Librarians and Gumshoes:

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The project & process

“Data set ”--Agatha, Anthony & Edgar Award Winners: Fiction, Adult, 1995-2005

Methodology

• Read them: 83 in total
  • Looked for any reference to libraries or librarians or web research in book or in preface.
  • Looked for author interviews, particularly as they discuss research.
  • Specifically looking for library vs. net

slide backdrops are images of specific libraries mentioned in books when possible

Radcliffe Library @ Oxford
The award is named after Mystery Writers of America’s patron saint, Edgar Allan Poe, and is awarded to authors of distinguished work in various categories of the genre.

Created in 1986 by the Bouchercon World Mystery Convention in memory of mystery writer and critic Anthony Boucher to recognize outstanding achievement in the mystery field. The members of each Bouchercon make the nominations for the Awards and also vote for their choice in each category.

The awards honor the traditional mystery; that is "mysteries of manners"--books best typified by the works of Agatha Christie. The genre is generally characterized by mysteries that contain no explicit sex, excessive gore, or gratuitous violence; usually featuring an amateur detective, they have a confined setting and characters who know one another.
Looking for shift from libraries to web but found:

- Stereotypes of librarians dispelled
- Nice stereotypes of librarians
- Negative stereotypes
- Information is pivotal to solving the mystery
- Wry observations of the library
- Warm and Fuzzy Memories of the library
She’s a short-haired woman in bicycle pants, and she passes me in no time. “I’ll get that bastard,” she says, hardly puffing as she whizzes by, cowlick flying...

The cop comes running from the entrance to the playground, but the young woman doesn’t need his help. She clambers onto the man’s back and wrenches his arm behind him. It’s a done deal by the time the cop and the teenager reach the middle of the huge field, which is when I guess the young woman must be an undercover cop.


“It’s okay now, baby. It’s all over”

“What are they gonna do?”

“They’re gonna put him in jail.”

I pick her up and walk over to the crowd. The cop has handcuffed him and flipped him over on his back. The woman has her running shoe at his Adam’s apple. She gives me a brusque wave as I approach.

“We got him,” the cop says.

Please. “You had an assist, I think, from the FBI. “

The cop and the woman exchange looks over the unconscious man.

“Are you with the feds?” the cop says.

“Me? Are you kidding?” The young woman laughs. “I’m a librarian.”
“I also need to drive to Charlottesville tomorrow to consult the UVA medical library.”

*Everything hinges on this: the historical murderer denies her husband the arsenic he’s become addicted to, thereby killing him without a trace.*

*First of all, to write entertainingly about a region takes talent and a genuine love of the place, and to write knowledgeably about a region requires the sort of research that people usually put into dissertations. I read history, geography, geology, British and Irish history and natural history, and scores of other non-fiction works on everything from handicrafts to Cherokee folklore.*

*Southern Scribe*
“Still, I don’t think relying exclusively on a computer is smart. You simply cannot get everything you need online and the facts you do generate often come without the nuances that give them true value. For that you need personal contact....To find out I dialed up Vu/TEXT, the database of the St. Paul Pioneer Press.”
“Oh, it’s such a crime the way they teach poetry in schools, especially the way they teach Dickinson. Really she has so much to say to these alienated young people. She’s very accessible. I taught English for thirty years, before I retired, and sometimes I worry that the readers of poetry are dying off one by one. I have this recurring vision that one day the very last of us will be walking home for a library with a book under arm and keel over and that will be the end of the breed, and no one will ever know or mourn it.”

A relentless self-improver, she joined Toastmasters to hone her speaking skills; flew to L.A. to take Robert McKee's screenwriting course (to help her plotting); and took a workshop on researching from Austin mystery writer PW 8/95
“And old Billings didn’t make it any easier, let me tell you. He has—had—that good old librarian idea that all the books ought to be left nice and safe on the shelves.....

