



## **Libraries and librarians in "Family Guy". Library reputation in U.S. animated TV Series audience**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The article examines scenes from the animated comedy series "Family Guy" featuring libraries or librarians, to explore the stereotypes portrayed. Many characteristics attributed to the female librarian Joanna reflect common perceptions about librarians, and the show's sharp humour effectively depicts opinions about what happens (or is believed to happen) in U.S. public libraries. The aim of the paper is to use a popular U.S. animated series to discuss the reputation and identity of the librarian profession, through the most effective and common clichés portrayed by non-library-professionals' illustrators for a general, non-library-professional audience, thus providing an external and unbiased perspective. The appearances of the Quahog Public Library (and other libraries) or librarian Joanna (and other librarians) are discussed case by case, with dialogues quoted verbatim. The resulting image is quite close to how U.S. citizens and common people in general use to perceive librarians, libraries and their patrons. These first are women, poorly integrated socially and yet good and clever, with a passion for cats and a sense of childlike humour. They work in quiet and reliable research locations, often frequented by homeless people looking for a roof or a toilet. What does emerge is that the stereotypes portrayed in the series are very close to those already known and studied, and portrayed in other films and TV series, but nevertheless not in all respects, and the character of the Quahog's female librarian Joanna is definitely positive.

**Keywords:** Griffin; Libraries; TV Series; Library Reputation; Librarians Stereotypes.

### ***Bibliotecas y bibliotecarios en "Family Guy". La reputación de las bibliotecas entre los espectadores de series animadas en EE. UU.***

### **RESUMEN**

El artículo examina escenas de la serie animada de comedia "Family Guy" protagonizadas por bibliotecas y bibliotecarios para explorar los estereotipos que se representan. Muchas características atribuidas a la bibliotecaria Joanna reflejan la percepción común sobre los bibliotecarios, y el humor agudo de la serie refleja eficazmente las opiniones sobre lo que sucede (o se cree que sucede) en las bibliotecas públicas estadounidenses. El objetivo del trabajo es utilizar una popular serie animada estadounidense para analizar la reputación y la identidad de la profesión bibliotecaria, a través de los clichés más efectivos y comunes representados por ilustradores no profesionales de bibliotecas para un público general, ofreciendo así una perspectiva externa e imparcial. Se analiza caso por caso la apariencia de la *Quahog Public Library* (y otras bibliotecas) o de la bibliotecaria Joanna (y otros bibliotecarios), citando textualmente los diálogos. La imagen resultante se acerca bastante a cómo los ciudadanos estadounidenses y la gente común en general perciben a los bibliotecarios, las bibliotecas y a sus usuarios. Estas primeras son mujeres, socialmente poco integradas, pero buenas e inteligentes,





apasionadas por los gatos y con un sentido del humor infantil. Trabajan en centros de investigación tranquilos y fiables, a menudo frecuentados por personas sin hogar que buscan un techo o un baño. Lo que sí se desprende es que los estereotipos retratados en la serie son muy similares a los ya conocidos y estudiados, y a los que se muestran en otras películas y series de televisión, aunque no en todos los aspectos, y el personaje de Joanna, la bibliotecaria de la *Quahog Public Library*, es sin duda positivo.

**Palabras-Clave:** Bibliotecas; Bibliotecarios; Serie TV; Reputación de las Bibliotecas; Estereotipos de los Bibliotecarios.

