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LIBRARIES, LIBRARIANS, AND THE DISCOURSE OF FEAR

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This article presents examples of representations of libraries and librarians taken from modern popular culture, including popular film, television, and novels. Using Michel Foucault's approach to discourse, we assert that such representations are made possible by, and decoded within, the structures of a discourse of fear, a practice of speech and symbols that equates the control and fear of discourse in fundamental ways. The library as an institution falls squarely into the lived tensions of this discourse, and these tensions are made apparent in the themes of the threshold: the librarian as formidable gatekeeper between order and chaos, the other-worldliness of the library, the library as cathedral, the humiliation of the user, the power of surveillance, and the consequences of disrupting the sacred order of texts. The discourse of fear is a language and a vocabulary. It is a way of speaking about the library and the librarian that transcends any specific image or portrayal. Outside of the discourse of fear, such representations would not be recognizable as libraries or librarians at all.

Introduction

"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,

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immeasurable as the truth it houses, deceitful as the falsehood it preserves. A spiritual labyrinth, it is also a terrestrial labyrinth. You might enter and you might not emerge."
(UMBERTO ECO [1, p. 38])

In Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* [1], the abbot of a medieval Italian monastery explains the central role of the library in the eternal holy war between the forces of good and evil, and between religious order and satanic anarchy. The power of the library in Eco's novel derives in large part from the propagation of fear about its contents and its structure, both to those who might defame the library and also to those righteous monks who use its contents on a daily basis—the library users. The fear is the same for people of both good and bad intentions. The abbot explains how the library must defend itself both in the physical structure of the labyrinth and, more important, in the stories that surround it. According to the abbot, the library is a place where “you might enter and you might not emerge,” a place of mystery, danger, and death. It is a place of fear, and a place to be feared.

Eco's use of the library as a place of fear is not unique to *The Name of the Rose*. In this article, we argue that fear is the fundamental organizing principle, or code, through which representations of libraries and librarians are manifest in modern popular cultural forms such as novels, movies, and television shows. Fear is the means by which the presence of the library setting, and the librarian characters within them, are to be understood. It is the horizon against which such representations make sense. This horizon of understanding is more fundamental than the representations found in any particular example, because it is what makes such images possible. It provides the discursive context and frame in which these representations are both encoded and decoded. It is to the nature of this greater discourse, an arrangement and use of symbolic forms within a given community, that this article is directed.

The greater discourse is referred to here as “the discourse of fear.” The concept is based primarily on remarks made by Michel Foucault at his inaugural lecture at the College de France, Paris, in 1971 [2]. In this lecture, Foucault described a fundamental relationship between control, discourse, and fear. This triad of themes represents a valuable and previously unexplored perspective from which to understand the nature of librarian stereotypes and the representation of libraries and librarians in modern popular culture [3]. The discourse of fear as it applies to libraries and librarians is explored through reference to a selected number of examples taken from popular novels: Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* [1], Isaac Asimov's *Forward the Foundation* [4], William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* [5], and Stephen King's *The Library Policeman* [6]; motion pictures: *Party Girl* [7], *UHF* [8], *The Pagemaster*

[9, 10], and *Sophie's Choice* [11]; and a television comedy show, *Seinfeld* [12].³ We argue that all of the representations depicted in these examples are made possible by underlying discourses of fear and control. Further, we suggest that such themes are not aberrant or extraordinary but, rather, use and exaggerate, certainly, a fundamental vocabulary of images and symbols by which libraries and librarians are understood in the context of modern discourses. To unpack these claims, it is necessary to begin with a consideration of Foucault's notion of discourse.

Discourse and Control

What civilization, in appearance, has shown more respect towards discourse than our own? Where has it been more and better honored? (MICHEL FOUCAULT [2, p. 288])

It has been said many times that the library, as an institution, stands as a physical celebration of the power of discourse [25]. The mission of the library is to preserve, store, classify, catalog, and make texts available to whomever wishes to access them. Because of the library, discourse can speak and be celebrated long after its producers are dead and gone [26]. The grandeur of library buildings stands as a temple to the discourse of the living and dead. For example, the Great Hall of the Library of Congress, completed in 1897, was described by a newspaperman as follows: "Entering its main floor the visitor is presented with such a vision of richly hued marble, bright mosaics, classic carving, and heroic sculpture that the Capitol across the street seems like a spartan cave" [27, p. 33]. When the New York Public Library opened the Central Research Library on Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street in 1911, "it was the largest marble structure in the country" [27, p. 42]. These imposing structures send a clear message as to the status of discourse in modern Western society.

Michel Foucault devoted much of his life's work to the description and critique of Western civilization's apparent respect and honor for discourse. He examined the manner in which the deployment of discourses gave rise to the great *epistemes* of the social sciences [28], of biological and medical science [29], sexuality [30], madness [31], discipline, and punishment [32]. He considered how the arrangements of privileged discourses within a given civilization and historical time made possible the appearance and disappearance of scientific para-

3. This list is not exhaustive by any means. For bibliographies of the portrayal of libraries and librarians, see [13–24].

digms, disciplinary and medical practices, and the constitution of the self. Foucault explored the strategies through which certain discourses became honored and others pushed to the margins in his discussion of power and knowledge [33]. He described how the discourse of figures such as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx became institutionalized and provided the foundations for contemporary discursive regimes of their own [34] and how the historical discourses of life, labor, and language combined to produce the object of knowledge known as the individual [28].

In pursuing the hypothesis connecting libraries, discourse, and fear, it is necessary to address Foucault's central concept of discourse. Much has been written about the way Foucault deliberately skirts around giving a definitive account of the concept [35–38]. Yet, on closer reflection, it becomes clear that Foucault's unwillingness to give a single definition of "discourse" follows from the nature of his theory. Foucault claims it is not in the nature of discourse to be able to give a single and "correct" definition of any word, including the word "discourse." This view is not a Foucauldian insight by any means. One need only to look up any given word in a respectable dictionary to find multiple definitions and usages. Foucault, like the user of the dictionary, recognizes that what a word means depends on how it is used and the context in which that usage takes place. Thus, Foucault writes that "instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word 'discourse,' I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings" [39, p. 80]. Foucault asks, "have I not allowed this same word 'discourse' . . . to vary as I shifted my analysis or its point of application?" [39, p. 80]. This article, like Foucault, can only offer a working definition of the central notion of "discourse"—one that is appropriate to the analysis and "point of application" of this argument. As Foucault recognizes, this word must be put to use in a particular practice from where its meaning will be constituted.

That being said, let "discourse" refer to the arrangement and use of symbolic forms within a given community. Unlike the science of linguistics, which turns to the sentence for its unit of analysis (for example, its phonetics, syntax, and morphology), this use of the term "discourse" refers to the practices of speech—what speech is used for, what it does, what it enables, and what it excludes. For example, Foucault would be more interested in the practice of "the lecture" as a particular arrangement and use of symbolic forms than the lecture's content or message. Indeed, for Foucault, it is not content that determines the form of a lecture but, rather, the practice of "lecturing" that determines an appropriate content [40]. Content is only made possible in the practices that give it shape, context, meaning, and truth value. Fou-

cault is interested in the role of the lecture as a practice. He would examine how this practice operates within institutions of, say, higher education, and how this contributes to the institution's role in the production and maintenance of knowledge and power. A lecture is not a simple matter of information being transmitted from a teacher to students. It is a practice that operates alongside and within a system of practices that, together, can come to produce what Herbert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow refer to as serious speech acts that have a "systematic, institutionalized justification of the claim . . . to be true of reality" [36, p. 48].

