

Reel Librarians: Images and Stereotypes of Librarians and Libraries in film and literature
David Levy

Outline (* in interests of time only show clips from *)

(1) **stereotype of old spinster female librarian**: hair in bun, eye glasses, conservative dress, as professional "shusher"

*a) Saturn commercial

b) Ghostbusters

(2) **Librarian as humilitator, bully, and intimidator, embarrassing library patrons**

*a) Sophies Choice

b) Seinfeld Bookman episode

c) Party Girl

(3) **More Positive images: Detective Sleuthing**

*a) Eco's The Name of the Rose

(b) Homicide

(c) The Matchmaker

(d) Buffy the Vampire Slayer

*e) Wings of Desire

(4) **Censorship of Books and Critique of Jewish intellectualism**

*a) Book Thief

(b) Fahrenheit 451

Introduction

Stereotypes of librarians in film have evolved over the decades as has the image of libraries. Due to limits of time this presentation will focus on 3 images of librarians: namely (1) the stereotype of the old spinster with hair in a bun, conservative suit, glasses, constantly shushing patrons in the name of quiet by considering the [Saturn commercial](#), & [ghostbusters](#), (2) the librarian as intimidator and bullier who throws their authority around shaming and embarrassing patrons, by Considering at [Sophie's Choice](#), & [a Seinfeld Bookman episode](#), and (3) positive images such as the librarian as an essential gate keeper in help detective sleuthing to solve detective plots often of murder by looking at Umberto Eco's [the Name of the Rose](#), [Homicide](#), and [Wings of Desire](#), etc.

Stereotypes change as “either old foggy bookworms”. Stereotypes of librarians have “ranged from the bespectacled mousey male of the 1800s to the 1900s shushing spinster complete with bun.”. She exists to put a damper on all spontaneity, silencing the exuberance of the young with a harsh look or hiss. Her only task seems to be checking out books or collecting fines. Books to her are best left upon the library shelves where they do not become dirtied or worn.... There at the desk she will stay, stamping out her books until her retirement.”

With revolutions in technology such as the internet, websites, database construction, digitization the stereotype of the image of the librarian as a cyber jockey, computer geek, or other images developed. The stereotypes of obsession with detail, card catalogs, dates stamp authoritarians are being replaced with librarians of know-how who use electronic information retrieval technologies in a post-modern setting. These stereotypes include: “The Lipstick Librarian”, “The Bellydancing Librarian”, “the modified Librarian”, and “The Librarian Avenger.” What destroyed the early stereotypes of the mousy nerdy male librarian and spinster eye glass bun female librarian with

rubber bands around her wrists to bind card catalog cards were economic and technological changes in librarianship.

Libraries have many images associated with them. Some have likened them to crypts as found in films like Stephen King's *The Policeman* and Asimov's *Forward the Foundation*, and cemeteries where ghosts hang out, to palaces in heaven as per Louis Borges, "*The Library of Babel*".¹ The image of the library as cemetery and crypt contrasts Louis Borges who commented that he imagines heaven and the afterlife as a large library in the palaces of G-d beyond. The head of the Library of Congress also has a positive image of libraries as "temples of learning."² The architecture of the LC and other great libraries has been noted to convey the awe and sanctity of great cathedral like houses of worship. In the Book, *the Alexandrian library: Glory of the Hellenic world*, it is noted that one head librarian Callamachus was accidentally locked in the library overnight and testifies that he heard ghosts and demons so that whenever he frequented the library again he wore garlic around his neck.

A Stereotype of female librarian as spinster with hair in a bun, conservative dress, glasses, and professional *shusher*

(1) Let us watch a clip from the TV Commercial Saturn to witness the librarian as obsessed shusher:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXkQSpblgBk>



[Saturn Corporate Librarian Coming Soon 30 sec GMSF 3372 6:5:95 Hal Riney & Partners Red Car](#)

www.youtube.com

Saturn Corporate Librarian Coming Soon 30 sec GMSF 3372 6:5:95 Hal Riney & Partners Red Car

(2) GhostBusters

In *Ghost Busters*, the first place in all of the city to be visited by ghosts is the NYPL which is guarded by lions.³ Two librarians appear in the film. The first (a ghost) is shown as the stereotypical old spinster with her hair in a bun, conservatively dressed, a mean look on the face, and constantly Shushing. In fact a constant pattern of the stereotype of the librarian in film is that of shelving, stamping, and shushing. The fact that often women are portrayed in this manner is due to many factors.⁴ The second librarian in *Ghost Busters* is the victim of a visitation when the card catalog is attacked. She is portrayed as a mousy neurotic who when asked if there was any family history of mental illness, comically replies, she had an uncle who thought he was St. Jerome. In this popular Hollywood film Ghostbusters much comic play is made of a card catalog where cards are flung out by some demonic ghost power, which causes the stereotypically dressed librarian in a conservative suit, glasses, hair bun, to flee in terror.

https://search.yahoo.com/search;_ylt=A2KLfSikQBRbJcMADTVx.9w4;_ylc=X0kDSkhhTnpgazRMakVuQ0o0N1ZkbncxUUZMTVRjekxnQUFBQUfjdkRIZARfUwM5NTQwMDYzODUEX3IDMgRhY3RuA2NsaWJc3JjcHZpZANKSGFOemprNExqRW5DSjQ3VmRudzFRRkxNVGN6TGdBQUFBQ192RGVkBZyA3ImcC1ocm1vYi1zBGZyMgNzYS1ncARncHJpZANhWkxDRIZENIRZaXNwWlUwdmpfSjhBBG5fcnNsdAMwBG5fc3VnZwMxMARvcmlnaW4Dc2VhcmNoLnIhaG9vLmNvbQRwb3MDMQRwcXN0cgNHg9zdGJ1c3RI

