesque characters, such as the inappropriately sexy children’s librarian Christine, combined with exaggerated ‘everyday’ circumstances give the audience the rare opportunity to see issues that libraries face every day in a comical light.

*Parks and Recreation*’s Tammy Swanson

*Parks and Recreation*, an American comedy from NBC, briefly features a librarian as The Farce in an episode in its second season. Main character Leslie Knope finds out that the Department of Parks and Recreation for Pawnee, Indiana is not the only department making a planning claim on the unoccupied Lot 48: The Public Library has also submitted a claim. Leslie instantly panics: “Pawnee’s library department is the most diabolical, ruthless bunch of bureaucrats I’ve ever seen. They’re like a biker gang, but instead of shotguns and crystal meth, they use political savvy and shushing” (2:14 - 2:23). This attitude pervades the entire episode, which contrast with the everyday regard of the
library as a well loved public service. By flipping this concept on its head, the
Carnivalesque humor comes to the surface.

In an attempt to fend off the Library’s claim, Leslie goes to see Deputy Director
Tammy Swanson, the ex-wife of the Parks and Recreation Deputy Director, Ron
Swanson. When Ron discovers that Tammy is working for the Library, he exclaims “Of
course, that bitch of an ex-wife is working for the library now, that is perfect. The worst
person in the world working at the worst place in the world” (3:33-3:42). Yet when Leslie
goes to meet Tammy, she appears to be friendly and nice, even going so far as to wish to
reconcile with Ron. Leslie and Tammy become “government gals,” female allies in the
federal workplace, and Ron agrees to go to coffee with Tammy. Yet, once again, the
situation is turned upside down: Ron and Tammy vacillate between screaming at one
another and making out while in the diner. They quickly run to a cheap motel to have sex,
tearing off their clothes as they run the short distance between the car and the room.

Tammy’s un-librarian-like behavior does not stop there. Leslie realizes that
Tammy has offered Ron a trade: Lot 48 for more sex. When Leslie accuses Tammy of
using Ron, she states “Leslie, that’s crazy! And correct ‘ (12:32). When explaining why
she’s been manipulating Ron, she asks Leslie “Haven’t you ever messed with a man’s
head just to find see what you could get him to do for you? I do it all the time in the
Library Department. You should come join us sometime” (13:58-14:14). Tammy also
becomes violent off-camera when Ron finally reclaims Lot 48 from her, emerging from
her office with a pushpin in his forehead and half of his moustache missing. But it’s not
just these personality traits that make Tammy a character of The Farce archetype.

Consider this final monologue between Ron and Leslie:

Ron: “She’s a Grade A bitch. Every time she laughs, an angel dies. Even telemarketers avoid her. Her birth was payback for the sins of Man. But you know the worse thing about her?”
Leslie: “She works for the library.”
Ron: [in agreement] “She works for the library.” (20:32-21:00)

Tammy’s personality, plus the other characters’ perception of the library, makes her The Farce.

**The Hero**

*Lirael: Daughter of the Clayr*

As The Hero, a librarian character can be either male or female. The title character from Garth Nix’s *Lirael: Daughter of the Clayr* is only 14 when she becomes a librarian. Although she is a Clayr, a group of people who can look into the future with an inherited ability called The Sight, she is an outcast. With long dark hair and pale skin, she is desperate to end the pain of her lack of Sight, almost killing herself. When a group of the most powerful Clayr find her about to throw herself off a glacier, they decide to allow her to work in the place of her choosing to keep herself busy until she gets the Sight. Lirael asks to work in the Great Library of the Clayr, because of her hatred of talking to people and her desire to avoid ‘real’ Clayr who have The Sight (73, 75). However, being a librarian in the Great Library is dangerous, and it is the presence of danger that makes Lirael a Hero archetype.
When she is taken on as a third assistant librarian, Lirael receives several items along with her yellow, canvas and silk waistcoat: an alarm whistle; a mechanical mouse that can run from any spot in the cavernous library and sound an alarm; a sword; and a bracelet that acts as a key for opening doors. It is then that she begins to wonder what dangers the Library may have in store for her (83). There are some items in the Library that can only be retrieved by “large parties of armed librarians” (88), and is informed that it’s not unusual “for librarians to lay down their lives for the benefit of the Clayr as a whole, either in dangerous research, simple overwork, or action against previously unknown dangers discovered in the Library’s collection” (101).