To take an example from his own work, consider Foucault's account of "the examination" in the context of the prison in his book *Discipline and Punish* [32]. For Foucault, the examination of prisoners is not simply a matter of collecting information about individual subjects. Indeed, this information is of secondary importance. Of interest to Foucault is the role of this practice with respect to the totality of such practices that make up the prison institution. As Foucault demonstrates in this book, the consequences of the examination extend to the formation of a whole domain of power and knowledge: "The examination introduced a whole mechanism that linked to a certain type of the formation of knowledge a certain form of the exercise of power . . . In this space of domination power manifests its potency, essentially by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification" [32, p. 187]. Foucault continues: "The examination leaves behind it a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days. The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them. . . . A 'power of writing' was constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline" [32, p. 189].

In this idea can be found a perspective from which to understand the awe and fear that strike many people as they enter a library. Taking Foucault's stance on the nature of discourse, it becomes apparent that it is not the contents of the library that inspire awe; it is the practices that occur within the institution. To the user, libraries seem to be "governed by idiosyncratic and sometimes inscrutable rules of behavior" [41, p. 201]. Like Foucault's account of the examination in the prison context, the discursive practices within the library are made up of its "rituals, its methods, its characters and their roles, its play of questions and answers, its systems of classification . . . For in this slender technique are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power" [32, p. 185]. Within the library, users find themselves in the midst of overpowering "rituals" with specialized "methods" of search-

ing and information retrieval. They must learn to understand the "characters and their roles" (the librarian and the user). They must engage in the "play of questions and answers" (the reference interview) and the nature of the "classification system." Like Foucault's examination, the complete edifice of the library experience founds the basis of a whole domain of knowledge and a whole type of power. Like the prisoner in the examination, the user becomes appropriated by the practice of the library and becomes defined by its limits and structures. As the practices of the prison transform the person to the prisoner, so, too, do the practices of the library transform the person to the user.

This line of thinking leads to Foucault's notion that all discourse is controlled. This control is not that of a transcendent Orwellian thought-police, but control produced by the constraints of particular discursive practices, such as the examination in the prison [32], the confession in the church [30], the presentation made at an academic conference [40], the article written for an academic journal [42], the lecture made at a university [43], or the reference encounter in the library [44]. These forms impose specific structures and limits on what it is possible to say, and they bestow any validity or truth value on the serious speech acts produced by them. Speaking in the voice of the institutions, Foucault writes, "but you have nothing to fear from launching out; we're here to show you discourse is within the established order of things, that we've waited a long time for its arrival, that a place has been set aside for it—a place which both honors and disarms it; and if it should happen to have a certain power, then it is we, and we alone, who give it that power" [2, p. 216]. The power of any particular discourse, if it should have any power, is made possible by the institutions. Yet, paradoxically, these practices of discursive control, including that of the library, also neutralize the discourses they recognize.

Such limits master and control the proliferation of serious speech acts and contain them within boundaries and arrangements, such as scientific disciplines, for example. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [45] offers an account of the ways in which scientific discourse becomes structured and limited through the constraints of the paradigm. What is and can be considered a serious speech act is totally determined by the nature of the contextualizing paradigm. Beyond the paradigm that gives them significance, serious speech acts have no truth value.⁴

4. It is interesting to note that Kuhn faces a similar dilemma to Foucault when trying to define precisely his notion of the paradigm (see [38] and [46]). For more discussion on this subject, see app. A.

Foucault recognizes that “truth” is only possible through limits and control. He writes that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role it is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, and evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” [2, p. 216]. It is these procedures, not the wishes, ideas, thoughts, or intentions of individual speakers, that ultimately dictate who can speak, when to speak, and what can be spoken. All discursive practices do this, whether it be the formal constraints imposed by the form of the lecture or the examination or the conversation between two spouses about what to have for dinner.

In Foucault’s characterization, the library becomes an institution with the explicit charge of creating and maintaining discursive control. Foucault points out that particular and privileged discursive practices are “both reinforced and accompanied by whole strata of practices such as pedagogy—naturally—the book system, publishing, [and] *libraries*” [2, p. 219; emphasis added by the authors]. Librarians classify, catalog, index, and arrange all of the discourse under their jurisdiction. Discourse is given its proper place with respect to all other items in the universe of discourse. This idea is articulated in *Party Girl* [7] when Mary, struggling to understand the organization of the library, reads aloud from the introduction to the twentieth edition of Dewey’s classification schedules: “Classification provides a system for organizing a universe of items be they objects, concepts, or records.” The message being given in this popular-culture setting is that the power of the library’s classification scheme is massive and total. Its aim is to classify and organize no less than a “universe of items.” There is nothing beyond this that can escape from the library’s pervasive order.

The library collection is not only a place where discourse is controlled through organizational procedures but, also, the library itself, through its architecture and furnishings, becomes a visible monument to this discursive order and control. The library symbolizes the boundary between the rational and the chaotic [47], and its grand and overbearing presence warns of the dangers of arbitrary and uncontrolled discourse. Without an institution like the library, discourse becomes inaccessible, certain discourses take on power by virtue of arbitrary standards, and previously authoritative discourses are challenged. Not only would certain texts be rendered inaccessible but also people would be denied the resources to know that such texts exist. The library has the authority to determine what shall fall within the universe of discourse defined by its boundaries, and what shall not.

This section has addressed the issues of discourse and discursive control. It has conceptualized the library as one institution that creates

and then maintains control of serious speech acts (scientific paradigms are another). So far, this view is not an enlightening proposition. Control is readily visible and understood in the order of the stacks and the catalog. What makes control interesting is when it is placed within the context of a discourse of fear and we then consider how the combination of control and fear provides a unique manner in which to understand and analyze the nature of library and librarian representations in modern popular culture. The issue of fear is addressed in the following section.

The Discourse of Fear

It seems to me, a certain fear hides behind this apparent supremacy accorded to this apparent logophilia. It is as if these taboos, these barriers, thresholds, and limits were deliberately disposed in order, at least partly, to master and control the great proliferation of discourse, in such a way as to relieve the richness of its most dangerous elements; to organize its disorder so as to skate round its most uncontrollable aspects. (MICHEL FOUCAULT [2, p. 228])

In his address at the College de France, Foucault suggests that there exists a certain fear that motivates the practices inherent in institutions of discursive control such as the library. He notes that discourse has "fearsome and even devilish features" [2, p. 215] and that without mechanisms of order, discourse becomes "dangerous" and "uncontrollable" [2, p. 228]. There is a fundamental "anxiety as to just what discourse is, when it is manifested materially, as a written or spoken object" [2, p. 216] that is a result of "uncertainty faced with a transitory existence, destined for oblivion—at any rate, not belonging to us; uncertainty at the suggestion of barely imaginable powers and dangers behind this activity, however humdrum and grey it may seem; uncertainty when we suspect the conflicts, triumphs, injuries, dominations, and enslavements that lie behind these words" [2, p. 216]. There is an unspoken danger of discourse becoming unleashed, of a discourse without a speaker or an author, of meanings that cannot be traced to an identifiable origin, of the ambiguity of not knowing which discourses speak truth and which do not. Foucault writes that people feel driven by fear to preserve, at all costs, that "tiny fragment of discourse—whether written or spoken—whose fragile, uncertain existence must perpetuate their lives" [39, p. 211]. The library is a place of dedicated institutionalized "taboos, . . . barriers, thresholds, and limits" [2, p. 228] that serve to "master and control the great prolifera-

tion of discourse" [2, p. 228] in an attempt to "relieve the richness of its most dangerous elements" [2, p. 228]. Foucault is describing a discourse of fear.