[cnMgbGlicmFyeQRwcXN0cmwDMjAEcXN0cmwDMjYEcXVlcnkDZ2hvc3RidXNOZXJzJTIwbGlicmFyeSUyMHNjZW5lBHNIYwNzZWYy2gEc2xrA2Fzc2lzdAR0X3N0bXADMTUyODA1MzgxMAR2dGVzdGlkA05TUlBDMA--?ei=UTF-8&fp=1&pvid=JHaNzjk4LjEnCJ47Vdnw1QFLMTczLgAAAAC_vDed&gclid=&.tsrc=yfp-hrmob-s&fr=yfp-hrmob-s&fr2=sa-gp&p=ghostbusters+library+scene](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv8qDRdC_F0)

B. Librarian as intimidator, Bullyier, and Shamer by Embarassing patrons in Public

(1)

In *Sophie's Choice* Sophie visits the Brooklyn College library and is intimidated, bullied, and shamed by the librarian Mr. Weiss who botches the reference interview.

Weiss is a pompous authority of the stereotypically depicted librarian. In the film *Sophie's Choice* starring Meryl Streep as a Polish Shoah survivor living in Brooklyn, She has discovered poetry of Emily Dickinson in an English language class and comes to the library to take out a poetry book. In her Polish accent she innocently asks the mousy librarian with a bowtie and don't bother me attitude for a book by this American poet. Sophie has misunderstood the name of the poet to be Emil Dickens. The librarian an overly confident surly young man with thick glasses lambasts her for her alleged "ignorance" because it is "common knowledge" that Charles Dickens was not an American nor did he write poetry but rather novels.

<https://reel-librarians.com/tag/sophies-choice/>

[alternative link: Librarians in the movies ((1) Citizen Cane 1941 (library as prison or crypt), (2) Sophie's Choice 1982 (humiliation of patron)), (3) Its a wonderful life,1946 (4) Foul Play 1978(library as reclusive hide away), (5) Batman, 1967 (6)) (7) Tomcats, 2000 (8) Big Sleep 1946

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=bv8qDRdC_F0]

This is a classic example that could be shown to every MLS reference librarian as an example of a botched reference interview. Sophie emerges from this reference interview intimidated and bullied. Sophie probably won't return any time soon to the library after he bad experience

Humiliating someone in public in Jewish law is called *Halbanat panim*. Rav Nachman equates such an act of embarrassing someone to public as the equivalent of murder or spilling blood.⁵

When one is embarrassed "*Azilsumakav' atihivara*," the features lose their red color and turn white; thus, the Talmudic term for humiliation, "*halbanat panim*," whitening of the face. David HaMelech's retort to his tormentors included the admonishment that one who shames others in public forfeits his eternal reward.⁶ This notion is in fact stated authoritatively a number of times in the Talmud.⁷ The Talmud displays an exquisite sensitivity to the potential of even an accidental misplaced word to cause great anguish: This attitude is also evidenced by countless enactments of the Rabbis designed "*sh'lol'vayesh*," not to embarrass.

(3) A comic representation of intimidation by someone who works for the library is in the *Seinfeld* episode concerning the library policeman. Seinfeld has not returned the controversial book Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Seinfeld has it in his possession overdue since 1971. Thus Seinfeld has had it illegally for 23 years. Seinfeld goes with friend Kramer to the NYPL to plead his innocence. Like Stephen King's story *The Library Policeman*, the *Seinfeld* episode treats the consequences of not returning a book on time. However this time the genre is comedy not horror. The stereotypical female librarian appears engrossed in stamping a pile of library books. The librarian looks disapprovingly at Seinfeld's overdue notice and tells him his case has been turned over to a "librarian policeman" named Bookman who is a cop bully. Let us watch:

Seinfeld (library policeman detective recoop overdue book)

<https://search.yahoo.com/search?p=seinfeld+over+due+library+book+episode&fr=yfp-hrmob-s&fr2=p%3Afp%2Cm%3Aa&.tsrc=yfp-hrmob-s&type=&fp=1&toggle=1&cop=mss&ei=UTF-8>

(4) A Third example of the librarian shaming someone in public is in the film **Party Girl**.

The main character in *Party Girl* also ends up humiliating a patron attempting to reshelve a book he has pulled from the shelves. She is seen at the reference desk surrounded by piles of books, mechanically stamping books. She looks up and seeing a young male library patron says, "Excuse me what are you doing?". The patron raises his hand to his chest in a gesture that says, "Who? Me?" Mary continues, "Yeh, you...." Singling him out so that he is noticed by other patrons sitting at desks. She asks sternly, "Were you just putting that book away?". The young man stands frozen while other patrons approach the desk for help. Mary comments strongly, "IT looked like as though you were putting that book away". The patron looks around with a shocked expression. The people at nearby tables raise their heads. Sarcastically Mary says, "I guess you didn't know we had a system for putting books away here?". Mary continues, "Now, I'm curious.... Your just randomly putting that book on the shelf, is that it?". The patron looks lost, helpless, and trapped, unable to speak. Mary raises her voice and says loudly, "You've just given us a great idea. I mean why are we wasting our time with the Dewey Decimal System when your system is so much easier, much easier. We'll just put the books (again raises voice) anywhere!". Mary turns to the people at the reading desks, "Hear that everybody? Our friend here has given us a great idea. We'll just put the books any damn place we choose!". Mary is shouting very loudly now and loosing it. She bangs her fist on the desk. She pushes it further by saying, "We don't care, right? Isn't that right!". Mary has evolved from a carefree party girl to a order freak librarian not afraid to assert her authority. Mary takes the patrons' misshelving of a book as a personal affront. She takes her job shelving books very seriously. Mary should have quietly come from out behind the reference desk and tactfully whispered to that young man that she could assist him in reshelving the book.

C. MORE POSITIVE IMAGES OF LIBRARIANS in DETECTIVE ROLES

SLEUTHING TO UNCOVER MURDER

(1) *The Name of the Rose*- Labyrinth Library 1986 & Abby of Crime Umberto Eco.