### ***Bibliotecas e bibliotecários em "Family Guy". A reputação das bibliotecas no público de séries de animação nos EUA***

#### **RESUMO**

O artigo examina cenas da série de comédia animada "Family Guy", referente a bibliotecas e bibliotecários, de modo a explorar os estereótipos retratados. Muitas características atribuídas à bibliotecária Joanna refletem percepções comuns sobre bibliotecários, e o humor afiado da série retrata com eficácia opiniões sobre o que acontece (ou se acredita que aconteça) nas bibliotecas públicas dos EUA. O objetivo do artigo é usar uma série popular de animação americana para discutir a reputação e a identidade da profissão de bibliotecário, por meio dos clichês mais eficazes e comuns retratados por ilustradores não profissionais da área para um público geral, também não profissional, proporcionando assim uma perspectiva externa e imparcial. As aparições da *Quahog Public Library* (e de outras bibliotecas) ou da bibliotecária Joanna (e de outros bibliotecários) são discutidas caso a caso, com diálogos citados literalmente. A imagem resultante é bastante próxima de como os cidadãos americanos e as pessoas comuns em geral costumam perceber bibliotecários, bibliotecas e seus usuários. As primeiras são mulheres, pouco integradas socialmente, mas boas e inteligentes, com paixão por gatos e um senso de humor infantil. Elas trabalham em locais de pesquisa tranquilos e confiáveis, frequentemente frequentados por moradores de rua em busca de um teto ou um banheiro. O que se percebe é que os estereótipos retratados na série são muito próximos daqueles já conhecidos e estudados, e retratados em outros filmes e séries de TV, mas ainda assim não em todos os aspectos, e a personagem Joanna, bibliotecária da *Quahog Public Library*, é definitivamente positiva.

**Palavras-Chave:** Bibliotecas; Bibliotecários; Série TV; Reputação das Bibliotecas; Estereótipos dos Bibliotecários.

## **1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>**

*Family Guy* is one of the most successful animated series of all time. Created by Seth MacFarlane and produced by Fox, it has aired for 23 seasons since 1999 and recently celebrated 25 years on the screen. In a recent interview with the Los Angeles Times, MacFarlane—who also voices three of the characters—remarked that he doesn't see "a

good reason to stop." (Itzkoff 2024). Like many successful series, *Family Guy* spawned a spin-off centered on one of its characters: *The Cleveland Show* (2009-2013). Although its strong structural similarity to *The Simpsons* has been noted (and sometimes criticized) (see Biderman & Devlin 2007), *Family Guy* features elements not found in earlier animated series. Compared



to the "yellow family," the Griffin-centered series uses cutaways and absurdity as key components of its biting sarcasm. Moreover, *Family Guy* is even more controversial and irreverent than *The Simpsons*, consistently infusing black humour, racism, sexism, and ableism into the actions and remarks of certain characters. Using Culpeper's model (1996), Puspitasari Mulyadi et al. (2024) have measured its (high and intentional) degree of impoliteness. Looking at Lyotard, Biderman & Davlis also observe that:

the series is (...) not a rip-off since it is a postmodern work of art that intentionally tears down the distinctions between appearance and reality, original and copy, and uses the world of television to push this dissolution. So, sit back, relax, and enjoy the postmodern comedy *Family Guy*, knowing full well that you are not watching a secondary, unoriginal, and uncreative animated sitcom. (Biderman & Devlin, 2007, pp.157).

The satirical comedy, set in the fictional town of Quahog in Rhode Island, New England, exposes various elements of American life and culture, often depicted through the lens of sarcasm. Among these is also the library environment. The Quahog Public Library appears in about two dozen episodes out of the more than 440 that have aired so far, averaging one appearance every season. Overall, most of the appearances last only a handful of seconds, yet they are sufficient to reveal a certain American perspective on libraries through the sharp humour of its characters.

The librarian of the Quahog Public Library, whose name is Joanna - except in the latest episode (see chapter 4 "*Wild West* (19x07): The librarian starring in an episode") where, probably for an ironic inversion, is called Elle Hitler - is depicted with the stereotypical traits of the profession. The stereotype of the female librarian in American popular culture is

far from new and was already seen in movies and tv series analysed, among others, by Fajte & Börjesson (2015), Mendes & de Souza (2019) and Yanes (2002). Stereotypical librarian is commonly described as a "little old lady with the bun, the shawl, the wire specs, and the pencils ticking out of her hair" (Manley 1984: 650) or similarly as an unmarried spinster, bookish, sexually repressed, unattractive, and uptight shushing loud talkers (see Kneale, 2014).