Foucault's "fear" is not an objective fear or some state of affairs that lies behind and motivates discourse. It is a discursive practice in which the fear of discourse becomes a valid and meaningful object of knowledge; it becomes expressed in serious speech acts. The hypothesis proposed here is that representations of libraries and librarians take their identity from their place within this specific arrangement of discourse, as opposed to some other.

The discourse of fear has, as a central component, the notion of the "threshold" or "boundary." Outside of the threshold is the prospect of a profound loss of meaning, a place of decontextualized talk that is simply unimaginable and inexpressible within the realms of prevailing discursive practices. The discourse of fear, through its deployment of the threshold, creates an identifiable realm in which the unknown and uncontrollable can exist; it lies over the threshold. This idea parallels and complements a similar argument by Foucault in his discussion of the creation of the "unconscious" within modern social science in the late nineteenth century [28]. Fear arises not from the prospect of not understanding what is being said, of not understanding respective discursive roles identified in prevailing discursive practices, of being unable to distinguish truth from falsity, reason from madness, the citizen and the criminal, the normal and the perverted. The fear is of the potential to transgress dominant discursive forms and of making all things and all worlds possible. The objects of knowledge and structures of power built on dominant discursive forms would come to an end and the realm of the Other, so carefully constrained by prevailing practice, would enter the realm of the same [48].

The library is intriguing because it embodies both sides of Foucault's control-fear relationship. As long as each item of discourse can be assigned a classification number, placed in a particular place on the shelf, and accessed through catalogs or bibliographies, institutions can be secure. Institutions can decide who can have the privilege of access to these items and what the conditions will be (for example, entry into stacks or closed collections, borrowing privileges, and length of borrowing period or fines). But these control mechanisms are contextualized and made possible by a discourse of fear. Consider this exchange between a monk named William and another monk in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*:

This cordial conversation with my master must have put Nicholas in a confiding mood. For he winked at William (as if to say: You and I understand each

other because we speak of the same things) and he hinted: "But over there"—he nodded toward the Aedificium—"the secrets of learning are well defended by works of magic . . ."

"Really?" William said, with a show of indifference. "Barred doors, stern prohibitions, 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 . . ."
[1, p. 89]

The hypothesis developed in the following sections is that modern representations of libraries and librarians are structured by the discourse of fear. The image of the library is an embodiment of the fear of uncontrolled discourse. The library in popular imagination thus plays an intriguing and possibly unique double role. On the one hand, the library exists in this discourse as the ultimate symbol of discursive control and order. To enter the library, one must enter its world, where the structure of discourse does not equate with our own, where communication with knowledge is not a conversation, but a request. Spoken discourse in the library is subject to the same control as the textual. Perhaps the most recognizable element of the librarian stereotype is that of a finger raised to shushing lips and the sound "shhhh." Silence is the key—uncontrolled spoken discourse has no place in this shrine to discursive order.

On the other hand, the library is also a representation of fear. It is an image that, in itself, evokes and inspires fear. The library can be seen as perhaps the last barrier to the realm of uncontrolled discourse; the threshold between order and disorder, harmony and chaos, and sanity and insanity (see also [3]). As the library continually moves, as it must, into the realm of uncontrolled discourse to incorporate it into the universe of structured discourse, so the realm of the uncontrolled seems to infiltrate the realm of the library. As Foucault has argued, the fantasia and the nightmare exist, and are made possible, by the library [49 and 50]. Both the dream and the nightmare breathe in the very stacks that presumably hold them at bay. In the following sections, these claims are explored by considering a number of examples of representations of libraries and librarians from modern popular culture. We suggest that the discourse of fear brings forth a number of identifiable themes: (1) the library as cathedral, (2) the humiliation of the user, and (3) the library policeman.

The Library as Cathedral

"That cocoon of whispery hush [with] an atmosphere of reverent silence." (JOAN LOWERY NIXON [41, p. 210])

The library building itself is a message. As Nancy Pickering Thomas suggests, "an experience of library architecture . . . is not simply a neutral backdrop for library services which engages or fails to engage a user in some aesthetic response. On the contrary, it constitutes part of a 'semiotically loaded' communicative moment" [51, p. 27]. In American popular culture, on many occasions, the library building is presented as big, grand, and imposing, like a church. Such a representation reflects the grandeur of library architecture of the nineteenth century that "featured marvelous, ornate open spaces that offered their patrons a cathedral-like atmosphere" [27, p. 14]. Libraries have been described as "those temples of learning, those granite-and-marble monuments" [52, p. 107]. Indeed, the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress offers the supreme symbolism of "the impressive central feature, a grand domed Reading room. So the architects affirmed the bibliophilic purpose of the building. By the great dome, gilded on the outside and topped by a golden torch, they focused on the national library on Capitol Hill some of the awe and sanctity usually associated with houses of worship" [53, p. 19]. Donald Davidson and Richard Budd argue that a stereotypical image of libraries has evolved from images of monumental structures of "austere but imposing buildings guarded by lions or eagles or oversized concrete urns" [54, p. 146]. This size and grandeur is treated in American popular culture in a number of ways. In some representations, the library is portrayed as an overbearing and overwhelming place.

In the animated children's film *The Pagemaster* [9], the image of the library plays a central role. Richie Tyler, an overly cautious ten-year-old, rides out astride his bike on an errand to buy nails from the local hardware store. A thunderstorm arises, and he rides through a dark tunnel. As Richie emerges on the other side, he finds himself in a strange landscape and crashes his bike into a tree. Looking up, he sees a large and imposing granite building with arches. There are statues of lions at the door that appear to roar at him in the thunder. Richie pushes open the huge door and steps inside out of the storm. The book version describes his impressions as follows:

Richard was out of breath and completely soaked. At least now he was safe from the raging storm outside. He looked around. The strange place seemed even bigger on the inside. The ceilings were very high. A marble staircase led to other floors. A row of statues cast huge eerie shadows across the walls.

Richard felt he had come upon a very mysterious place.

"Welcome to the library, young man," said a deep voice excitedly.

Richard jumped. The voice had come from a narrow aisle. Richard rubbed the rain from his eyes and looked down the aisle. That's when he noticed that there were many aisles. Each one held a row of shelves. And each shelf was filled with books.

There were rows upon rows of books. Shelves of books. Walls of books. Richard had never seen so many books in one place. [10, p. 12]

The film presents the library as existing in another dimension from Richie's everyday world. Richie's passage through the tunnel marks the threshold of one domain to another. The image of the library, with its roaring lions and "rows upon rows of books," is presented as being strange and frightening. Richie's library is described in images evocative of the religious mystery of the cathedral: high ceilings, many aisles, marble stairways, and a "row of statues," shrouded in "huge eerie shadows." Richie is afraid of the building and of getting lost within its labyrinth stacks: "Richard moved toward the aisles cautiously. There were so many rows. Suppose he made a wrong turn? Would he ever find his way back?" [10, p. 15]. In an institution of ultimate order, Richie is afraid of becoming lost.