Detective Genre:⁸ Sleuthing murder

In my test case, In Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* the medieval library is likened to a labyrinth which one upon entering risks never escaping.⁹ The semiotic novel by Eco was made into a film. Mysterious deaths occur at the monastery in Northern Italy in the 14th century.¹⁰ The detective search for clues to the ambiguous murder mystery leads the main character played by Sean Connery to the monk who supervises the scriptorium named Malaki and the closed stacks of the library.

Eco's novel is a murder mystery. The abbey library is at the heart of the novel and the community. It is a fortress containing a labyrinth with secret passageways, booby trapped rooms, hidden doors, and a system of organization that is known to only a single librarian. The abbot describes the library as following:

The library was laid out on a plan which has remained obscure to all over the centuries, and which none of the monks is called upon to know. Only the librarian has received the secret, from the librarian who proceeded him, and he communicates it, while still alive, to the assistant librarian, so that death will not take him by surprise and rob the community of that knowledge. And the secret seals the lips of both men. Only the librarian has, in addition to that knowledge, the right to move through the labyrinth of books, he alone knows where to find them, and where to replace them, he alone is responsible for their safekeeping¹¹

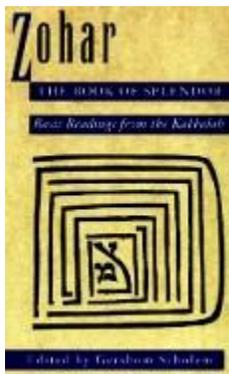
Eco's fortress library is a place that orders and protects texts and limits access to texts. The librarians role as keeper of the texts extends further for it is the library who knows the secret of all

secrets of all texts. The abbot comments on the nature of the library in the monastery which houses holy texts¹² and is the loci of love of learning ideally¹³ :

And so no one except for two people enters the top floor of the Aedificium...?

The abbot smiled, “No one should. No one can. No one even if he wished would succeed. The library defends itself immeasurable as the truth it houses, deceitful as the false hood it preserves. A spiritual labyrinth, it is also a terrestrial labyrinth. You might enter and you might not emerge “ (p.38)

Thus the library is set up as a place you might not emerge and thus a place of mystery, danger, and death. It is a place of fear, and a place to be feared.¹⁴ The image of the labyrinth is found also in Sifrei Kabbalah where a letter mem is at the center of a maze like trajectory towards which the pilgrim ventures. The idea of the journey of life as if in a maze like labyrinth with the goal of reaching the center of ayn sof common in Jewish mystical (Kabbalistic) art.



The abbot describes the system of control which is more than just protecting the physical texts. The library and librarian is not only a repository of physical texts but the loci of arbitrating between truth and falsity. We read:

;only the librarian knows from the contents of the collection of the volumes from its degrees of inaccessibility, what secrets, what truths or falsehoods, the volume contains.

Only he decides how, when, and whether to give it to the monk who requests it; sometimes

he first consults me (the abbot). Because not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods can be recognized as such by a pious soul¹⁵

The abbot is suggesting that the librarian is a gatekeeper. He knows the truth of an individual text through his knowledge of its place in the organized system of the library, where the text is located in the labyrinth of knowledge echoed in the labyrinth of the library. But more importantly the chief monk librarian understands the contents of the texts in his labyrinth library and knows their secrets and the chief librarian is said to have an overbearing countenance and eyes that see into one's soul

In his physiognomy there were what seemed traces of many passions which his will had disciplined but which seemed to have frozen those features they had now ceased to animate. Sadness and severity predominated in the lines of his face, and his eyes were so intense that with one glance they could penetrate the heart of the person speaking to him, and read the secret thoughts, so it was difficult to tolerate their inquiry and one was not tempted to meet them a second time.¹⁶

The Chief librarian Malachi not only knows how to access the texts but more importantly what they mean hermeneutically and what secrets they contain. Consider further the exchange between William and another monk in the *Name of the Rose*:

“But over there”- he nodded toward the Aedificium- the section of learning are well defended by works of magic....

“Really?” William said with a show of indifference. “Barred doors, stern prohibition, threats I suppose...”

“Oh no. More than that...”

“what for example?”

“Well I don't know exactly; I am concerned with glass not books. But in the Abbey there are rumors... strange rumors...”

“of What sort?”

“Strange Let us say rumors about a monk who decided to venture into the library, during the night, to look for something, Malachi (The librarian) had refused to give him, and he saw serpents, headless men, and men with two heads. He was nearly crazy when he emerged from the labyrinth.”¹⁷

Connery tries to learn the classification system and solve the murder mystery which ends in a clue whereby the secret of the library depends on the decipherment of a text in Greek.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC9EG9Vh9CA>



[The Name of the Rose - Labyrinth Library Part \(1986\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qC9EG9Vh9CA)

www.youtube.com

This video is part of the movie *The Name of the Rose*, where the labyrinth library is discovered.

(2) Homicide DETECTIVE SLEUTHING HINGING ON OVERREADING

The library as the locus of knowledge for detective sleuthing is also found in the film *Homicide*.

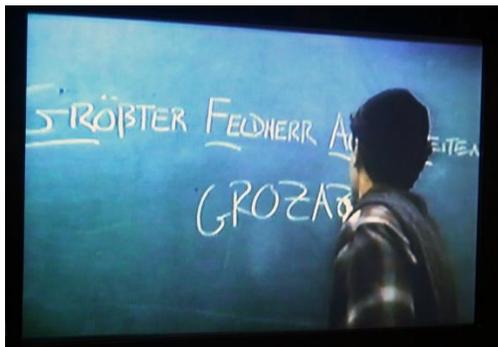
David Mamet's film portrays the existential crisis and journey of the main character, a policeman named Bobby Gold, in search of his own Jewish identity that evolves in the process of his solving a murder case which he wrongly assumes is fueled by anti-semitism rather than economic class hatreds. Gold engages in what Charles Pearce and Umberto Eco identify as a "hermeneutic of semiotics" to decode 'signs that signify signifiers' to uncover the encryption of clues that lead to solving the motive for the murder. Bobby discovers a piece of paper at the crime scene with the words GROFAZ which turns out to be a red herring although pursuit of trying to understand the meaning of this clue leads to Bobby's heightened Jewish identity and understanding. Thus the film plays upon the act of misreading semiotic signs in the library and over reading their significance.