But first of all, as stated, she's a woman. This point is not a neutral or trivial one and has been discussed in feminist studies as a cue for analysing male domination dynamics and power structures laying behind (see Radford & Radford 1997; Fajte & Börjesson 2015). 4 out of 5 librarians in the movies analysed by Yanes (2022) are female, and even if Fajte & Börjesson (2015) notice "an increased representation of male librarians", they admit that "the old stereotype seems to persist" (ivi: 2). On the other side of things, according to Kneale (2014, 12) "if you're a male librarian, no matter your age, people assume you must be gay".

Exactly as in the standard representations of spectators collected by Mendes & de Souza (2019), Joanna wears glasses; she is a spinster, middle-aged, plump woman, dressed unattractively, with her hair in a bun and wearing earrings typical of mature women. While her character also reflects the collective imagination about librarians, she also has relevant traits worth noting. Joanna is repeatedly described as "smart," but she has a mediocre sense of humour (she makes terrible jokes, has an awkward laugh and is easily entertained). Although she is aware of her lack of attractiveness to men, she remains kind and always smiling. This last trait, in particular, is uncommon in stereotypical representations which portray librarians as generally unapproachable, fussy and surly individuals (see Radford & Radford, 1997).



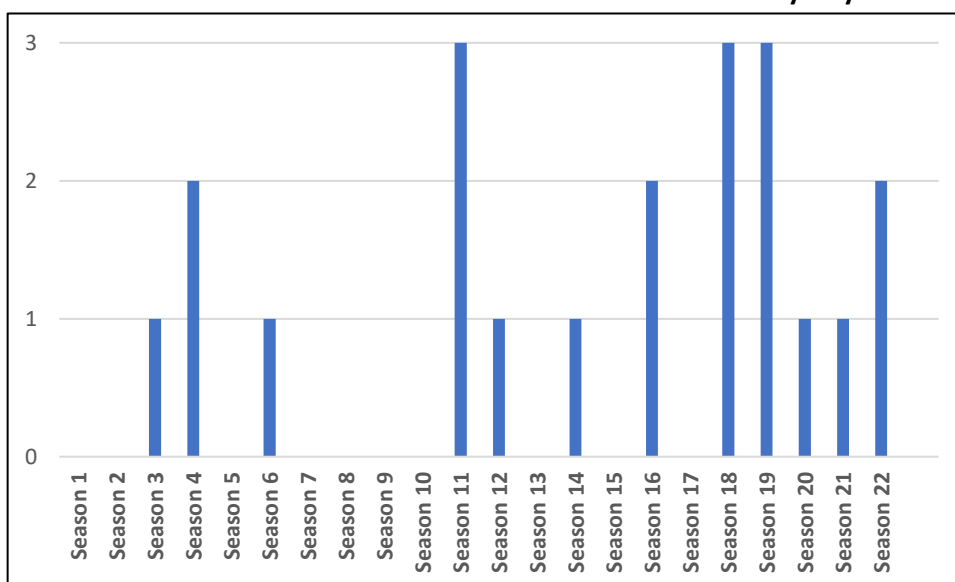


As we will see, as a black humour series, *Family Guy* prefers to poke fun at entrenched stereotypes rather than fight them or create new ones. At the same time, it should be noted that the appearances of libraries and librarians have increased in the last seven seasons (16-22), where they are more than in the previous 15 seasons (see graph below).

In the following sections we will discuss in detail the individual appearances and their

connection to the established stereotype. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the case study of a popular US animated series in order to bring out adherences and divergences with the stereotype and shared image of librarians and libraries among a general public. In order to do this, we will report literally most of the conversations and dialogues between the characters and the librarian, or those between the main characters while they are in the library and discuss them in the context of the episodes.

**Chart 1: Occurrences of libraries and librarians in “Family Guy”**



Source: Series Data (2024).