In other depictions, the grandness of the library similarly becomes a stage for an eerie, haunted feeling, especially when the library is deserted. For example, in Stephen King's novella, *The Library Policeman* [6], the protagonist, Sam Peebles, reacts to the Junction City Public Library as follows: "Sam had gone to the library hundreds of times during his years at Junction City, but this was the first time he had really looked at it, and he discovered a rather amazing thing: he hated the place on sight" [6, p. 413]. Sam describes the library as looking like an "oversized crypt" [6, p. 414], and his reaction is one of distaste: "he didn't like it; it made him feel uneasy; he didn't know why. It was, after all, just a library, not the dungeons of the Inquisition" [6, p. 414]. In many ways, the library can be likened not only to the grandeur of the church, but also, as Sam observes, to the loneliness of the crypt. This imagery has some grounding in fact, in the dark tomblike visages of nineteenth-century libraries: "Picture to yourselves, if you will, a typical city library in, say, the year 1885. The building is dingy, if dignified, dimly lighted, its walls painted the ubiquitous muddy buff considered suitable for a public institution. Within is a desk shutting off the sacred book collection, which extends back into a dark crypt called the 'stacks'" [27, p. 26].

Susan Allen Toth describes a childhood memory of her public library in which, on entering, "a chilly breeze always seemed to be blowing up my back. The library and the [World War I Memorial] Union Hall, seemed to be places where things lay precariously at rest, just below

the surface, waiting to be summoned up again" [41, p. 90]. King picks up on this aspect of the discourse of fear explicitly. The library is represented as a repository of dead discourse, with moldering texts lined up and decaying like bodies in old coffins. Like the crypt, the potential horror lies behind the facade of the building; the bodies, ghosts, and spirits, encased within, ready to rise up if their silence is disturbed. As Sam Peebles enters the library, King offers the following descriptions and reactions: "The old fashioned latch-plate depressed under his thumb, and the heavy door swung noiselessly inward. Sam stepped into a small foyer with a marble floor in checkerboard black and white squares. An easel stood in the center of this antechamber. There was a sign propped on the easel; the message consisted of one word in very large letters. SILENCE!" [6, p. 415]. King continues: "The library was deserted. Shelves of books stretched above him on every side. Looking up toward the skylights with their crisscrosses of reinforcing wire made Sam a little dizzy, and he had a momentary illusion: he felt that he was upside down, that he had been hung by his heels over a deep square pit lined with books" [6, p. 417]. Both *The Library Policeman* and *The Pagemaster* portray the library as deserted, and this emptiness is another element of the discourse of fear. Entering the deserted library is presented as crossing into a new and different domain. Sam and Richie see themselves as trespassers in a bizarre, otherworldly place.

In Isaac Asimov's novel *Forward the Foundation* [4], the Library (with a capital L) plays a key role in Hari Seldon's attempts to save the Galactic Empire. The descriptions of Asimov's Library of another space and time provide one more instance in which the dominant images of libraries are ones of exaggerated scale, churchlike interiors, and the decay of the tomb. As is true of cathedrals, the architecture of the library is a testimony to its perceived permanence. Asimov writes: "The Galactic Library was the largest single structure on Trantor (possibly in the Galaxy), much larger than even the Imperial Palace, and it had once gleamed and glittered, as though boasting of its size and magnificence" [4, p. 303]. He continues, "the Library, having been built in the classical style of antiquity, was fronted with one of the grandest stairways to be found in the entire Empire, second only to the steps at the Imperial Palace itself. Most Library visitors, however, preferred to enter via the gliderail!" [4, p. 380].

The feeling that the library is like a church, or even a crypt (as in King's eyes), is also found in Asimov's description. Asimov writes: "Hari Seldon surveyed the comfortable suite that had been his personal office at the Galactic Library these past few years. It, like the rest of the Library, had a vague air of decay about it, a kind of weariness—something that had been too long in one place. And yet Seldon knew it might

remain here, in the same place, for centuries more—with judicious rebuildings—for millennia even” [4, p. 306]. In such settings, the librarian is represented, not as a person, but as an extension of the library itself. Consider the following perceptions of Malachi, the librarian from Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*:

“The library dates back to the earliest times,” Malachi said, “and the books are registered in order of their acquisition, donation, or entrance within our walls.”

“They are difficult to find, then,” William observed.

“It is enough for the librarian to know them by heart and know when each book came here. As for the other monks, they can rely on his memory.” He spoke as if discussing someone other than himself, and I realized he was speaking of the office that at that moment he unworthily held, but which had been held by a hundred others, now deceased, who handed down their knowledge from one to the other. [1, pp. 75–76]

Added to the fear of the library is the element of surveillance that the library structure invokes. Abigail Van Slyck writes extensively on the architecture of the Carnegie library and notes its centrally placed charging desk where the librarian could oversee “the entire library from its central position,” [41, p. 166] not only “checking all books in and out” but also checking all users [41, p. 208]. This position of overseeing and the constant feeling of surveillance it arouses in users is another part of the discourse of fear and is manifest in the film version of *Sophie’s Choice* [11]. Sophie enters the halls of a large library, the camera using a wide angle to reveal a huge atrium with marble pillars reaching to the lofty cathedral ceiling. Sophie’s footsteps echo on an expansive, highly polished marble floor, intruding on the quietness. The imposing male librarian, dressed in starched white collar, reminiscent of clerical garb, is enthroned behind a looming, elevated, pulpitlike reference desk, looking down on all who come before him. Sophie is visibly intimidated by the appearance of the library, but she bravely makes her way to the desk and hesitantly asks the reference librarian for assistance. In the interaction with the overbearing librarian that follows, Sophie’s initial intimidation by the appearance of the library and the position of the librarian behind the central desk is confirmed and magnified by the horrific encounter that is described in the following section.

The Humiliation of the User

Persistence was required of young readers as they approached the desk to look up into “sharp, hostile eyes be-

hind flashing spectacles," and often as not they found themselves moved to tears by the encounter.
(ABIGAIL A. VAN SLYCK, quoting Helen Hooven Santmyer [41, p. 203])

Although Sophie was intimidated, people have different reactions to the imposing structures of libraries [27]. The hushed tone can be peaceful and solemn for some, but it evokes fear in others. The typical university graduate will more than likely characterize library settings as "unfriendly, uncomfortable, or intimidating" [27, p. 1]. Academic researchers have also found that library users may be entering into the library, and especially approaching the librarian, with fear and trepidation [44, pp. 55–57].

Within the discourse of fear, the librarian is also portrayed as a fearsome figure and as one capable of handing out punishment in the form of public humiliation. Consider this description of the librarian from Eco's *The Name of the Rose*:

The librarian came to us. We already knew he was Malachi of Hildesheim. His face was trying to assume an expression of welcome, but I could not help shuddering at the sight of such a singular countenance. He was tall and extremely thin, with large and awkward limbs. As he took his great strides, cloaked in the black habit of the order, there was something upsetting about his appearance. The hood, which was still raised since he had come in from outside, cast a shadow on the pallor of his face and gave a certain suffering quality to his large melancholy eyes. 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 [1, p. 73].

