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Suzanne Marie Stauffer
Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge, stauffer@lsu.edu

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Marilla Waite Freeman: The Librarian as Literary Muse, Gatekeeper, and Disseminator of Print Culture

Suzanne M. Stauffer

School of Library and Information Science, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

ABSTRACT

Contrary to the popular image of the librarian as a passive organiser of books and other forms of print, librarians are and have been active selectors, collectors, and disseminators of print and print culture. As such, they serve as gatekeepers for their communities. In addition, librarians have included 'children's book reviewer' among their professional titles, serving as gatekeepers for readers at large and as de facto literary agents, and have inspired and nurtured poets and authors. Marilla Waite Freeman exemplified each of these roles in her nearly seventy years as a librarian. She was known for acquiring and promoting new forms of literature and opposing censorship, using motion pictures to encourage the reading of books, and lecturing and writing on modern library service, producing speeches and essays which were required reading in library schools of the day. She is identified as the model and inspiration for the librarian Helen Raymond in Floyd Dell's novel *Moon-Calf* and was a long-time friend of John Masefield, Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. This paper will explore the ways in which her career exemplifies the librarian as literary muse and as gatekeeper and disseminator of print culture in the community.

KEYWORDS

Cleveland Public Library; disseminators; Floyd Dell; gatekeepers; Frieda Lawrence; John Masefield; librarians; Marilla Waite Freeman; muses

Literature review

Biographical explorations of the achievements of male librarians, such as Panizzi, Cutter, Dewey, Ranganathan, and others, have tended to focus on their role as developers of systems of organisation and of their contributions to institutional administration and regulation.[1] This is due in large part to the Western views of gender and the professions, which have resulted in male librarians being identified with administration and management professionally and by scholars and biographers. Female librarians, the other hand, were more likely to be identified with books and reading in the literature and in the profession, owing to their societal roles as educators, arbiters of cultural, and guardians of social morality.[2] Children's librarians in particular were charged with instilling a love of good books in the young and preventing their access to 'sensational literature' that could lead to juvenile delinquency or worse.[3] Female librarians such as Caroline Hewins, Anne Carroll Moore, and Alice Jordan in the United States and Lillian H. Smith in Canada are recognised for their influence on the field of children's

CONTACT Suzanne M. Stauffer stauffer@lsu.edu School of Library and Information Science, Louisiana State University, 270 Coates Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803.

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literature, while Augusta Baker and Charlemae Rollins are remembered for their work in transforming the images of African Americans in children's literature, and Effie Louise Power for her mentoring of the teenaged, and later adult, Langston Hughes.[4]

The motto of the American Library Association (ALA), 'The best reading for the largest number, at the least cost', applied to adults as well as children, but while numerous scholarly articles and books have been written about public library services to adults, such as Lutie Stearns's work with travelling libraries in Wisconsin,[5] Eleanor Ledbetter's advocacy for immigrants in Cleveland,[6] and Juana Manrique de Lara's contributions to Mexico's national library,[7] little has been written about individual librarians' interactions with adult readers. This paper seeks to help to fill that gap.

Marilla Waite Freeman

Marilla Waite Freeman was born on 21 February 1871 in the village of Honeoye Falls in western New York State to Rev. Dr Samuel Alden and Sara J. Allen Freeman. She was a descendant of the Plymouth Colony founders John Alden (on her father's side) and Miles Standish (on her mother's). She attended Elmira College for Women in Elmira, New York, for one year before moving to Chicago, where she worked under William Frederick Poole in the Newberry Library from 1892 to 1894.[8] She entered the University of Chicago in 1894 as a part-time student, working half-time in the university library under Zella Allen Dixson, and 'received special training from Mrs. Dixson, including a course of lecture on library science'.[9] According to university records, she was a charter member of the women's literary society, Mortar Board,[10] and a member of the women's honour society, Nu Pi Sigma, whose goals were 'social enlightenment and the promotion of friendly relations among the women's societies of the University of Chicago'.[11] She earned a PhB in literature from the University of Chicago in 1897, and in a letter of application to the Cleveland Public Library (CPL) in 1899 she emphasised that her 'studies were chosen with reference to their value to me in library work'. These were 'languages and literature' including 'five years of Latin, four of German, two and a half of French, one and a half of Greek, and one of Italian'. She also took seven English courses and 'work also in history, psychology, ethics, civics, economics, and the natural sciences'. While her 'specific work [at the university library] was that of cataloger', she also spent time in the reference and circulation departments. She noted that, as a librarian, she had 'always laid emphasis upon the reference work with schools and clubs and the general public'. She felt that she had a 'special instinct' for that work and enjoyed 'the necessary contact with people of all kinds and the sociological aspect of the work'.[12]