Lirael discovers this danger for herself when she accidentally releases a Free Magic creature called a Stilken in an Old Level of the Great Library where Third Assistant Librarians are most certainly not allowed to go. Using her research skills and consulting with her mysteriously magical companion, the Disreputable Dog, she manages to capture and seal the Stilken away on her own. As the protagonist and The Hero, she does this on her own to fix her own mistake - releasing the Stilken in the first place - which allows her to remain in the Library. At 19, five years after she first started in the Library, she becomes a Second Assistant Library (with a red waistcoat) and discovers that she has a birthright: she is a Remembrancer.

Instead of having The Sight and being able to look into the future, she can Remember and look into the past. She discovers three magical objects in a room that is thousands of years old, yet mysteriously has her name carved on the door: a set of silver
panpipes, a mirror called the Dark Mirror, and *The Book of Remembrance and Forgetting*. Although still unable to speak to her fellow librarians (280), she is charged to leave home by the same group of Clayr she met when she was 14. They have finally been able to See her in the future, a first; more importantly, they Saw her at the Red Lake, the location of a great, powerful evil that is threatening the land. While preparing to leave, she decides to keep her red waistcoat: “

Lirael considered changing her clothes completely, to wear something that did not identify her as a Clayr. But when it came time to dress, she once again donned the working clothes of a Second Assistant Librarian. That was what she was, she told herself. She had earned the right to the red waistcoat. No one could take that away, even if she wasn’t a proper Clayr. (450)

The epic saga continues into the next book. Lirael, in her namesake novel, is a timid and unsure young woman who feels forgotten and useless for most of her life, but is then charged with saving the land from a growing force of evil. She is not a Warrior, however, because the enemy she has to help face does not occur over many story arches - instead, there is only one story and one enemy, a self-contained and defined antagonist. She is also not a Warrior because she does not willingly fight against anything - she is forced into her role, and her reluctance keeps her out of that sub-archetype.

*The Librarian, Flynn Carsen*

Actor Noah Wyle describes his character, Flynn Carsen, as “a nerdy bookworm… who holds the fate of the world in his hands.” A professional student with 22 degrees, Flynn is hired by the Metropolitan Public Library as The Librarian. Although he’s buffoonish, wears clothes that are too large, and still lives at home with his mother as a 30-something, he does a Sherlockian reading of a grumpy secretary and secures the
mysterious job. Once he’s hired, he learns that the Metropolitan Public Library is merely a front for The Library, the largest collection of items from around the world and many time periods, all magical and powerful. For example, the Ark of the Covenant, Excalibur, a live unicorn, and a jetpack from the future are all part of The Library’s collection.

Flynn is charged with retrieving all three pieces of The Spear of Destiny, stolen by a former Librarian that everyone believed to be dead. Using the vast amount of knowledge that he collected after 19 years of higher education, and an ancient tome that he translates while avoiding capture by the evil organization called The Serpent Brotherhood, he finds all the pieces of The Spear. Unfortunately, not-so-deceased Librarian Edward Wilde appears and assembles The Spear, intending to use it to destroy The Library. Flynn wins the spear in the final fight and returns it to The Library.

Several aspects of Flynn make him a Hero archetypal character. First, Judson, Flynn’s supervisor, tells him that being the guardian of such artifacts is his destiny. This aspect of ‘destiny’ and its inevitability, plus the apparent unlikelihood of Flynn’s ability to actually be The Librarian, conspire to make him not just a Hero archetype character, but an unlikely Hero. Next, he has to keep his true job a secret, even from his own mother. This secrecy forces him to remain silent about the daring adventures he must go on to be The Librarian. Finally, by the end of the film, he ‘gets the girl’ Nicole Noone, who has been assisting him and traveling with him during the entire adventure.
**The Warrior: The Librarians of the Library Defense Force**

The Warrior, the sub-archetype of The Hero, faces a constant and recurring enemy. The characters of the manga *Library Wars: Love and War* are all examples of The Librarian as The Warrior sub-archetype. An adaptation of a light novel series by the same name, the story is based on the actual Statement on Intellectual Freedom in Libraries proposed by the Japan Library Association in 1979. In this alternative universe, the national government of Japan passed the Media Betterment Act, an act that allowed the censorship of materials that were considered dangerous: “They’re on a mission to deny citizens their right to have access to free media” (15-16). However, because they are controlled by local government instead of national, libraries “can oppose their censorship. Local governments set up armed units to fight the censorship under the Library Freedom Act, and to continue offering library collections to citizens.” (15-16).