My most valuable resource for the Hilda books, though, is my local public library. They have an excellent local history collection, and excellent, cooperative librarians. Jeanne Dams

Writers Write   May 2000
Up Jumps the Devil  Margaret Maron  Agatha 1997

“Ambrose Daughtridge, who had represented Clea Beecham and her small daughter, sat at the opposing table. Mid-fifties, silver haired, soft spoken and courtly, he looks as if he should be cataloging books in a library at some small elite college.”

I do a lot of my research through books, and I use libraries extensively. It's always been very helpful when a library either has a book in its own holdings or can get me a copy through interlibrary loan. Another great thing I used the library for before I was online (I don't do it so much anymore) was the reference desk. For years, I asked the reference librarians questions, and I think I only stumped them once. And if they couldn't get me the answer within five minutes, they'd be calling back within the hour with the information I needed.  Booklist  May 1, 2001
Special Librarian Laurie Prine helps out. :

”Oh no,” she said cheerfully, “when you come in and sit down, I know it’s going to be a long one.” She was referring to the extensive search requests I usually made in preparation for stories. A lot of the crime stories I wrote spiraled into wide-ranging law enforcement issues. I always needed to know what else had been written about the subject and where.”
Death in Little Tokyo  Dale Furutani Anthony  1997

“In the basement of the museum is an entire room devoted the relocation camps. In this room is a computer system set up so you can search for the camp record of any inmate.”

My intention is to create something entertaining, but I wanted to be as accurate as possible. I've gathered well over 100 books for research, and I just returned from Japan where I did more research. Writers Write Jan 1998

Japanese American Museum
After dinner I took out my mother’s old family photo album and began leafing through the stiffened pages of forty years ago. At the top of the page my mother, always the librarian, had written the year each group of pictures was taken.
Tess had gone to the Pratt library, the usually reliable Maryland Room did not carry junior high yearbooks.

I have always loved mysteries and thrillers. I remember reading my first Encyclopedia Brown when I was a kid. I drove my parents nuts wanting to go to the library and check out the rest of the series. LL: http://www.karinslaughter.com/interviewLL.html
“Senate records every committee hearing. If you have the date and the time—and it’s right there, so you do—you can go over to the Legislative Reference and listen on a pair of headsets, just like it was an old radio show.”

Referring to the Enoch Pratt Free Library------Tess had long cherished this island of privacy in downtown Baltimore, with its view of the verdigris domed Basilica of the Assumption.
“I was especially proud of the little lending library I had built up. Because paper was getting scarce and books were in short supply, I rented them out for tuppence a week. I kept a good selection of World’s Classic editions: Anthony Trollope, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens in particular. I also stocked a number of the more sensational novels, Agatha Christie and the Mills and Boon romances, for those who like such things—unfortunately, the majority of my customers!
Enchilada Roja was easy to spot on the horizon, but it seemed to keep shifting as Tess drove toward it. Outside and in, it was the antitheses of her beloved Enoch Pratt—gorgeous appointments, state of the art computers, even a room dedicated to genealogical research. The only thing in short supply was books. The shelves yawned with empty spaces.

“Do you keep a lot of your collection in the stacks?” Tess asked the librarian who showed her where to find the local newspapers. “What you see is what you get,” the young man said.

He had a long silky ponytail and Bambi eyes. Tess noticed the periodical section seemed unusually crowded with a large number of high school girls peering at the librarian over the tops of Teen People, but her guide seemed oblivious to his fan club.

“I guess they thought if they built the buildings, the books would take care of themselves.”
The historical museum, located in the old brick and stone Carnegie library, was the pride and joy of my gramma Dove and her cronies in the San Celina County Historical Society.

I probably spend about 20 30% of my time in research, reading and actually going out on "field trips." It's one of the really fun parts of my job, the interesting places it has taken me, the lives I am able to catch a glimpse of "close up." It's like living other people's lives for just a little while.