Three years later, she graduated from the New York State Library School in Albany, New York, which she attended after being rejected for a position at CPL because of her lack of a degree in librarianship.[13] From her ancestry to her place of birth and her educational achievements, she possessed what one scholar has described as the 'gilt-edged credentials that include religious affiliation, community, Americanness, and of course whiteness' necessary for a career in public libraries at that time, as well as the ambition and self-confidence.[14] And that career spanned nearly seventy years, beginning with the Newberry Library in 1892 and continuing with periods at public libraries in Michigan City (Indiana), Davenport (Iowa), Louisville (Kentucky), and Newark (New Jersey),

where she worked from 1910 to 1911 under the legendary John Cotton Dana,[15] whose influence can be seen throughout her career. She was the Librarian of the Goodwyn Institute Library in Memphis, Tennessee, from 1911 to 1921, except for 1918, when she was a hospital librarian at Camp Dix, New Jersey. In 1921, she earned an LLB through the University of Memphis (Tennessee) law school's evening programme and was admitted to the Tennessee state bar. She never practised law, but did serve in the Harvard University Law Library from 1921 to 1922. She moved in 1922 to the CPL, from which she retired in 1940.[16]

She was hired by the CPL to develop the scholarly collections. Influenced no doubt by Dana's work in Newark, she also developed the business information bureau, readers' advisory services for adults, the adult education programme, and multiple partnerships with community organisations.[17] She was a member of numerous professional associations, including the ALA, of which she was elected First Vice-President in 1923, the Ohio Library Association, and the National Adult Education Association. She was also a member of various social and cultural clubs, including the Cleveland Alumni of the University of Chicago (President, 1933–34), the Library of Cleveland and Vicinity Club (President, 1928–29), the Novel Club of Cleveland (President, 1930–31), and the Women's City Club of Cleveland (member of the board of directors, 1934–38).

The University of Chicago awarded her the Distinguished Service Medal 'For outstanding achievement in the field of librarianship' in 1941 on its fiftieth anniversary.[18] She spent the years between her retirement in 1940 and her death in 1961 giving lectures on poetry and writing on library and community affairs as a member of the ALA's Motion Picture Preview Committee, including serving as Chair from 1949 to 1951, and continuing to edit *Library Journal*'s 'New Films from Books' column. She also served as the part-time librarian of St Joseph's Hospital in Yonkers, New York, on a voluntary basis for twenty years, under the auspices of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association.[19]

Her contemporaries remembered her for her contributions to public library administration and management, as well as her development in 1944 of the CPL's World War II Library collection of 'underground papers and letters from all the warring nations' of Europe brought into the country by refugees.[20] Far from being the dowdy librarian of the popular stereotype, she was praised as 'a beautiful lady' who had a 'sure sense of style', with a 'rare gift of breathing life into librarianship — and into everything that deeply interested her' and a 'dramatic' and 'charismatic' personality, while critics called her a 'prima donna'.[21] Although many remarked on her vitality and energy, others found her loud and demanding.[22] There was such 'considerable activity and bustle in and around' her desk at CPL that a co-worker 'moved her desk as far away as the limit of the room would permit' in order to work in peace. She was quoted as asking, 'Am I talking too loud? You know, I haven't a library voice'.[23] It was also reported that she 'believes that if a greater good can come through the breaking of a rule, then the rule should be broken,[24] suggesting that she was something of a law unto herself, rather than the rigid enforcer of rules and regulations of the librarian stereotype.

When her attempt to share the works of Dickinson with young children was a failure, she reacted so negatively that the hostess of the event, Jean, was compelled

to write a letter of apology to soothe her feelings. She explained that, while Freeman 'made Emily seem very vivid and real [..] the poetry [was] a different matter. They are all much more preoccupied with Life than with Death'. Jean mildly reprimanded her, 'You must not ask for an opinion when you are in such a hurry', and took the sting out with 'but if you were not in a hurry it would not be you. We all want you — unchanged and uncensored'. She placated her with 'It is so easy to be fond of you because you have the art of accepting liking and affection with such ease that the giver never feels himself too insignificant to contribute at least a tiny bit to your happiness'. She signed off with 'another "paper kiss"'.[25] This makes it easy to see how some would consider her demanding and difficult, while others saw her as energetic and charismatic.