The Library Freedom Act mentioned in the manga adopts the first four principles of the Statement on Intellectual Freedom and adds a fifth. The Act guarantees:

1. The freedom of libraries to select their materials.
2. The freedom of libraries to make their materials and facilities available to the people.
3. The right of libraries to protect the privacy of their patrons.
4. The right of libraries to oppose all forms of censorship.
5. When libraries are imperiled, librarians will join together to secure their freedom. (Japan Library Association; Yumi, 1)

While the Media Betterment Act established the Media Betterment Committee to carry out its ordinances, local governments set up a Library Force to defend their collections and the rights of patrons to access free materials without censorship. The Library Force has two main branches: Librarians, who are trained regularly and staff the actual libraries;
and the Defense Force, a militaristic unit who defends the libraries from physical attacks led by the MBC. The manga mostly follows the members of the Library Task Force, an elite group that does the duties of both groups: “Normally, Defense Force Agents don’t have clerical duties. The Task Force is the exception. It’s our duty to be ready for any eventuality. And that means we have to know how to perform all kinds of jobs” (150). So, while the main characters often fight against physical forces, they must also know how to assist patrons and perform everyday library duties. The characters in Library Wars: Love and War must constantly fight against a single, continuous enemy, making each of those characters Warriors in their constant struggle against the censorship of the MBC.

The Guardian

Oracle from Birds of Prey: Endrun

Barbara Gordon first appeared 1967 as a librarian (with a doctorate in Library Science) by day and Batgirl by night. However, in a 1988 graphic novelization of the storyline, Barbara was shot in the spine and paralyzed, forcing her to retire from her Batgirl duties. She was revived as Oracle, and went on to be a part of the Birds of Prey comic series. In the volume Endrun, she is introduced as “Oracle A.K.A. Barbara Gordon. Powers: Formerly Batgirl, now the world’s premier infojock and data specialist supreme” (10). Bound to a power wheelchair, she uses her superior computer and technology skills to assist fellow superheroes Lady Blackhawk, Black Canary, and Huntress, and their allies on dangerous missions. In this volume, an unknown enemy who has compiled information about their personal lives and their loved ones threatens all four
of them. Barbara must explain to the others that the information this enemy gathered is only as dangerous as the fact that he’s made himself untraceable, and if they do not comply with his demands then all that information will be made public, endangering themselves and their loved ones (20).

Barbara can assist the others remotely, staying mostly in the Batcave and using technology and the Internet to provide assistance to them in the field. She can appear to them via television screens, using a simulated face that is female, green, has glowing eyes, black lips, and a black striped pattern on the scalp (127). While the others go out to fight enemies, Barbara realizes that at least one enemy is using ‘the grid’ against her, and that she’s grown slack in the years:

Five years ago, I was so far ahead of the normal tech, no one could touch me. I got complacent. I let the machines do my work. Now, the right guy can do more with his phone than I could with my mainframe when I started this. No more tears. Not ‘til I find whoever did this to us. But whatever their weapons, whatever their tech…they don't understand. I am the grid. …It exists because I allow it. And tonight -- the grid fights back. (47-48)

However, it is not actually Barbara’s tech skills that help her find the enemy and defeat him. Her enemy, a once reformed villain named Savant, kidnaps her not to harm her, but to make her watch as he commits suicide. Barbara, understanding that he has a psychological disorder that prevents him from accurately recalling the passage of time, realizes that he’s been living in a perpetual state of emotional distress, reliving a torture session that she indirectly caused over 2 years ago. Just as he jumps, she pushes herself out of her wheelchair and stops him from falling (88).
It is not Barbara’s lack of mobility that makes her a Guardian archetypal character. Instead, it is the fact that she stays in one place and performs her duties from there. She acts as support for others while maintaining a network of information via the Internet. As a Guardian, she helps other heroes on their missions, but cannot accompany them because she is no longer equipped to. Other Guardian archetypal characters have been mentioned in the literature, including librarian Marian Ashcroft from the *Beautiful Creatures* novel series.