Within the fearful architecture of the library building, under the fearsome gaze and surveillance of the fearsome librarian, one who "with one glance . . . could penetrate the heart of the person speaking to him, and read the secret thoughts," a discourse of fear is invoked that makes possible the most common reaction to the library experience in modern popular culture: the fear of getting caught and subsequently humiliated by the librarian. The story of Sam Peebles' visit to the library in King's *The Library Policeman* continues:

The acoustics of the place were very good, and his low murmur was magnified into a grouchy grumble that made him cringe. It actually seemed to bounce back at him from the high ceiling. At that moment he felt as if he were in the fourth grade again, and about to be called to task by Mrs. Glasters for cutting up rough at exactly the wrong moment. He looked uneasily around, half-expecting an ill-natured librarian to come swooping out of the main room to

see who had dared profane the silence. *Stop it, for Christ's sake. You're forty years old. Fourth grade was a long time ago, buddy.* Except it didn't seem like a long time ago. Not in here. In here, fourth grade seemed almost close enough to reach out and touch. [6, p. 416]

In many instances, entering the library is depicted as transforming the library user into a schoolchild. Abigail Van Slyke reports that the image of the fearsome librarian lingers into adulthood, as exemplified by Newton Marshall Hall whose memories of using the public library as a child in the 1870s "were dominated by the 'awful presence' of the librarian and the various mechanisms that this 'stern potentate behind the high desk' had used to hamper reader's access to books" [41, p. 209]. King's image of the "ill-natured librarian . . . swooping out of the main room to see who had dared profane the silence" resonates with the *Newark Star Ledger's* recent depiction of librarians who "prowled the stacks, shushing noisy readers or confiscating snacks" [58, p. 1]. Sam feels reprimanded in his encounter with the librarian who knows the collection intimately, wants it kept in order, and does not want Sam to disrupt this order:

"I know right where to find the books you need, Sam. I don't even have to check the card catalog."

"I could get them myself—"

"I'm sure," she said, "but they're in the Special Reference section, and I don't like to let people in there if I can help it. I'm very bossy about that, but I always know where to put my hand right on the things I need . . . back there anyway. People are so messy, they have so little regard for order, you know. Children are the worst, but even adults get up to didos if you let them. Don't worry about a thing. I'll be back in two shakes."

Sam had no intention of protesting further, but he wouldn't have had time even if he wanted to. She was gone. He sat on the bench, once more feeling like a fourth-grader . . . like a fourth grader who had done something wrong this time, who had gotten up to didos and so couldn't go out and play with the other children at recess. [6, p. 424]

This theme of power and humiliation is played out in a key scene from the motion picture *Party Girl* [7]. The central character, Mary, has taken a job as a library clerk in an act of desperation to pay her rent and is at the reference desk surrounded by piles of books. She is portrayed, in the best tradition of the stereotype, mechanically stamping books. Mary looks up and, seeing a young male library user, says: "Excuse me, what are you doing?" People are shown sitting at tables, reading books in silence. The young man is walking; his hand rests on a book in the stacks. At the sound of Mary's voice, he stops abruptly and stares at Mary in silence. He raises his hand to his chest in a gesture that says "Who? Me?" Mary continues: "Yeh, you . . . Were you just putting that book away?" Another library user enters the scene and

waits at the reference desk. The young man stands frozen. "It looked as though you were putting that book away," Mary says. The user at the reference desk looks around with a shocked expression. The people at the nearby reading tables raise their heads. Some look toward the young man; others look toward Mary. Sarcastically, Mary says: "I guess you didn't know we had a system for putting books away here." Now all eyes are on Mary, except for one man in a blue shirt who has his back to Mary and continues reading. Mary continues: "Now, I'm curious . . . you're just randomly putting that book on the shelf, is that it?" The young man is shown in close up. He looks lost, helpless, and trapped, like a deer in the headlights. He is 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 is now speaking to her audience seated at the reading tables. "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 now and bangs her fist on the desk. "We don't care, right? Isn't that right!" The woman in front of the desk looks angrily at the man. The user in the blue shirt turns around, looking surprised but amused. The others do not move or speak. They are staring at Mary. The accused man remains fixed and silent.

This scene is one of several that depict the metamorphosis of Mary from carefree party girl to librarian. It follows a scene in which Mary has an epiphany when grasping the organizational scheme of the Dewey Decimal System for the first time. Mary's chief duty at the library has consisted of shelving books, a job which she has taken quite seriously. She regards the young man's ill-timed placement of a reference book in the wrong place as both a personal affront and a serious threat to the well-ordered reference area. Rather than coming out from behind the reference desk to tactfully whisper in the ear of the young man that she could assist him in the reshelving of the reference book, she chooses to stand behind the desk and shout sarcastically at him. Mary exposes his guilt to the others present, revealing his shameful behavior and availing herself of the most painful weapon of the stereotypical librarian—public humiliation.

The themes of humiliation, punishment, and domain are also brought out in a sketch called "Conan the Librarian" from the movie *UHF* [8]. As the scene opens, the camera pans the stacks of a small-town public library. One man is seated at a table wearing a tweed jacket with bright-yellow elbow-patches. Other library users are seen standing in the stacks. One person, who is standing in the stacks looking in a book, gives a look of annoyance as another brushes by. The camera

pans and comes to rest on the midriff of a huge man holding a sword. The voice-over declares in a deep and powerful voice: "Never before has there been a screen presence so commanding, so deadly, so powerful—he's Conan the Librarian!"

The next shot is taken from a high angle over Conan's shoulder. Looking down on the man in the tweed jacket, is a small, balding man with glasses. The man looks terrified and is playing with his hands. He timidly asks Conan: "Can you tell me where I can find a book on astronomy?" Then Conan's arm, with a huge, bulging bicep, lifts the man from the floor by the scruff of the neck. The bright-yellow elbow patches on the man's tweed jacket are prominently displayed. Conan pulls the man high enough so he can put his face directly in front of the terrified man's. In an Arnold Schwarzenegger-like voice, Conan demands: "Don't you know the Dewey Decimal System?"

The next shot shows Conan standing behind a desk with a large sign that reads "Return Books Here." Conan stands erect, holding his sword. The narrator announces: "Conan the Librarian!" Two teenage boys approach the desk. Again, the camera angle is high, taking Conan's view, looking down on the two adolescents. One boy says: "Sorry, these books are a little overdue." He gives a nervous snicker. Conan snarls, raises his sword, and slices the boy in two! In Conan's library, death is the ultimate punishment for overdue books.

The final scene is a low-angle shot looking up at Conan's huge, body-builder physique. He is holding a pile of books in one hand and his sword in the other. He is surveying his domain, the library. Conan is keeper of the order, like Mary, reprimanding any who are ignorant of the library's system of preserving order, allowing no library user to disrupt that order, and swiftly and severely punishing any who dare to do so.

Returning to a discussion of *Sophie's Choice*, a famous example of the themes of librarian control and public humiliation of library users is presented. In the book *Sophie's Choice* [11], which takes place soon after World War II, Sophie has immigrated to America after having been in a Nazi concentration camp. She has discovered the poetry of Emily Dickinson in an English-language class, and she comes to the library to take out a poetry book. Sophie has misunderstood the name of the poet to be Emil Dickens, but she was quite elated by her professor's reading of the poetry:

But the incredible emotion evaporated swiftly. It was gone by the time she entered the library, and long before she encountered the librarian behind the desk—a Nazi. No, of course he was not a Nazi, not only because the black-and-white nameplate identified him as Mr. Shalom Weiss but because—well, what would a Nazi be doing appropriating volume after volume of the earth's

humane wisdom at Brooklyn College Library? But Shalom Weiss, a pallid, dour, thirtyish man with aggressive horn-rims and a green eyeshade, was such a startling double of every heavy, unbending, mirthless German bureaucrat and demi-monster she had known in years past that she had the weird sense that she had been thrust back into the Warsaw of the occupation. And it was doubtless this moment of *deja vu*, this rush of identification, that caused her to become so quickly and helplessly unstrung. Feeling suffocatingly weak and ill again, she asked Shalom Weiss in a diffident voice where the catalogue file would be in which she might find listed the works of the nineteenth-century American poet Emil Dickens.