Filmclip Homicide (Jewish Culture)

Homicide

<https://reel-librarians.com/2012/04/24/homicide-mamet/>

<https://reel-librarians.com/2012/04/24/homicide-mamet/>



[Smelling a rat in Homicide « Reel Librarians](#)

reel-librarians.com

I've tried, I really have, but oh, David Mamet, I just am not one of your fans. But if you do happen to be a fan of Mamet's patented staccato speech patterns and twisty-turny plots and self-important awareness, that's cool with me.

Current anti-Semitism und GROFAZ cross reference Der Fuhrer

(5) Detective Sleuthing in The Matchmaker (Israeli Film)

*In a different modality a kind of detective sleuthing appears in the Israeli film **The Matchmaker** written and directed by Avi Nesher inspired by t Amir Gutfreund's novel **When Heroes Fly** set in the Haifa cityscape. The main character does deterctive like background checks on shiduch couples that mimicks the public librarians recommendations of detective romance at the Public Library. The main character Arik a gawky teenager gets drawn into an old I.B. Singer world of a poor immigrants, Arabs, ex kibbutniks, black marketers, gamblers, sailors, and Shoah survivors suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder Yanekel Bride has a day job as a matchmaker for hard to match misfits and at night smuggles goods and running illegal card games. During the day Arik plays detective following Yankeles clients to check their veracity. This parallel's the pulp fiction recommended to him by a mousy public librarian named Meir who recommends detective thrillers. Clara Epstein is the shiduch coach of Yankele's clients and hosts a gambling parlor. The librarian, the timid Meir pursues Clara instead of the matchmaker's arrangement it sets off a combination of comic and tragic events.*

The Matchmaker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBmrW2LeCnw>



[THE MATCHMAKER - Avi Nesher - TRAILER](#)

www.youtube.com

*Official Selection Toronto 2010 7 Nominations
to Israeli Academy Awards, including Best*

*Picture Arik, a teenage boy growing up in
Haifa in 1968, gets a job working ...*

(6) Detective Sleuthing in **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**

The kid teen TV series, ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer***, where the librarian of a High school allows the slaying of vampires, demons, werewolves and monsters by his access and knowledge of the occult books in the library on kishuf, wizardry, and black magic. Rupert Giles is the high school librarian referred to as “the watcher.” . He is the source of training, counterintelligence, and guidance for high school student Buffy Summers, the one of her generation chosen to be Vampire Slayer. Buffy draws on Giles for research necessary to do that for which the Vampire slayer has been chosen. Buffy’s fellow high school friends meet and conduct much of their research in the library where they consult vampire and demon lore, the occult, witchcraft, spellcasting, etc. Giles stereotype is that of wearing tweed coat, sometimes befuddled, well dressed, intelligent, stable, friendly, supportive, and wise. Giles is also creative in that he engages in translations and recasting what he reads into stories, tag lines, and aphorisms that make sense to the teens he helps. Giles speaks to the faith of the importance of the library where answers can be found in the pages of books. His character and role speaks to the belief that “knowledge is the ultimate weapon.” The show portrays books as central and the knowledge therein as key to the struggle against evil forces. Giles is gentle and genteel, literate, sensitive, and devoted to his patrons. Yet Giles is not a techie. He is bookish and reserved, and a bit technophobic. He lives in the world of books and print culture. HE confesses to Buffy that computers fill him with “Childlike terror.” Jenny gently chides him for living in the Middle Ages, and assures him he will enter the new century with a few years to spare.¹⁸

(7) Detective Sleuthing in **Wings of Desire**

On the flip side of the library housing the occult in *Buffy the Vampire slayer*, an atmosphere of White magic is portrayed by such films as, **Wings of Desire (Der Himmel Uber Berlin** (1988). *Films that portray the library and librarians in a more favorable light associated with knowledge, wisdom, light, happiness, comfort, and joy include Wings of Desire.*

This Wim Wenders film centers around the story of two angels wandering in a mixture of post-war and modern Berlin, and hang out in the library. Invisible to humans, they nevertheless give their help and comfort to all the lonely and depressed souls they meet as well as Peter Falk who is on a movie shoot in Berlin. Finally, after many centuries, one of the angels becomes unhappy with his immortal state and wishes to become human in order to experience the joys of everyday life.

Let us watch a clip from wings of Desire, the Socrates like Peter Falk meets angels who like to hang out in the Berlin library facilitating learning in the reading room:

Film Clip Wings of Desire

Wings of Desire (angels hang out in library, clairvoyance, mystery, supernatural)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=B502n8PbC20>

D. Anti-Intellectual, Anti-Jewish assault on Books in forms of censorship in Film

CENSORSHIP OF BOOKS: Burning books is activity of totalitarian governmental regimes to prevent people from thinking for themselves and stomping out creativity

(1) The book Thief

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=the+book+thief++book+scene&qsn&sp=-1&pq=the+book+thief+book+scene&sc=1-25&sk=&cvid=380EAC3DB437444ABEF647D22021EF7B&sid=10B9725B1F2F6E2539477E5F1EA76F1D&jsoncbid=0&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3dthe%2520book%2520thief%2520%2520book%2520scene%26qs%3dn%26form%3dQBRE%26sp%3d-1%26pq%3dthe%2520book%2520thief%2520book%2520scene%26sc%3d1-25%26sk%3d%26cvid%3d380EAC3DB437444ABEF647D22021EF7B&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=D2E4B0670BDC6716A846D2E4B0670BDC6716A846&FORM=WRVORC>