## 2 SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT APPEARANCES

The first episode in which the Quahog Public Library appears is in *Peter Griffin: Husband, Father...Brother?* [03x14]. Peter takes Chris to the Quahog Public Library to look for information on the Griffin family's genealogy. It is Chris's first time ever entering a library, and he asks his father:

CHRIS: What's a library, Dad?

PETER: Oh, it's just a place where homeless come to shave and go BM [Bowel Movement].

It will be Chris himself, despite his inexperience, who quickly finds the useful information for their research.

During the fourth season, the Quahog Public Library will appear twice. The first is the only episode in the series where the library is the focus of a cutaway: *The Cleveland-Loretta Quagmire* [4x05]. The cutaway is introduced by a conversation between Peter and Brian:

BRIAN: So they revoked your CPR card, huh?





PETER: Yeah, I tell you. This is worse than when they took away my library card.

At this point, the cutaway begins, in which Peter is reading aloud in the library, and a police officer warns him threateningly that he is reading too loudly. Peter starts to flee while continuing to read aloud until he slips against a bookshelf, knocking it over. The fundamental rule of libraries—to be quiet—is thus represented through its blatant violation, heavily punished by a police officer (!).

The *Petergeist* episode [04x26] is the first in which Joanna the librarian appears. Her first statement simultaneously reveals her poor sense of irony and her lack of success with men:

PETER: Hi, there. Do you have any books on how to get rid of ghosts?

JOANNA: Have you tried telling them you're ready for a commitment? (laughs).

STEWIE: Oh, like a relationship.

JOANNA: Exactly. That 'll send them running, uh? (laughs).

STEWIE: (laughing) I like her.

After the exchange of remarks, to which the Griffin family responds with cynical indifference and Stewie with deliberate sarcasm, Joanna provides the Griffins with the volume they need.

In *Movin' Out (Brian's Song)* [06x02], Stewie, in an attempt to help Brian forget his ex-girlfriend, the beautiful and young Jillian, introduces him to Joanna, who immediately presents herself with her dull sense of humour:

STEWIE: Brian, I want to introduce you to Joanna. Look out for this one, she's a bit of a card.

JOANNA: Ok, here's one for you. What food can't make up its mind?

STEWIE: This is gonna be good.

JOANNA: (laughs) A waffle.

(both laughing).

STEWIE (to Brian): This one. Didn't I warn you right? Right?

STEWIE (to Joanna): How are you still single?

Interestingly, it is Stewie who produces a more effective irony with the expression "bit of a card," likely a play on words with the library card.

Although the scene doesn't strictly relate to libraries, in a cutaway from *Stewie Goes for a Drive* [10x04], reading is depicted as the worst activity to invest in on a Friday night: Lois is on the couch reading with some friends and invites Peter to join the book club. "Oh, okay" is Peter's response, after which he applies a deadly maneuver to his own neck, falling to the ground stiff as a board.

The same theme from [03x14] and the same lack of respect for the silence of [4x05] returns in the episode *In Harmony's Way* [12x07]. Here, Peter and Glenn Quagmire decide to form a musical duo, Griffin & Quagmire (a deliberate parody of Simon & Garfunkel), and they give their first surprise concert right in the Quahog Public Library. The idea, certainly not so clever given the silence required in a study room, leads all the attendees to flee in search of a quieter place. However, what interests us here is primarily the inappropriate subject matter of the song, which praises home evacuation against what is implicitly supposed to be practiced by the homeless in public libraries:

PETER AND QUAGMIRE: (singing) I can't poop in strange places (strange places)/ I can only poop in my home/ It's as though I'm watched by strange faces (strange faces) / It's why I never roam./ I've left Stewie alone with strangers (strangers)/to satisfy my fecal needs/





I've put my whole family in danger/ to poop before my anus bleeds/ home bowl, home bowl/ you know just what I need/ home bowl, home bowl/ poop before my anus bleeds.