"In the catalogue room, first door to the left," muttered Weiss, unsmiling. Then after a long pause, he added, "but you won't find any such listing."

"Won't find any such listing?" Sophie echoed him, puzzled. Following a moment's silence, she said, "Could you tell me why?"

"Charles Dickens is an *English* writer. There is *no* American poet by the name of Dickens." His voice was so sharp and hostile as to be like an incision.

Swept with sudden nausea, light-headed and with a perilous tingling moving across her limbs like the faint prickling of a multitude of needles, Sophie watched with dispassionate curiosity as Shalom Weiss's face, sullenly inflexible in its graven unpleasantness, seemed to float way ever so slightly from the neck and the confining collar. I feel so terribly sick, she said to herself as if to some invisible, solicitous doctor, but managed to choke out to the librarian, "I'm sure there is an American poet Dickens." Thinking then that those lines, those reverberant lines with their miniature, sorrowing music of mortality and time, would be as familiar to an American librarian as anything, as household objects are, or a patriotic anthem, or one's own flesh, Sophie felt her lips part to say, *Because I could not stop for Death . . .* She was hideously nauseated. And she failed to realize that in the intervening seconds there had registered somewhere in the precincts of Shalom Weiss's unmagnanimous brain her stupid contradiction of him, and its insolence. Before she could utter the line, she heard his voice rise against every library decree of silence and cause a distant, shadowy turning of heads. A hoarse rasping whisper—querulous, poisoned with needless ill will—his retort was freighted with all the churlish indignation of petty power. "Listen, I *told* you," the voice said, "there is *no such* a person! You want me to draw you a *picture*! I am *telling* you, do you *hear* me!" [11, pp. 103–4]

Sophie's terror over the encounter with the librarian relates to her previous experiences at the hands of the Nazis. Yet this analogy fits with little dissonance within the structures of the discourse of fear. Sophie is portrayed as feeling powerless in the face of the librarians's authority and is unable to control her feelings of helplessness and shame. The librarian does not attempt to ask Sophie to clarify her request, but assumes that she is ignorant. He chooses to publicly humiliate Sophie, in a manner similar to Mary's tirade and humiliation of the young man in *Party Girl* and the physical violence and killing of users in *Conan the Librarian*. These portrayals are exaggerated for the purposes of comic effect, but the contours of the discourse of fear are at their most exposed in such examples. Beyond the fear of humiliation by the librar-

ian, there stands what might be considered the ultimate manifestation of the discourse of fear: the Library Policeman.

The Fear of the Library Policeman

I had loved the library as a kid—why not? It was the only place a relatively poor kid like me could get all the books he wanted—but as I continued to write, I became acquainted with a deeper truth: I had also feared it. I feared becoming lost in the dark stacks, I feared being forgotten in a dark corner of the reading room, and ending up locked in for the night. I feared the old librarian with the blue hair and the cat's-eye glasses and the almost lipless mouth who would pinch the backs of your hands with her long, pale fingers and hiss "Shhhh!" if you forgot where you were and started to talk too loud. And yes, I feared the Library Police.
(STEPHEN KING [6, p. 405])

As if the terror of the librarian were not enough, the discourse of fear also makes possible the Library Police, "the faceless enforcers who would *actually come to your house* if you didn't bring your overdue books back" [6, p. 386]. The fear of the Library Police coming to your house is bad enough, but King raises the questions that all users keep repressed in the dark recesses of the mind for fear of the answers to which they give rise: "What if you couldn't find the books in question when those strange lawmen turned up? What then? What would they do to you? What might it take to make up for those missing volumes?" [6, p. 404].

What makes the apparently unfounded fear of the library police possible is the discursive practice of the discourse of fear. The Library Police are the ultimate and exaggerated manifestation of the fear and consequences of a user bringing disorder to the otherwise complete and perfectly shelved collection.⁵ The idea that library users should have free and easy access to books and other materials is a relatively modern one, the ideal library having been thought of in antiquity as the one that had its collection intact, well-preserved, and sheltered from the user. In 1876, Melvil Dewey championed the idea that "libraries were not for hoarding books but for getting them into the hands of readers. . . . What Dewey and other progressives had to counter at this time was the attitude of such traditional custodians as the Harvard librarian who once joyfully boasted that all his books were in place

5. The themes of the discourse of fear are also dominant in reportage of libraries and librarians. For two outrageous examples, see appendix B.

except two in the possession of Professor Agassiz, which he was just then on his way to fetch" ([59] quoted in [27], p. 20). In the year of 1890, "Cleveland boldly became the first large public library to 'allow unrestricted access to all persons, to all books, at all times.' Not everyone agreed with the move, however. In 1886 Princeton's Frederick Vinton worried that if the public had access to library shelves, future generations would suffer 'the sure result of promiscuous handling of the books by some hundred persons'" [60, p. 104]. Along with this shift in attitude to library users have come conditions and rules for their use of library materials, one of them the ubiquitous penalty (usually in the form of a fine) for "overdue" materials, that is, materials not returned within the specified loan period. Usually the fine is nominal, say, ten or twenty-five cents a day. The idea of such small fines generating the absolute fear of the library police is a contradiction, one that is addressed by Jerry Seinfeld in his monologue in an episode of the television show *Seinfeld* entitled "The Library":

What's amazing to me about the library is—now here's a place where you can go in and take out any book; they just give it to you and say bring it back when you're done with it. It reminds me of like this pathetic friend everybody had when they were a little kid that would let you borrow any of his stuff if you will just be his friend, you know. That's what the library is: it's a government-funded pathetic friend. That's why everybody kind of bullies the library: "I'll bring it back on time, I'll bring it back late—oh, what you gonna do? Charge me a nickel?!" [12]

But the discourse of fear makes possible the magnification of such nominal fines into a brutish and terrible fear. The fear has a name, if not a reality: the Library Police. The fact that the Library Police exist more in the realm of imagination than reality makes them even more frightening because the terrors they invoke come from within the user's mind. In King's *The Library Policeman* [6], Sam encounters the librarian, Ardelia Lortz, and borrows two books to prepare for a speech. The librarian admonishes him, as one would a small child, to return his books on time, and she threatens him with the ultimate sanction the library has to offer: a visit from the Library Policeman: "'[The books are] not renewable, so be sure to get them back by April sixth.' She raised her head, and the light caught in her eyes. Sam almost dismissed what he saw there as a twinkle . . . but that wasn't what it was. It was a shine. A flat, hard shine. For just a moment Ardelia Lortz looked as if she had a nickel in each eye. 'Or?' he asked, and his smile suddenly didn't feel like a smile—it felt like a mask. 'Or else I'll have to send the Library Policeman after you,' she said." [6, p. 428]

This is all the librarian has to say to bring out the worst nightmares in Sam. These fears intensify when Sam forgets about the library books.