(author’s website)
“Millard King? Yes, I know him, said the librarian. Why?”

-He said you passed him out on the track at the Dobbs middle school Saturday afternoon”

Peggy Lasater wrinkled her forehead in an effort to remember.

-He said you were wearing red shorts and a white shirt.

“Did he happen to mention that I was also wearing a Walkman?”

-No Walkman.

“People think if you’re a librarian, you spend your days reading. They should see all the shelving and cataloging we do. When I run? That’s when I get to read.”

-Read?

The librarian nodded.

“Books on tape. I did run Saturday afternoon, but I was too absorbed in the last Charlotte MacLeod to notice anything except where I was putting my feet. Sorry.”
“He did not like the development of the investigation. Nor his plan for the day: to do a day’s research in the Shanghai Library.

The librarian was a nice woman, moving about briskly in her high heels, but a stickler for library rules. All she could give him at one time were the issues of one particular magazine for a year. For anything more, he had to write out a new order slip.
Black Maria Mark Graham Edgar 2001

“To Andrea Gottshalk, archivist at the Fairmount Park Commission, for the time she generously spent taking me through a private tour of Memorial Hall. Ms Gottshalk allowed me access to the archives of Fairmount Park and to a rare panoramic photograph of the Centennial Exhibition. To Tom Gaughan, Director of the Trexler Library, Muhlenberg College, and Kristin Harakal of the Interlibrary Loan department who made it possible for me to acquire numerous rare guidebooks to 1876 Philadelphia.
“It was an hour later that Percolin wrapped up. He snapped off his gloves, slapped them into a bin marked dangerous medical waste, and crooking a finger at them, led them to a small library off the hallway, densely packed with books and journals.”

The internet is a big help. It used to take a whole day to go to a library and find something. Just getting a parking place in Chicago can be an hour’s work.
(Mystery One Bookstore website)
Conspiracy of Paper       David Liss       Edgar 2001

“So I thought it a fine idea to take advantage of the library available in the coffeehouse, and made my way over to the shelves, where I began to search through the mountains of material, organized in no way I could discern.”
The library is quartered in the former Customs House, a square two-story building close to the fort. Built by the Danes over two hundred years ago, the library’s coral and molasses walls—the tropical equivalent of Elizabethan wattle and daub—were two feet thick.

*Recent President of Sisters in Crime said, “PW devoted just 43% of its 2003 mystery review space to books by women authors, down from 50% in 2002.” PW 4/19/04*
She walked quickly down the length of the room into a library cluttered with reference books and journals. Joe followed, there was a computer and fax machine on one stand and a microfiche reader on another. She put her coat and handbag on a shelf while she booted up the computer, double-clicked through a series of menu screens, and pulled up a document database. After taking a few moments to figure out how to move around within the document, he pulled up the find command and typed in the words “miller’s weasel.”
Winter and Night         S. J. Rozan         Edgar 2003

Sends Stacie to the local paper to get “Ancient History 101”

*background information of a rape that happened 23 years before that creates the murders being investigated in Winter and Night*
“I asked a parishioner to do some research for me on the Internet, and she found several articles giving parents the costs for the first year. “

In fifth grade, when we had a “hobbies fair,” I brought in boxes and boxes of books and a sign reading, “I am a Bookworm!” Every year I won the library’s summer reading contest. I had the sort of social life you might expect, under those circumstances.

05/24/06 Your Wednesday Author Interview: Julia Spencer-Fleming
Letter from Home  Carolyn G. Hart  Agatha 2004

Tommy was two years older. He ran track and he was tall and thin and bony with a shock of curly brown hair and quizzical blue eyes and a spattering of freckles. He had a habit of shoving his fingers through his wiry hair. They’d met at the library last summer. They both loved *The Moon is Down* and *The Human Comedy.*”
“How many times had she and David, while undergrads, sat down in front of the Sigmund Samuel Library watching young men in shorts lunging at a ball. There was a calming effect no one could explain. She had spent her young adult life here and reckoned it was the most beautiful place on earth.”
“Where’s Jazz?” Rebus asked.