In *Underage Peter* [14x14], in an attempt to drink water from a fire hydrant as part of a bet, Peter, already drunk, crashes into the library's glass doors, flooding it. Immediately afterward, he tries to "drown" the book *White Fang*, blaming it for ruining his eighth-grade summer. Just like a wolf or a living creature, the book manages to recover and attacks him again. The book-animal ultimately dies from a gunshot fired by his friend Joe, who announces, "He ruined my summer too." In the following scenes, Tom Tucker, the local news anchor, announces:

TOM TUCKER: The public library suffered damage this evening when an area fat man smashed through the front of the building while attempting a drunken stunt. The bus station is expected to absorb the overflow of homeless armpit-washing ladies.

The damage is such that it motivates the mayor of Quahog to raise the legal drinking age to fifty. The new rule and its consequences will serve as the narrative pivot for the entire episode.

Also in the *Emmy-Winning Episode* [16x01], as in [03x14], Peter goes to the QPL to do some research on the computer (the research is about why *Family Guy* will never win an Emmy).

In *Cat Fight* [18x05], the last stereotype about librarians, that of a passion for cats, is also fulfilled. Quagmire opens a cat café where we find Joanna and Bruce watching the animals present, in the act of grooming themselves:

BRUCE: Boy, if I could clean myself with my tongue, I'd never leave the house.

JOANNA: (laughs) Right? And it's like, if I had nine lives maybe I'd finally find a man. (laughs)

BRUCE: You're joining me.

Bruce's statement, made while he takes Joanna's cup to invite her to his table, suggests that at first glance, the librarian might have hit the mark. However, from previous episodes, we know that Bruce is homosexual, and what connects him to Joanna is their shared, desperate search for a man. The episode *Coma Guy* [18x17] opens with a cocktail party at the Griffins' house. Considering it perfectly appropriate for the occasion, Lois asks the guests what books they are reading. Cleveland speaks up, admitting he has only read four books in his entire life. Peter responds, proudly declaring he has never read a book in his life. Shocked by what's considered an inappropriate statement for an elegant cocktail party, the guests flee in outrage. Disappointed and annoyed, Lois demands that Peter start reading one junior high book a day starting the next morning. After mistaking the titles of several famous novels for pornographic texts (e.g., *Little Women*, *Holes*, *The Giver*), Peter agrees to read *1984*. The next day, backpack in hand, Peter heads to the library, sighing in relief:

PETER: Ah, the public library. I'm just put my backpack down for one second. And it's gone. My laptop was in there, no password. My wallet. Everything. That person is now me. My entire life went away (sighs).

Resigned to the theft, portrayed as highly predictable in such a place, Peter approaches the ever-smiling librarian, Joanna:

PETER: Hey, how do you find something in there?

JOANNA: It's a lot easier than finding a man out there. (laughs)



PETER: (chuckles) Yeah. Yeah maybe wash your hair, lose the bun, give that a chance.

Peter asks for a copy of *1984* at this point:

JOANNA: We've got it on CD. C-D (laughs) Sounds like my high school reports card (laughs).

Joanna, however, thinks that Peter is interested in the album of the same name by the hard rock band Van Halen and not George Orwell's novel. Peter, who doesn't even know what a book looks like, inserts the CD into the player, convinced that what he's holding is a book.

PETER (to himself): Ok, boring book. *1984*. I am ready for you to be lame and a book not something unexpected. ("Panama" song music starts). Gasps. This is books? Books kick ass!

Excited by the hard rock music, Peter will cause trouble throughout the city, until he ends up in a coma due to a car accident. After waking up and returning home with his family, he comments with his son:

CHRIS: Well, we have learned an important lesson: no one should ever read a book.

PETER: Eh, I didn't need a coma to know that.

The episode *Short Cuts* [18x11] opens with the writers' irony about the librarian's poor sense of humour, as she finds herself in the same stationery store where Brian and Stewie are:

JOANNA: I'm getting my friend a birthday card in Spanish (laughs) but he doesn't Speak Spanish! (laughs loudly)

STEWIE: Oh-ho-ho-ho, he's not gonna know what it says. Oh you're bad!