When, at last, he remembers that the books are due and tries to locate them, he can not remember where he put them. Realizing that they are lost, he becomes worried:

Toward midnight, his thoughts turned to Ardelia Lortz, and that was when things really began to get bad. He began to think of how awful it would be if Ardelia Lortz was in his closet, or even under his bed. He saw her grinning happily, secretly, in the dark, wriggling fingers tipped with long, sharp nails, her hair sprayed out all around her face in a weird fright wig. He imagined how his bones would turn to jelly if she began to whisper to him.

You lost the books, Sam, so it will have to be the Library Policeman . . . you lost the books . . . you loooosst them . . . At last, around twelve-thirty, Sam couldn't stand it any longer. He sat up and fumbled in the dark for the bedside lamp. And as he did, he was gripped by a new fantasy, one so vivid it was almost a certainty: he was not alone in his bedroom, but his visitor was not Ardelia Lortz. Oh no. His visitor was the Library Policeman . . . He was standing there in the dark, a tall, pale man wrapped in a trenchcoat, a man with a bad complexion and a white jagged scar lying across his left cheek, below his left eye, and over the bridge of his nose. [6, p. 471]

Similarly, Jerry Seinfeld's humor about the consequences of not returning books on time changes abruptly when the "library investigator," Mr. Bookman comes to Jerry's house, as King predicted, to find out where the book has gone [12]:

Bookman: "You took this book out in 1971."

Jerry: "Yes, and I returned it in 1971."

Bookman: "Yeh, '71. That was my first year on the job. A bad year for libraries, a bad year for America. Hippies burning library cards, Abbie Hoffman telling everybody to steal books. I don't judge a man by the length of his hair and the kind of music he listens to—rock was never my bag. But you put on a pair of shoes when you walk into the New York Public Library, fella!"

Jerry: "Look, Mr. Bookman, I returned that book. I remember it very specifically."

Bookman: "You're a comedian. You make people laugh."

Jerry: "I try."

Bookman: "You think this is all a big joke, don't ya?"

Jerry: "No, I don't."

Bookman: "I saw you on TV once; I remembered your name, from my list. I looked it up. Sure enough, it checked out. You think because you're a celebrity that somehow the law doesn't apply to you? That you're above the law?"

Jerry: "Certainly not!"

Bookman: "Well, let me tell you something, funny boy! You know that little stamp? The one that says New York Public Library? Well, that may not mean anything to you, but it means a lot to me. One whole hell of a lot. Sure, go ahead, laugh if you want to. I've seen your type before. Flashy, making the scene, flaunting convention. Yeh, I know what you're thinking; what's this guy doing making a such a big stink about a library book? Let me give you a hint, junior! Maybe we can live without libraries, people like you and me, maybe.

Sure, we're too old to change the world. But what about that kid, sitting down, opening a book, right now, in a branch of the local library, and finding pictures of pee-pees and wee-wees on the cat in the hat, and the five Chinese brothers? Doesn't he deserve better? Look, if you think this is about overdue fines and missing books, you'd better think again. This is about that kid's right to read a book without getting his mind warped. Maybe that turns you on, Seinfeld; maybe that's how you get your kicks, you and your good-time buddies. Well, I got a flash for you, joy-boy! Party time is over! You got seven days, Seinfeld. That's one week!" [12]

Jerry's library policeman is portrayed as a stereotypical hard-boiled cop. Key features are present from the discourse of fear: Bookman's brusque and lecturing tone, his condescending attitude toward Jerry, his profession, and his supposed lifestyle. Bookman makes it clear that Jerry's life pales in comparison with the importance of keeping the collection of the New York Public Library intact. The element of surveillance is also present in Bookman's reference to having Jerry on his "list." Like the librarian, the Library Policeman has the ability to humiliate, to shame, to take children to task over forgotten responsibilities, and to mete out punishments. But beyond the librarian, the Library Policeman has the ability to carry out terrible and brutal retribution. The Library Policeman becomes the librarian in a trenchcoat. In King's *The Library Policeman*, Sam's worst worries become a reality when the Library Policeman comes to visit:

He advanced toward the kitchen—toward Sam, who was cowering against the counter and staring at the intruder with the huge, shocked eyes of a terrified child, of some poor fourth-grade Simple Simon . . . he was over seven feet tall. His body was wrapped in a trenchcoat the leaden color of fog at twilight. His skin was paper white. His face was dead, as if he could understand neither kindness nor love nor mercy. His mouth was set in lines of ultimate, passionless authority and Sam thought for one confused moment of how the closed library door had looked, like the slotted mouth in the face of a granite robot. The Library Policeman's eyes appeared to be silver circles that had been punctured by tiny shotgun pellets. They were rimmed with pinkish-red flesh that looked ready to bleed. They were lashless . . . Sam Peebles, darling of the Junction City Rotary Club, wet his pants. He felt his bladder go in a warm gush, but that seemed far away and unimportant. What was important was that there was a monster in his kitchen . . . He never thought of running. The idea of flight was beyond his capacity to imagine. He was a child again, a child who has been caught red-handed. [6, pp. 486–87]

"Look at me," the distant, thudding voice instructed. It was the voice of an evil god. "No," Sam cried in a shrieky, breathless voice, and then burst into helpless tears. It was not just terror, although the terror was real enough, bad enough. Separate from it was a cold deep drift of childish fright and childish shame. Those feelings clung like poison syrup . . . *Whack!* Something struck Sam's head and he screamed. "*Look at me!*"

Sam was now helpless to look away from that merciless face, those silver eyes with their tiny birdshot pupils. He was slobbering and knew it but was help-

less to stop that, either. "You have two books which belong to uth," the Library Policeman said. His voice still seemed to be coming from a distance, or from behind a thick pane of glass. "Mith Lorth is very upthet with you, Mr. Peebles."

"I lost them," Sam said, beginning to cry harder. The thought of lying to this man about the books, about *anything* was out of the question. He was all authority, all power, all force. He was judge, jury, and executioner . . . "I . . . I . . . I." "I don't want to hear your thick ecthuses," the Library Policeman said . . . he reached into his left pocket and drew out a knife with a long, sharp blade. Sam, who had spent three summers earning money for college as a stockboy, recognized it. It was a carton-slitter. There was undoubtedly a knife like that in every library in America. "You have until midnight. Then . . ."

He leaned down, extending the knife in one white, corpselike hand. That freezing envelope of air struck Sam's face, numbed it. He tried to scream and could produce only a glassy whisper of silent air. The tip of the blade pricked the flesh of his throat. It was like being pricked with an icicle. A single bead of scarlet oozed out and then froze solid, a tiny seed-pearl of blood. "Then I come again," the Library Policeman said in his odd, lisp-rounded voice. "You better find what you loht, Mr. Peebles." [6, pp. 488-89]

The horror here, as in the previous examples, is connected to fears of being shamed like a child and of being humiliated by an authority figure who threatens self-esteem and ultimately bodily harm. King is known for creating works of horror that evoke one's worst childhood fears. His choice of the specter of the Library Policeman seems to be an arbitrary one. However, combined with the five other images presented in this article—Conan the Librarian wielding a sword against library users with overdue books, Seinfeld being harangued by Mr. Bookman for a book overdue for twenty years, Richie being fearful of the library in *The Pagemaster*, Mary of *Party Girl* humiliating the young man for disrupting the order of the library through misshelving a book, and Sophie, also being humiliated for having incorrect bibliographic information to present to the librarian—there is a striking consistency of representations of the library and encounters with librarians as having underlying currents of fear.