**The Mentor: Rupert Giles**

The best example of The Mentor sub-archetype of The Guardian is Rupert Giles from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. As the literature review shows, much has been written about him as a male librarian in popular culture. Therefore I do not want to hash out too many details about him when others have already written extensively on him. I will, however, point out the characteristics that make him a Mentor character.

While he is in charge of researching the arcane and occult knowledge necessary to fight various monsters, he also teaches Buffy Summers, the Slayer, how to do her job. That is, he trains her in martial arts and weaponry to fight various demons and monsters. He also gives her life advice and becomes close to a father figure to her. This emotional relationship between he and Buffy, as well as his duties not merely to assist her but to train her and guide her, make him a good example of a Mentor sub-archetypal character. Another example would be Mr. Dewey from the 1994 movie, *The Pagemaster*, where he guides a young boy through an adventure and helps him overcome his plethora of fears.
The Monster

The Monster archetype can be a character of either fear or comedy, but is always identified in some part as a monster. Whether the character is an actual monster, such as the librarian from *Monster’s University*, or is a monster in the guise of a human, like Mr. Revise from *Jack of Fables*, they are always seen as inhuman in appearance, action, or both. However, they are not always aggressively against the protagonist. Often, they are merely in a mild conflict and serve as trials for the protagonist to overcome. Still, a few of the Monster characters are the main antagonists in their story.

Human-like Monsters: The Librarian from *Courage the Cowardly Dog*

“Wrath of the Librarian” was the second-half of episode twelve in the second season of the darkly surreal children’s show, *Courage the Cowardly Dog*. When the main character, Courage the dog, discovers an overdue book he takes it to the library to return it. The library is a cross between a traditional library and a bookmobile: while it appears to be a classical stone structure with columns and a pair of lion statues, it is placed on the back of a truck. The librarian is a woman who appears to be middle aged, with red, opaque cat’s eye glasses, a large bouffant bun of white hair, and pale green skin. She has a mole on her cheek and a few long, scraggly chin hairs. Courage shrieks, and she immediately shushes him with a finger and her purple lips.

She refuses to take the book back until Courage pays his overdue fees, well over three thousand dollars. The twin lion statues guarding the library intone that if Courage does not pay his fees, they will continue to rise. When he attempts to run away, a wave of her hand magically sends the book back to Courage’s doorstep. Another wave of her
hand turns Courage’s elderly owners, Muriel and Eustace respectively, into the book’s title characters: *The Pixie and the Prickle Pirate*. Eustace, as the Prickle Pirate, is determined to attack the Pixie, Muriel, and they are both forced to speak in Seuss-like rhymes.

With his owners in danger of harming themselves while acting out the book’s plot, Courage is forced to frantically come up with the ever-increasing overdue fees. He finally comes up with the final total, $10,000.01. With the overdue fee paid, the lions intone, “You have returned, and paid what you owe,” and the Librarian stamps “Returned” on the checkout card. With that, Eustace and Muriel turn back into themselves, with no recollection of what happened to them, or how they ended up in a snake cage at the zoo. While the Librarian is certainly a monster, with her green skin and magical powers, she is not necessarily aggressively against Courage. Instead, she merely performs her duties as a librarian - receiving returned books and overdue fees - albeit with a more supernatural flare.

**Inhuman Monsters: Wan Shi Tong**

Set in a land similar to rural Asia in an alternate universe, the television series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* follows Aang and his friends as he sets out to become a full-fledged Avatar, a master of all four elements. In the tenth episode of the second season, ‘Team Avatar’ (as Aang and his companions are referred to in the fan community) has decided to take mini-vacations before they begin finalizing their plan to defeat their enemy, Fire Lord Ozai, ruler of the Fire Nation. After meeting an anthropologist named Professor Zei who tells them about a Spirit Library in the middle of the desert, Sokka,
believing that the Library may help them find information that will lead to the defeat of the Fire Lord, determines that he wants to spend his mini-vacation “AT THE LIBRARY!” (6:08-6:15). The professor explains that the Library was built by the great knowledge spirit, Wan Shi Tong. Venturing out into the desert, Team Avatar and Professor Zei find the now underground Library and enter it via a tower, the only thing left visible of the huge and ornate building.