JOANNA: I know. I think I've earned whatever misshapen Reese's products is by the cashier.

The irony continues three-quarters into the episode. This time, in her workplace, the librarian interacts with Stewie, who is busy consulting several volumes:

JOANNA: I see you found all of George Townshend's books. That was fast.

STEWIE: Yep, got my own system. I call it "The Stewie Decimal System".

JOANNA: (laughs) Oh Stewie, you're gonna make me spit out my saltwater taffy. (laughs)

And she continues, with the look of a woman who has just been seduced:

JOANNA: Stewie, I've got to have you around here more often!

Stewie, who is standing in front of the magazine rack at that moment, doesn't miss the chance to deliver another quip:

STEWIE: Oh, I think you'll find me here...periodically.

And leaning against the shelf, he notes that it is dirty with "homeless sperm".

Joanna appears for a musical number at the beginning of *The Marrying Kind* [19x14], along with all the other characters of the series (including the minor ones), but this is negligible here.

In *Family Cat* [19x19] the dialogue between Brian and the Griffin family's new cat, Bouncey, who scratches him on the nose becomes a meta-scene that librarian Joanna is watching on YouTube as a funny video. All the main stereotypes and characteristics of Joanna are condensed into a few seconds: the questionable humour, the poor social and relational life, the passion for cats:



JOANNA: (laughing) Well I'd say this is a purr-fect way to spend a Friday night. Oooh I'm gonna comment that.

MAN: (knocking on door): Hello, it's Instacart. I have your \$170 worth of ice cream.

JOANNA (smiling): Promo code: lonely.

In *Peterschmidt Manor* [20x07], the librarian finally gets a romantic comeback and ends up being pursued by two suitors: Principal Shepherd and Dr. Hartman. Ultimately, it will be the money of the latter that wins over the two's seduction tactics. On this occasion, Joanna, in addition to her classic identifying outfit, wears some childish accessories: a fanny pack shaped like a teddy bear and a purple teddy bear on her backpack; moreover, she carries a trolley with a third pink teddy bear and a pillow with drawings of teddy bear heads. Stewie's voiceover, in a tone reminiscent of a voiceover narrator or a television host, announces her like this:

STEWIE: The Librarian, never married, Adult Disney. First kiss was with a boy at

theater camp who would one day get beaten up by David Hyde Pierce for being too fancy.

In *The Munchurian Candidate* [21x04] there is an all-female discussion between the librarian, Lois, Donna (Cleveland's wife), and Bonnie (Joe's wife) over a cup of tea/coffee. In this case as well, Joanna's essential characteristic—her poor quality of irony—emerges in the early dialogues. Prompted by Donna, Lois is recounting the previous evening spent with Peter. Joanna interjects:

JOANNA: (chuckling) so, tells us, tells us...after you had dinner, how was the pork? (laughing).

However, Donna does not appreciate Joanna's presence and her poor taste in humour, and she asks with an irritated attitude: "Who is this froggy little bitch? How come she's sitting with us?". Donna's attitude once again confirms Joanna's difficulty in socialising, even with her female peers.

### 3 OTHER LIBRARIES, OTHER LIBRARIANS

Together with the Quahog Museum of Science and the Quahog Theater, the Quahog Public Library is among the few places of culture represented in the series. However, QPL is not the only library to make an appearance in the series, as Joanna is not the only librarian to appear in *Family Guy*, even if she's surely the most important. The dialogue of the other librarians, when present, is also rather short. Three of the four alternative appearances are in the eleventh season. Here we see the appearance of two female librarians, neither of whom is Joanna, however, and whose physical and clothing characteristics are decidedly less close to the stereotype of the profession. In *The Old Man and the Big C* [11x03], Quagmire, feeling old because he has lost his hair, tries to make conversation with Sharon, a female librarian younger than Joanna. The scene of

elderly people visiting libraries to chat and feel less lonely is certainly something that occurs daily in many public libraries. However, the young librarian is not inclined to engage in small talk with a somewhat boring old man, especially since a long line of patrons is forming behind Quagmire. He thus feels excluded even from a place where the elderly can easily socialize.