The Discourse of Fear and Librarians and Users

Like the prison, an institution that transforms subjects into prisoners, the library, as an institution, first and foremost transforms subjects into librarians and users. As far as we know, there has been no analysis done that examines the processes through which subjects become librarians and users in the same sense as Foucault describes how subjects become

prisoners. The discourse of fear is much more than a label. It is an encapsulation of a set of practices and a way of being. Through discourses inscribed in practices, subjects stand in particular arrangements with respect to each other in the institutional space of the library. To engage in any meaningful way within the library context, one has to take on the identity of librarian and user and perform those acts that are consistent with those roles. One does not choose these roles; it is the other way around: the roles choose the subject. The subject becomes an integral part of the context and is defined within the limits of the discourse of fear.

From Foucault's and our point of view, the librarian, or even the library scholar, cannot step outside of this discourse. The point we make here, and, to be sure, it is not a comfortable one, is that these arrangements are made possible by an overarching and constitutive discourse of fear. It is the themes of fear and control that make the library possible. Librarians cannot "choose" another style of discourse in which to represent their activity. Subjects become librarians because of the discourse of fear. The discourse always comes first. It is always one step ahead of any individual action because it is the discourse that makes that action possible. One cannot get behind or beyond the discourse since the act of transgression, indeed its very idea, is made possible by the actual discourse to be transgressed. Any so-called act of transgression must always fall within the parameters of the discourse. It can never fall beyond.

The discourse of fear is a universal and totalizing organizing principle that gives the library its place in modern cultural forms and in institutionalized action. From this point of view, it does not matter if the librarian you know at your public library is friendly and comforting. It does not matter that you, personally, really enjoy working in the library. It does not matter if your students find the library and its function a place of comfort. The discourse of fear is a cultural form, not a part of individual or social psychology. It is what makes possible the knowledge that you are in a library and speaking to a librarian at all. It is to this level of analysis that the model provided by Michel Foucault must be employed.

The question to which this discussion leads, of course, is this: How does a viewpoint such as ours benefit the library profession? The arguments presented here are indeed sobering. They seem to suggest a certain powerlessness in the face of all-powerful discursive forms such as the discourse of fear. In a culture predicated on notions of freedom, free will, and personal autonomy, such ideas are foreign and counter-intuitive. What Foucault brings to the profession is the insight that dis-

course is constitutive; that who we are is determined, in large measure, by how we speak, and that how we speak stands in a reflexive relationship to how we act.

Conclusion

The discourse of fear described in this article is not a comforting way in which to consider libraries and librarians, yet the long history of the negative librarian stereotype suggests that there is validity to it. The purpose of this analysis is not to simply reinforce the negative images that dominate popular culture representations. Nor do we mean to suggest that any individual libraries and librarians have any of the characteristics attributed to them by the discourse of fear. Rather, the objective here is to gain a means of understanding these representations that goes beyond a simple acknowledgment of their existence and, as it is prevalent in the library literature, a bibliography of where they occur. There is a need to examine the ground that makes such representations possible, the soil from which they grow and make sense. That ground is to be found in a discourse of fear, a universal symbolic environment in which images of libraries and librarians are presented and come to make sense. As mentioned previously, the discourse of fear is not a fear of libraries but a fundamental fear of the power of discourse itself. The work of Michel Foucault provides a lens with which to view and understand the nature of this environment.

Modern popular culture is a good place to begin this analysis because its images are the most visible and least ambiguous. Using popular culture representations, we have attempted to outline some fundamental contours of a library genre. In ways similar to genres such as horror or mystery, the library genre has a developed and extremely stable set of features. As a result, an understanding of the library as genre would require the analytical tools provided by literary and cultural studies. The work of Foucault provides one model of how this might be done, but others, such as Stuart Hall [61] and John Fiske [62], would be equally insightful.

Because of the negative ways in which libraries and librarians appear within the discourse of fear, there is the temptation, of course, to somehow situate the library within a different kind of discourse, one that is more upbeat, positive, and friendly. Unfortunately, this would be difficult, if not impossible. As Foucault has shown, one does not simply pick and choose a discourse. The process works the other way around; it is the discourse that makes the library recognizable as a library. The discourse of fear is a cultural code, set in a particular sociohistorical

context and with strong ties to other discursive forms, such as those constituting the prison. It is the means through which the very identity of the library, and the librarians within it, come to be recognized as such. Libraries are understood through metaphors of control, tombs, labyrinths, morgues, dust, ghosts, silence, and humiliation. In examining popular-culture treatments of the library, one does not see the library as a metaphor of light, happiness, comfort, or joy. Even if one did, these metaphors would be set against the prevailing horizon of the discourse of fear. The portrayal of a librarian as young, energetic, and friendly would be meaningful only against the prevailing negative stereotype of the female librarian as an aging, scowling spinster. The movie *Party Girl* is a perfect example of this. The value of the positive representation is always determined by its departure from the negative, and it would not constitute a new discourse in its own right. The meaning of the library and the librarian is ultimately determined by the discourse of fear.

But the discourse of fear goes further than this, and the representations of libraries and librarians provide only the starting point for a more sweeping analysis of the ways in which discourse shapes practice (and vice versa) within institutional settings. Popular culture representations provide a window on more fundamental practices that shape everyday perception and action within the library setting. The next step in this project is to address the role of discourse within actual library settings and to describe how the discourse of fear provides the backdrop of understanding for actual library practices.

As far as we can tell, to date there has not been any analysis conducted that has attempted to investigate the grounds from which the library is constituted in these terms. Such an investigation certainly would be a grand analysis and one that will take library scholars far beyond their traditional domains. The ultimate outcome of such an analysis would be to situate the library, and the discourse of fear, within prevailing systems of power and knowledge that constitute and maintain all of the discourses and institutions within contemporary Western civilization. This would be a big step, but an exciting one, and one that library scholarship needs to take in earnest.

Appendix A

Foucault argued that the term "discourse" was only meaningful within the confines of a prevailing discursive practice (that is, a discourse). Similarly, the validity and truth value of the term "paradigm" must be subject to the nature of a prevailing paradigm in which it is used (see

[63]). Kuhn writes that "monitoring conversations, particularly among the book's enthusiasts, I have sometimes found it hard to believe that all parties to the discussion had been engaged with the same volume. Part of the reason for its success is, I regretfully conclude, that it can be nearly all things to all people" [64, p. 459]. The metalanguage of both Foucault and Kuhn becomes, by virtue of their theoretical stance, very slippery. The question can always be raised: What is the prevailing discourse or paradigm that gives the theories "discourse" and "paradigm" the status of serious speech acts?

Appendix B

The themes of the discourse of fear are also dominant in reportage of libraries and librarians. For example, consider the following story reported in *American Libraries* [65]. The magazine reported that on January 13, 2000, Beverly Goldman, age 24, pregnant mother of two children ages 5 and 6, was arrested and held in jail for eight hours for failing to return seven children's books and videotapes to the Clearwater Florida Public library. She was released after promising to pay the \$127.86 she owed for the items, which were overdue for 16 months. The library director, John Szabo reportedly said: "We don't want to put people in jail. This is not something the library enjoys doing or even wants to do" [65, p. 22]. However, this was not the first arrest that had been made; six days earlier, Jeremy Soder, age 19, had been jailed for not returning \$80 worth of materials that were overdue to the same Clearwater library.

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