(2) Fahrenheit 451 (Ray Bradbury)

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=fahrenheit+451+library+book+scene&qsn&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=fahrenheit+451+library+book+scene&sc=0-33&sk=&cvid=4EF06F2A3EE94C09BA3371D4D77DABD0&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3dfahrenheit%2520451%2520library%2520book%2520scene%26qs%3dn%26form%3dQBRE%26sp%3d-1%26ghc%3d1%26pq%3dfahrenheit%2520451%2520library%2520book%2520scene%26sc%3d0->

[33%26sk%3d%26cvid%3d4EF06F2A3EE94C09BA3371D4D77DABD0&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=691E950F40E5344BA00C691E950F40E5344BA00C&FORM=WRVORC](https://www.libraryofjudaica.org/record/33%26sk%3d%26cvid%3d4EF06F2A3EE94C09BA3371D4D77DABD0&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=691E950F40E5344BA00C691E950F40E5344BA00C&FORM=WRVORC)

(3)

The Footnote: Bookish Academic Politics critical of academic politics

The *film the footnote (He'arat Shulayim)* portray two main characters- a father and son. The father Eliezer Skonnick (Shomo bar Aba) is an old time scholar who spends most his time in the library meticulously researching in a thorough comprehensive, and systematic way variants of Talmudic manuscripts, leading his life in almost obscurity. His deciphering of minute inconsistencies in various girsa of the Talmudim is hard work. He has not received much recognition except for one time a great legendary scholar cited his findings in a footnote. Eliezer is bitter, anti-social, and envious of his son's popularity and resentful of his own lack of recognition. Eliezer is a secular philologist who treats the Talmudic text like an archaeologist to be dated and identified, spending 30 years of drudgery work carefully alone verifying the source of a particular section of the Talmud. The father finds refuge in the library. He is bitter that his meticulous evidence in the form of a proof was overshadowed by a competitor (Grossman) chance discovery, so that his research was condemned to a footnote. Grossman is Eliezer's bureaucratic nemesis who blocks his recognition.

In contrast, the son is out and about. Religiously observant the son is concerned with the meaning of the words of the Talmud and makes them accessible to the public. The son is a new type of scholar. He is a populizer of Judaic lore, whose books are best sellers and whose presence is often seen on TV and talk shows. The son is in the limelight and has a popular public persona. The son has a je ne sais quo and is likable and carries charisma. Both scholars however seem to be covetous of fame and honor. The greatest honor to many academics in Israel is the Pras Israeli.

Eliezer receives a call congratulating him on having won this prestigious prize. Vindication at last for a lifetime of pain staking scholarship. When Uriel is told this remarkable development that the father is announced as the winner the son realizes that the caller actually intended to award the

prize to the son. The chairman of the committee and old curmudgeon Grossman, meets with six other judges to discuss the mix up. The exchange is hilarious. An apparent solution is arrived at by Grossman, who is a lifelong saboteur of Eliezer's work. During the meeting Uriel says he has been submitting his father's name for the Israel Prize every year, and accuses Grossman of blocking that and other ways of recognizing Eliezer. Uriel goes to the **National Library** to break the news to his father but finds him raising a toast to winning the prize with colleagues.

Unable to break the news to his father that Eliezer is not the recipient but rather the son Uriel is, he once again meets Grossman, asking that the prize be given to Eliezer. Grossman relents but with two conditions: Uriel must write the committee's recommendation and Uriel can never be a candidate for the prize again. Uriel agrees and writes the recommendation text, picking and choosing every word carefully. The son has sacrificed his own career in honor for his father's name. In a brilliant detective hermeneutic sleuthing Eliezer does the most crucial textual reading of his life ironically in connection with this personal crisis. During the preparation for the TV interview Eliezer is struck by an uncommon Talmidic phrase in the Israel Prize's committee's recommendation. He flees the studio and returns to his study library as a place of refuge. He examines the expression, cross-checking its published uses, and realizes that the text must have actually been written by Uriel. Eliezer then reconstructs his phone conversation with the *Minister of Education* realizing that she had addressed him by his last name only. He concludes that the minister thought she was talking to his son when she broke the news about the Israel Prize. Comedy abounds in Eliezer's lack of familiarity with modern publicity and public relations as he does not even know what security guards are for. What happens is a series of events involving academic scholarship, familial jealousy, and pride, stubbornness and poetic justice. Grossman as Shakespeare might say, is hoisted by his own petar! All of this comes together wonderfully in a complex subtle plot development that only the father and son will completely understand. The movie ends a moment before the laureates are called to the stage. The film speaks to politics of academia and the desperate need for validation. The son Uriel ultimately chooses between his career advancement and his father's honor. He does not sabotage his father's glory.

On another level it should be noted that Cedar the director of the film was raised with a Yeshivah background and studied the Talmud from a religious angle most of his life, so the academic making the Talmud into a text to be scientifically analyzed was something foreign to his childhood. Cedar recognizes that no other culture has created a document so vast, complex, and detailed that continues to be relevant and the text is the source not only of our culture but religious ethical behavior. Yet Talmud scholars in the film like Grossman appear to have learned little of the Talmud's ethical messages, but rather seems to be motivated by petty jealousies, academic politics, and cut throat competition. That a prize would cause so much strife and contention so that individuals lose their integrity is a story that needs to be told whereby jealousy, covetousness, and ayn ha-rah are the sins that bring evil into the world. To "learn about" is an intellectual game while to "learn from" is a religious quest for redemption. The model of competitiveness may weed out mediocrity but it can produce a world where no one is satisfied or fulfilled or certainly can see a higher moral mission and can lose sight of the trees for the forest.