In *Turban Cowboy* [11x16], the librarian (neither Joanna nor Sharon) happily counts down the seconds until 5:00 p.m. when books will be considered late. At that moment, Peter crashes through the ceiling while skydiving with books in hand, claiming that they had "wieners" already drawn in them.<sup>2</sup> It is significant to note here that the librarian almost seems to be looking forward to the official application of the sanction, rather than hoping that they will be returned.







In *The Giggity Wife* [11x12], during a drunken night in Boston, a drunk Peter goes to the feminism shelf and vomits on Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* at the Boston Public Library. The Quahog University Library also makes an appearance in only one episode: *The D in apartment 23* [16x06]. At the opening of the episode, Stewie thanks Brian for taking him to the library, and Brian suggests they try a different one this time to take his level of

education to a higher point. Compared to the public library, the university library turns out to be full of attractive young female students, and Stewie immediately understands Brian's intentions, letting him attempt multiple clumsy approaches that end in nothing. Public library users are implicitly described as primarily children and elderly people, as suggested in the episode *The Old Man and the Big C* [11x03].

#### 4 **WILD WEST (19X07): THE LIBRARIAN STARRING OF AN EPISODE**

As we have seen, in most episodes of *Family Guy*, the library and the librarian occupy a generally secondary space, serving only to advance a plot point or provide a brief gag. However, unlike these episodes, Season 19, Episode 7, titled "Wild West," features the Quahog librarian as a sort of co-protagonist or positive antagonist, certainly not secondary in terms of the space and role she occupies in the episode.

In search of a mayoral candidate to improve the fortunes of Quahog, Lois organizes a meeting at her home to listen to the proposals of those present. Among them is the town librarian, who seems to have changed her name for the occasion.

LOIS: We need someone with fresh ideas, someone who knows the issues.

LIBRARIAN: Well, if you're looking for someone with issues, I think you've found your candidate (laughs).

[...]

LOIS: You know, I think you might be a really good candidate. You know the town, you're smart and you clearly have nothing better to do. So all in favour of the librarian running for mayor say "aye".

EVERYONE: Aye!

[...]

LOIS: Let's toast our new mayor. Um...I'm sorry I don't even know your name.

LIBRARIAN: Elle. Elle Hitler. (laughs) no relation.

LOIS: Elle Hitler? Let's all say hi to Elle Hitler!

EVERYONE: Hi, Elle Hitler! Yay!

Beyond the biting choice of name, in this brief dialogue, we should note: 1) Lois's ironic observation that Elle "clearly has nothing better to do", suggesting that his work is undemanding or, more likely, that he has nothing to do in his spare time 2) the shared appreciation of the citizens of Quahog, who do not hesitate to exclaim "Aye" at the proposal of her candidacy. The only skeptic is Peter, who, commenting with his friends at the "The Drunken Clam" pub states:

PETER: I can't believe Lois wants the librarian to be mayor. I mean, Mayor West was a legend, and now they're gonna replace him with some third-tier character with a joke name?

The episode continues and develops with Peter searching for a strong alternative candidate, whom he identifies as the cousin of the current mayor, Wild West.

At Elle Hitler's rally, Lois rallies the crowd:



LOIS: I would like to ask all the women to please put aside your blinding hatred of other women and vote for this incredibly qualified candidate.

In a later scene, the Quahog librarian appears out of touch with the times and shows an underdeveloped sense of irony. She asks Peter:

ELLE: do you know what a meme is?

PETER: What? 'Course I do. And it's pronounced "me-me".

ELLE: Well, the other day I saw one with the most adorable kitten tangled in a ball of yarn. (laughs) And underneath, it said "(beep) the police" (laughing).