“He said he was going to the library,” Sutherland answered.

“What for”
Sutherland just shrugged, leaving Gray to explain.

“Jazz thinks it would help to know what else was happening in the world around the time Rico got hit and Mr. Diamond did his vanishing act.”

The results brings threads together of interlocking crimes.
“It was at the Catonsville branch of the Baltimore County Public Library that someone finally thought to call the police. The always busy branch was particularly antic on the third Friday in June, with children selling band candy and a community group gathering signatures on a petition for plantings along the Frederick Road median. Inside, the talk—loud, insistent talk, not at all library-like—was about the Fourth of July celebration, and whether there would be fireworks...Miriam Rosen, a patron at Catonsville for more than thirty years, always felt a surge of nostalgia for its more formal past. The reconfigured branch was so crowded, so overwhelmed by all the services that libraries were now expected to provide not just books and periodicals, but compact discs and videos and DVDs and computers with internet access that it seemed more flea market than library. No wonder Starbucks had become so popular, Miriam thought. In Starbucks, a person could find a place to sit.”
Maisie Dobbs  Jacqueline Winspear  Agatha 2004

Maisie was fascinated the library...Each day she lingered just a little longer...Each day she learned a little more about the depth and breadth of knowledge housed in the Comptons’ library, and each day her hunger grew. ..The library seized Maisie’s imagination...Of all the rooms in the house she loved this the most.
“I figured the Weasel could be found somewhere on the Internet, but all I knew how to do on my computer was inventory, accounting, and graphics. For everything else I depended on Fredreeq, who was always threatening to send me to a twelve-step program for unwired people.”

Fredreeq is Wollie Shelley’s friend who helps her sleuth, as well as helping her get through a dating marathon for a $5000 prize money. Los Angeles greeting card artist.
CONCLUSIONS DRAWN:
33/83 have reference to information gathering, 30 of those at the library.

Stereotypes dispelled
• fast tough librarian
• librarian too busy to read (at work)
• librarian who wants all the books on the shelves
• Hunky male librarian

Nice Stereotypes
• courtly
• careful and detailed oriented
• interlibrary loan magic

Stereotypes
• stickler for library rules
Information found at library is critical to solving mystery

• UVA Med library
• Special librarian Laurie Prine
• Japanese American Museum
• Senate Recordings
• Shanghai Library
• Medical Examiner Library
• EPA Library
• Newspaper Libraries
Wry Observations about library realities

• popularity of romances
• Great facility, no book budget
• Can sit down at Starbuck’s, but the library is too busy to get a seat
Fond Thoughts of the library:

- Where the last of the poet readers get their poems
- Island of Privacy
- Town’s Center
- Place where you meet your first ‘crush’
- College Library “most beautiful place on earth.”
- Love of Learning
Conclusions Drawn

Given that: Fiction tends to reflect bestseller lists more closely, but libraries often buy regional fiction, and our survey shows that 40 percent of all adult fiction budgets goes to buy genre fiction, including romance, suspense, and sci-fi titles, and almost 25 percent of the total fiction budget goes to buy mysteries. (Reaching the Library Market 4/25 PMA Online)

Given that: Library funding cuts announced in the media have reached $163 million in the last 3 years (ALA Report) & that England is currently looking at the elimination of 100 public libraries (Christian Science Monitor 07/06/06)

Given that “A report released by the U.S. Department of Education suggests that more money spent on libraries in a community may lead to more reading.” (Knowledge Quest, 31(3), Jan/Feb, 2003)

It’s important to figure out how and why the public values libraries. These novels represent some kind of cross-section of the public. This look at their depictions of libraries & librarians leads me to think that:

• Marketing the library could be built on nostalgia

• We could give annual prizes to writers whose characters make the best use of libraries