It is ironic that computer technology simulation may replace the efforts of scholars like Eliezer Skolnick. Eliezer is a taciturn and under appreciated philologist who analyzes Talmudic manuscripts in exacting detail, and is focused on the task of recreating an authentic ur text master version of that ancient collection of sacred oral texts before attempting to decipher what it all means. Yet we sympathize with Eliezer's diligent hard work of old time scholarship in contrast to his son who has a gift for schmooz. The film ultimately teaches that having a life's quest in academic scholarship does not mean you are not vulnerable to petty human feelings and tensions. Academic politics are perhaps the most vicious because the stakes are so low.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DjUwSr0VFo>



[Footnote Official Trailer #1 -
Movie \(2011\) HD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

www.youtube.com

Footnote Official Trailer #1
The story of a great rivalry
between a father and son,
both eccentric professors in
the Talmud department of
Hebrew University in ...

Conclusion

Many negative images of librarians and libraries have been presented. A stereotype found in the ***Saturn*** commercial and ***Ghostbusters*** is that of the librarian as an old scowling repressed spinster with her hair in a bun, wearing glasses, to stamp, check out books and demand fines for late books. The primary duty she seems to enjoy is *Shushing* all the patrons.

We also encounter the librarian as a stereotypical bully, intimidator, and humiliator. For example in ***Sophie's Choice***, *Sophie is shamed by the librarian Weiss at the Brooklyn College library who botches the reference interview.*The

librarian Weiss does not listen carefully and likes to throw his authority around and insinuates that the bullied Sophie is dumb.

*We see bullying to a further extreme in Stephen King's **The Library Policeman** where the library policeman in the horror genre is a kind of monster or ghoul who nicks Sam the library patron with knife in his throat threatening worse if he does not return his overdue book. In the film **Conan the librarian**, there is not hesitation to kill as Conan spits apart patrons who have late overdue books. In the **Seinfeld episode** of the library policeman, Mr. Bookman is also a bully who tries to intimidate Seinfeld who has not returned a copy of Henry Millers, *Tropic of Cancer* for 23 years. But this time the encounter is not horror or threats of violence but rather comic relief. We seen also the librarians penchant to humiliating library patrons in the character of Mary in **the Party Girl** who shames a young man who has attempted to reshelve a book himself (in the wrong place).*

The purpose of this study into the images of libraries and librarians in film and literature is not to suggest there is validity to these stereotypical representations. Rather we merely point out and note these negative images based on ignorance of what librarians really do and contribute to their institutions. We do not mean to suggest that any individual libraries or librarians have any of the characteristics attributed to them by the stereotypes.

A goal is to deconstruct these simplistic reductions into stereotypes to point out the complexity of classifying any particular type of profession or individual which is always a limiting of their freedom and acknowledgment of the dynamic of change and development of the complexity of human beings.

So what makes for these negative stereotypes? From what ground do they grow? Mostly ignorance and what Foucault calls a discourse of fear, which is not fear of libraries and librarians but what they represent, which is logocentrism and the power of authorized discourse itself.

*Films that portray the library and librarians in a more favorable light associated with knowledge, wisdom, light, happiness, comfort, and joy include *Wings of Desire* and even *The Name of the Rose*. In Eco's *the Name of the Rose* the librarian definitely has secret knowledge of the key to solve the secret of secrets the myster of mysteries and the library as labyrinth reinforces the librarians esoteric abilities to understand the maze of the labyrinth in the journey to ultimate knowledge of the crime solved by hermetic detective sleuthing employing the science of semiotics of interpretations of signs. Thus in *Name of the Rose* the act of reading and interpretations leads to the solving of the mystery while in the film homicide over reading leads to almost not solving the Detective "who done it" and the reasons and motivations of the murder. In popular sitcoms like *Buffy the Vampire slayer* we do find another popular portrayal of the librarian as the locus of esoteric knowledge also. Here the*

librarian is young, energetic, friendly, collegiate, and helps Buffy fight werewolves and vampires by providing¹⁹ knowledge of the occult kept in books in the library.

More study and investigation of the grounds from which the stereotypes of libraries and librarians springs is needed. Such research will undoubtedly reveal that these negative images arise because what librarians do and the purpose of libraries is not understood fully by the general public and even administrators at libraries. We are seeing today the further trend of the devaluing and disrespect by institutions that are liquidating their libraries in the name of the equation of practical cost efficiency and bottom line thinking, because the role of the library and librarian is not understood but devalued, disrespected, and dishonored. Such findings will undoubtedly uncover that the systems of power, legitimation, and regimes of authority that maintain all the discourses of institutions that house libraries are themselves in need of further library education, not only in being proficient in library science skills, but better appreciating the value added by librarians and the existence of libraries for the overall mission of any academic or educational institution. The fact that intellectuals like Umberto Eco and Louis Borges would center their creative works around the mystery of the library lends credit to the respect for which libraries and librarians should be awarded. If there were only more patrons like Borges and Eco!

¹ Borges, Jorge Luis, "The Library of Babel," trans by James E Irby in *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings*, edited by Donald Yates and James Irby Norfolk Conn.: New Directions Books 1962, p.54-55.