Peter and Elle decide to team up to sabotage Wild West's electoral campaign, and Elle joins Peter in his vehicle: a pickup truck with a hood loaded with books and a dashboard full of bobblehead figurines of Garfield characters.

PETER: Big Garfield fan, uh? Me, too. Not this big.

ELLE: You know, a lot of people think I'm obsessed, but I think I'm pretty *nermal* [nerd/normal] (laughs).

At night, somehow disguised, Peter attempts to leave Wild West's mark (the

crossed "WW" letters) on the outer wall of the library, planning to later accuse him of vandalism and tarnish his reputation among voters. However, the glowing branding iron ignites the Quahog Public Library, trapping Elle Hitler inside. It is Wild West himself, riding on horseback, who rescues her in a scene reminiscent of a romantic fairytale. The following scene reveals through the local news that Wild West has been elected mayor of Quahog and shows him shaking hands with the librarian.

At the beginning of this paragraph, we defined Elle Hitler as a co-protagonist or positive antagonist. Notably, the librarian never acts against Wild West, despite being his political opponent in the mayoral race. This gives the implicit impression of her as a passive woman, but above all, she appears kind-hearted, running for office for the good of her hometown yet unwilling, or perhaps incapable, of resorting to malicious tactics to achieve her goal. In contrast to Wild West, Elle embodies an almost opposite yet complementary character: the tough, muscular man, hardened by ranch life and rural hardships, stands in contrast to the unattractive, out-of-shape, intellectual librarian with her passive attitudes.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can affirm that *Family Guy* reflects many common U.S. (and not only U.S.) prejudices about libraries and librarians. The Quahog librarian Joanna displays some recurring features in all her appearances, both physical and behavioural: she is intelligent but out of touch with the times, sexually unattractive, spinster and yet longing for a man; she doesn't seem well integrated into a (non-virtual) social network or have many close friends; has nerdy passions, and her sense of humour is outdated and ineffective. Nevertheless, overall, she is with no doubt a

positive character: she is kind-hearted, harmless, without enemies, and worthy of respect and tenderness. This partially deviates from the stereotype of the grumpy, fussy and obnoxious female librarian. However, it is particularly important to note here that her profession seems sometimes subtly ridiculed as either unnecessary or not very demanding. Few other librarians appear in the series, and significantly all of them are female.

The library as place and institution is represented as a quiet and reliable place for





conducting research, instead of relying on the web—curiously, even in the more recent episodes. Despite the biting sarcasm, the creators reveal a good appreciation for libraries and their patrons, except when it comes to the frequency of theft. A good deal of irony revolves around the civic and social role that libraries play for the homeless in the United States, especially concerning free access to restrooms and shelter from bad weather. This is a less evident characteristic in Europe and therefore less understandable to audience from Europe, where such practices are less established, and free welfare services have historically been more substantial.

While it is true that such a popular TV show can have a great impact on the audience, it must be observed that, as a black humour series, *Family Guy* prefers to reconfirm and portray old and widespread stereotypes rather than fight them or creating new ones. As evidence of this, such is the series' general

attitude towards all minorities targeted in the series (disabled, blacks, LGBT, Jews, Italians, Hispanics...). Other recent movies or animated series are moving towards a new portrayal of libraries as attractive places and librarians as active, well-integrated people in society, indifferently male or female, married or single (see Da Silva 2006).

In conclusion, the representation of libraries in *Family Guy* helps us understand that many stereotypes about libraries are deeply rooted in American society, but that they are slowly evolving for the better. Most important, there is an underlying positive judgment about the goodness of the institution and the genuine kindness of those people who work in and attend them.

A diachronic comparative study with other comedy and non-comedy series would enable further insight into the spread and evolution of the popular imagery of libraries and librarians in the US and beyond.

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### TV SERIES

Family Guy (1999-)

The Cleveland Show (2009-2013)

The Simpsons (1989-)

### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> See [https://familyguy.fandom.com/wiki/Quahog\\_Public\\_Library](https://familyguy.fandom.com/wiki/Quahog_Public_Library).