Out of the darkness of the stacks, a giant owl approaches them. It is colored like a barn owl with black feathers and a white face, and is about 12 feet tall. He reveals himself as Wan Shi Tong, “he who knows ten thousand things, and you are obviously humans; which, by the way, are no longer permitted in my study” (10:59-11:08). He buried his library after humans used the knowledge they found there to gain an advantage in a battle against other humans. However, since they are each able to contribute a piece of knowledge to the Library, Wan Shi Tong allows them to browse as long as they promise not to use their knowledge for evil. It isn’t long before Sokka and the rest of Team Avatar discover a fact that could help them defeat the Fire Lord, and Wan Shi Tong isn’t surprised: “Mortals are so predictable. And such terrible liars. You betrayed my trust, from the beginning you intended to use this knowledge for evil purposes!” (17:08-17:22).

With this utterance, he begins beating his large wings, forcing the library to sink lower and lower into the ground so that no one can abuse his knowledge ever again. Team Avatar tries to leave, and Wan Shi Tong stretches his neck to an absurd length and
begins to attack them; he cannot let them leave the Library and use ‘his’ knowledge in their war. The once round, smooth barn owl figure stretches out his neck and body and becomes almost snakelike; where there was a fan-shaped tail of smooth feathers is now a length of ragged spikes; feathers begin to ruffle and fall out all along his neck; two edges stick up on his head, almost resembling horns. While he can slip between the shelves with his now streamlined body, his wingspan knocks countless shelves to the ground. He emits shrieks and tries to stab them with his beak. However, Team Avatar is able to escape at the last second, just as the Library sinks below the sand (Professor Zei, enamored with all the knowledge in the Library, stays voluntarily).

Wan Shi Tong’s past experience with humans heavily shaped how he interacted with further humans, and when Team Avatar broke their promise to not use knowledge to gain an advantage over their enemies, he attacked them. While he literally appeared to be a wise old owl, he was actually a snakelike bird, ready to attack anyone who would use knowledge to gain an advantage over another, no matter how ‘just’ a cause they might have. Again, he is not actively against Team Avatar at first, but welcomes them into the Library on the condition that they keep their promise. Once the promise was broken, though, Wan Shi Tong would have stopped at nothing to destroy them.

**Conclusion**

As I have shown, the myriad librarian characters in popular culture fit a particular set of archetypes of Librarian. These archetypes, whose characteristics are gathered from the traits that certain characters share in common, are not stereotypes. Stereotypes negatively affect librarians and the library profession, convincing patrons that all
librarians are strict sticklers there to serve the books rather than the people. However, these archetypes show that not all librarian characters are stereotypes; in fact, many of them are positive examples of librarians’ resourcefulness and intelligence. Each archetype is a facet of the librarian’s role in the profession, and actually reveals an incredibly diverse range of what a librarian looks like. Whether it’s the fearsome owl guardian who attacks those who misuse his knowledge for evil, or the extremely prim and proper woman who uses keen observation to solve a mystery, these archetypes reflect the diverse roles every librarian fills. Looking at the characters for their archetypes rather than stereotypes can help librarians engage in a dialogue with the rest of the world that puts fear and insult aside. As the literature shows, most librarian characters are seen for their stereotypes - their negative portrayals of the librarian as a person and as a professional - which hurts librarians on both fronts and affects the way patrons see librarians. But by concentrating on the negative stereotype aspect of the characters, librarians miss the opportunity to see the character within the context of the story itself. By looking at the story’s context, librarians can see these characters as readers see them: as archetypes who are integral to each story they inhabit. By taking a step back from the character and examining his or her role within their story, librarians can join patrons in cheering on these powerful and compelling men and women not as characters who invite scorn and despair, but as ones who can inspire and entertain all.

Notes

1. This definition is from the results of searching “stereotype” in Google. The particular dictionary this entry is from could not be found.

2. See Table 1 for a simplified list.
3. “William IV’s successor and niece, Queen Victoria, may have left her name to an era of sexual repression and rigid morality in the nineteenth century, but within her marriage she was apparently quite the coquette. It was her husband, Prince Albert, who was actually the prude.” – Farquhar, 24.

Tables

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Sub-Archetype</th>
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<td>The Woman</td>
<td>The Frumpy Shusher</td>
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<td>The Closet Sexpot</td>
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<td>The Mouse</td>
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<td>Perfectly Prim and Proper</td>
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<td>(Information Professional: The Quirky and Attractive Ingénue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Farce</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Hero</td>
<td>The Warrior</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>The Mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Monster</td>
<td>None</td>
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