See: Borges, Jorge Luis, "The Library of Babel," trans by James E Irby in *Labyrinths: Selected stories and other writings*, edited by Donald Yates and James Irby Norfolk Conn.: New Directions Books 1962, p..56; Order and knowledge for Foucault work in tandem. Jorge Luis Borges in his short story "The Library of Babel" expresses this dialectic. We read:

When it was proclaimed that the Library contained all books, the first impression was one of extravagant happiness. All men felt themselves to be masters of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal or world problem whose eloquent solution did not exist in some hexagon. The Universe was justified, the universe suddenly usurped the unlimited dimensions of hope"¹

For Borges to have knowledge of the secret order was tantamount to having the status of a god which contradicts the negative images and stereotypes of female librarians as a "dull, earnest body... with glasses, her hair in a bun, wearing sensible shoes, support hose, tweed skirt, and droopy sweater. We read further of Borges positive portrait of the librarian:

On some shelf in some hexagon (men reasoned) there must exist a book which is the formula and perfect compendium of all the rest: some librarian has gone through it and he is analogous to a god..... Many wandered in search of Him. For a century they exhausted in vain the most varied areas. How could one locate the venerated and secret hexagon which housed Him

The hexagon clearly is a form of the sefirot structure and architectonic that emanate from heavens distant gardens (die Himmel Ferne Gaften) pleromatically. In Sifrei Kabbalah this structure of emanation of the aspects of the manifestations of G-d, the DNA of G-d in the Universe

So this it is the Ideas behind this image that all the library texts eventually converge and describe? The semiotic of the closed and hidden secret thus becomes an open secret with anyone capable of hermeneutically decoding the encryption above, which for the Ramban is the torah as the encryption of G-d's divine names. Thus the title of the name of the Rose based on a pusek in a medieval poem: After the death of the rose all that remains is the name. This emphasis on the incorporeality of the rose itself but rather its name is found in Rambam's insistence as well on the incorporeality of God and His angels according to Charles Touti.³ Decoding this enigmatic riddle from this medieval poem would take us too far afield but the importance on the concept of name is well known to all in Judaism, when G-d himself is known as "The Name (Hashem). The Baal shem tov was said to be the master of the Name. The Besht could Davon and by uttering permutations of the names of the G-dhead could effect theurgically persons success in health, parnasa, and shiduchim for instance. For Borges the library is a labyrinth or maze where all leads to the utterance of the Name. Only the initiated have the key, thus a semiotic of esotericism is established with taboos set in place. Mystery surrounds the enigma of the Name. Spells and incantations according to Hechalot texts can open gates to rooms in the palace of G-ds seven heavens, where the soul is refreshed and delighted by the celestial knowledge it hears emanating from the names of angels. It is knowledge of the unity of the Name, and its subsequent various permutation that encrypt for this Name requiring decoding that makes for redemptive knowledge. For Borges the librarians are the gatekeepers of this knowledge, or at least know the path o the journey of life in how to arrive upon its manifestation, according to the Talmud, which is revealed once in 7 years, preferably at a flowing body of water or waterfall, to only those who can learn on their own. Thus the Name is not easily accessed nor attained by the man ad captum vulgi. There are Talmudic prohibitions as fences regarding prerequisites required for even questing for this name that hinge around the concepts of ma'aseh Merkavah³ and ma'aseh bereshit. Madness awaits those who are incapable intellectually of receiving the shefa of such revelation, and taboos set up to discourage its seeking out.

⁵ A Tanna taught the following Baraisa in the presence of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: if anyone makes his friend's face turn white from shame in public, it is as if he spilled blood ie. Murdered his friend. He Rav Nachman bar

Yitzchak said to the Tanna-What you are saying is right-because I have seen how the red coloring leaves the face of an embarrassed person and his face turns white.

⁶ רבנו של עולם, גלוי וידוע לפניך שאם היו מקרעים בשרי לא היה דמי שותת לארץ. ולא: אמר דוד לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא עוד, אלא אפילו בשעה שעוסקין בנגעים ואהלות אומרים לי: דוד, הבא על אשת איש מיתתו במה? - ואני אומר להם: מיתתו אבל המלבין את פני חבריו ברבים - אין לו חלק לעולם הבא. (ואמר) +מסורת הש"ס: [אמר] +, בחנק, ויש לו חלק לעולם הבא...מר זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב, ואמרי לה אמר רב חנא בר ביזנא אמר

⁷ Baba Metzia 59a notes with regards to the merit of Tamar: And Mar Zutrabar Toviyah said in the name of Rav-and others say, it was Rav Chana bar Biznawho said in the name of R. Shimon Chasida; and others say it was R. Yochananwho said in the name of R. Shimon ben Yochai-It is better that a person cast himself into a fiery furnace- than that he should shame his fellow in public. From where do we know this? From TAMAR. For it is written: Asshe was taken out (to be executed) she sent to her father-in-law, Judah the pledges he had left with her, but she refused to shame him in public by naming him as the father of her child; See רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב [אמר], ואמרי לה אמר רב חנא בר ביזנא אמר רבי שמעון חסידא, ואמרי לה אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: נוח לו לאדם אמר רב. שיפיל עצמו לכבשן האש ואל ילבין פני חבריו ברבים. מנא לן - מתמר, דכתיב בהיא מוצאת והיא שלחה אל חמיה חננא בריה דרב אידי: מאי דכתיב גולא תונו איש את עמיתו - עם שאתך בתורה ובמצוות אל תוניהו. אמר רב: לעולם יהא אדם ... זהיר באונאת

⁸ In the detective program *Miss Marple* (1962-1965) Mr. Stringer is the village librarian who serves as Miss Marples faithful helper in solving many detective crimes just as in the *Night Strangler* (1972) a timid researcher in the newspaper library helps Darren McGavin solves a strange series of murders. Likewise in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) Terese Wright researches a murder in Santa Rosa California public library as portrayed also in *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) that shows lawyers using a library. In *Bridge Across Time* (1985) Librarian Adrienne Barbeau helps solve murders. In *Hidden City* (1988) Cassie Stuart is a film librarian uncovering evil doing in London with the aid of Charles Dance. In *Maxie* (1985) a flapper from the 1920s inhabits the body of a 1980s woman. Two librarians resolve the plot. In *Web of Evidence* (1959) a librarian assists a young man trying to prove his passed on father innocent of murder.

⁹ See Garrett, Jeffrey, "Missing Eco: On Reading The Name of the Rose as Library Criticism," *Library Quarterly* 61, Oct 1991, p.373-88

¹⁰ On the nature of the monastery library as a holy space see Bede: Cunctum vite tempus in ejusdem Monasterii habitacione peragens^ omnem meditandis Scripturis operam dedi; atque inter observantiam disciplinam regularis et quotidianam cantandi in ecclesia curam, semper aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere dulce habui." — "All my life I spent in that same Monastery, giving my whole attention to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and in the intervals between the hours of regular discipline and the duties of singing in the church, I took pleasure in learning, or teaching, or writing something."

Bede *Historia ecclesiastica* v. 2

¹¹ Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, translated by William Weaver, NY: Warner, 1983, p 35-36.

¹² Consider Paulus of Nola's remark, Si quem sancta tenet meditandi in lege voluntas Hic poterit residens sacris intendere libris. [Here he whose thoughts are on the laws of God May sit and ponder over holy books.]

¹³ Consider the letter of Lupus Servati: Amor litterarum ab ipso fere initio pueritiae mihi est innatus, nec earum, ut nunc a plerisque uocantur, superstitiosa uel [superuacua] otia fastidiui; et nisi intercessisset inopia praeceptorum et longo situ collapsa priorum studia pene interissent, largiente deo meae auiditati satisfacere forsitan potuissem; siquidem uestra memoria per famosissimum imperatorem Karolum, cui litterae eo usque deferre debent ut aeternam ei parent memoriam, coepta reuocari, aliquantum quidem extulere caput satisque constitit ueritate subnixum praeclarum Cic[eronis] dictum: honos alit artes et accenduntur omnes ad studia gloria. Nunc oneri sunt qui aliquid discere affectant; et uelut in editio situs loco studiosos quosque imperiti uulgo aspectantes, si quid in eis culpa deprehenderunt, id non humano uitio, sed qualitati disciplinarum assignant. Ita, dum alii dignam sapientiae palmam non capiunt, alii famam uerentur indignam, a tam praeclaro opere destiterunt. Mihi satis apparet propter se ipsam appetenda sapientia (Lupus Servati Lupi epistulae [SLE] 1).

¹⁴ The libraries association with a discourse of fear is also found in novels besides Umberto Eco such as (1) Isaac Asimov's *Forward the Foundation*, (2) William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, (3) Stephen King's *The Library Policeman*, and motion pictures such as (1) *Party Girl*, (2) *UHF*, (3) *The Pagemaster*, (4) *Seinfeld* etc.; In the animated children's film *The Pagemaster* the image of the library is foreboding. Richie Tyler rides his bike to pick up nails from a hardware store and crashes his bike into a tree. Looking up, he sees a large and imposing granite building with arches guarded by lions that appear to roar at him in the thunder of rain storm. The library is described as a "mysterious place." The library exists in another dimension from Richie's world signified by the passage through a

tunnel. The library has the aura of a religious mystery of a high ceilinged cathedral, marble staircases, and rows of statues, shrouded in "huge eerie shadows." Richie is afraid of getting lost in the labyrinth.;

¹⁵ Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, translated by William Weaver, NY: Warner, 1983, p.36

¹⁶ Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. By William Weaver, NY: Warner, 1983, p.73; The image of the librarian as stern potentate is a motif in literature and film. Stephen King in *The Library Policeman* presents an image of an "ill-natured librarian... swooping out of the main room to see who had dared profane the silence." This is in conformity with Newark Star Ledger's which depicts librarians "who prowl the stacks shushing noisy readers or confiscating snacks." (see Kunkie, Frederick, and Sara Treflinger, "Good to the Last Page: Libraries try cafes to Lure Readers," NJ Star Ledger, June 12, 1998, p. 1)

¹⁷ Eco, Umberto, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. By William Weaver, NY: Warner, 1983, p.89; The description of the monk who went mad at night in the library seeing things, resonates with the story of the Arba Sheiniknasu biPardes, where Ben Zoma ate too much honey as is reported to say upon emerging "the distance between the 1st rakiah and 2nd rakia is a dove's wings beating..." Ben Azzai cut the shoots and went mad. Acher became a Greek philosopher. See: (*Chagiga* 14b, *Zohar* I, 26b and *Tikunei Zohar*, Tikun 40: The Rabbis taught: Four [Sages] entered the *Pardes* [literally "the orchard."]. Rashi explains that they ascended to heaven by utilizing the [Divine] Name [i.e., they achieved a spiritual elevation through intense meditation on G-d's Name] (*Tosafot, ad loc*). They were Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher [Elisha ben Avuya, called Acher — the other one — because of what happened to him after he entered the *Pardes*] and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them [prior to their ascension]: "When you come to the place of pure marble stones, do not say, 'Water! Water!' for it is said, 'He who speaks untruths shall not stand before My eyes' (*Psalms* 101:7)." Ben Azzai gazed [at the Divine Presence - *Rashi*] and died. Regarding him the verse states, "Precious in the eyes of G-d is the death of His pious ones" (*Psalms* 116:15). Ben Zoma gazed and was harmed [he lost his sanity — *Rashi*]. Regarding him the verse states, "Did you find honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be overfilled and vomit it up" (*Proverbs* 25:16). Acher cut down the plantings [he became a heretic]. Only Rabbi Akiva entered in peace and left in peace. ; Thus perhaps we can see the library as a bastion or refuge of order giving sanity to the chaos of multivocal and diverse opinions in a state of uncontrollable nature where Hobbes holds life is nasty brutish and short. The library is a fortress that wards off chaos or insanity. The ordered stacks hold at bay the mad chaos of uncontrollable discourse. This Foucaultian paradigm can tend to lead to the stereotype of the 1) library as refuge, fortress, and cathedral (see *Name of the Rose*), (2) the humiliation of the patron (see *Sophie's Choice* episode), and (3) the library policeman (see *Seinfeld* episode)