Biographies and obituaries depict Freeman as a literary muse, a gatekeeper of literature and information, and a disseminator of all forms of print culture. Without fail, they refer to her writings in opposition to library censorship, her encouragement of reading in all forms, and her love for and promotion of poetry in particular. Many note that she was 'a friend of many poets, famous and unknown alike'.[26] Her 1935 entry in *American Women*, to which she would have provided the information, includes her membership in the Poetry Society of America, lists her hobbies as 'Poetry, music, and drama', and notes that she is a 'Lecturer on poetry'.[27] These were obviously accomplishments which she felt were among her most notable, and she clearly valued an identification with poetry. Freeman was elected to the Poetry Society while in Memphis, thanks to the influence of President, Jessie Rittenhouse, 'through her generous appreciation of what she called my work for poetry and my great interest in it'. Some time later, membership was restricted to 'actual writers of poetry', and where another member might have felt called upon to resign because of the new restriction, Freeman felt no such compulsion. Rather, she cast herself into the role of audience, critic, and possibly muse, saying that she was 'one of the few active members to whom all the rest may safely read their verses without having to listen to any from me'.[28]

The CPL's announcement of her retirement in 1940 explained that she sought 'leisure to fill many deferred speaking engagements [..] in the fields of library science and of poetry'.[29] According to McDonald's 1947 biography in *Bulletin of Bibliography*, her office decor included 'a copy of the Alexander portrait of Walt Whitman', whom she considered the 'standard of measurement for height, breadth, and depth', as well as a 'hand-lettered and illuminated copy of Vachel Lindsay's Babylon poem, 'a gift of the poet'.[30]

Her taste in poetry was eclectic and varied, unlike that of the conservative librarian of the popular stereotype. The poets she brought to Cleveland 'for readings before the Women's City Club and audiences at the library' were a diverse group, including voices of the Harlem Renaissance Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, the American and British modernists Robert Frost and William Butler Yeats, the Romantic pessimist A. E. Housman,[31] and the local journalist, humorist, and poet Edwin (Ted) Meade Robinson.[32]

Freeman as literary muse

Distinctions among the librarian's roles of literary muse, gatekeeper, and disseminator of print culture are largely artificial. Each role is inextricably linked to the others over

the career of a public librarian who works with and for the public. The librarian as muse intersects with the librarian as disseminator, as both encourage the library patron to read and appreciate poetry and literature, while the roles of disseminator and gatekeeper are similarly intertwined, as material cannot be disseminated if the gates are kept locked. However, distinctions must be made for purposes of explanation and analysis, and so Freeman will be presented in terms of those three roles.

A literary muse is most commonly thought of as a woman who serves as an artistic inspiration for a usually male artist. In her work as a librarian, Freeman both directly and indirectly filled this role, encouraging aspiring authors and especially poets and serving as the model for at least one literary character. Her personal desire was to 'make poetry live for many people'.[33] She was a 'thrilling reader and lecturer of poetry' who 'saw to it that poetry became a vital thing in every library with which she was associated'.[34] In a student essay, she wrote that 'in poetry is found the highest form of free activity to which the mind of man has yet attained, and therefore the highest art'.[35]

Her ideal librarian was someone who 'may quietly and unobtrusively direct the whole trend of the intellectual life of her town' and was always willing 'to talk of books [..] even at those social functions where 'shop is supposed to be tabooed [*sic*]'".[36] The single most important quality was 'sympathy, ability to put one's self behind the bar of the eye of the other person, to see, for a moment at least, through the other man's eye',[37] and so to 'find out the native interest which already exists in an individual [..] and to build on that interest in what the library has to offer'.[38]

The ideal library was 'the centre of the civic, cultural and educational activities of the town',[39] 'the most indispensable social force in the modern world',[40] while the 'most effective of all methods of making the library known are the personal talks given by the librarian [..] before schools, clubs, groups of factory workers, Labour unions, masonic lodges, any organisation'.[41] The librarian's direction of the intellectual life of 'her town' was, perhaps, not quite so unobtrusive as Freeman expressed. She was to be an active, direct inspiration to the people in their civic, cultural, and educational activities. Even in regard to the educational mission of the library, she expressed a desire to 'inspire the life enthusiasms for work, for play, for social service' in order to 'procure the highest happiness and efficiency', and quoted Charles W. Eliot: 'Education for efficiency [..] must be idealistic, humane, and passionate'.[42]

Her argument against literary censorship was based on her vision of the public library and public librarian as literary inspirations. She presented the case of the 'cosmopolitan young people' of large cities among whom were 'budding novelists and poets' such as the one who 'talking to me of Proust and Joyce told me of his keen delight in his discovery of Emily Dickinson [..] he had known her at once for the shy, rare Olympian she is'.[43] He was, no doubt, not the only library patron to discuss Proust, Joyce, and Dickinson with the sympathetic librarian whose desire was to inspire art and artists.

Muse-like, Freeman extended her philosophy of librarianship beyond meeting the educational, informational, and vocational needs of the community to include 'inspiration [..] the emotions. Do these not furnish the motive power of human lives and must not these be fed by creative and imaginative literature — poetry, drama, fiction?'[44] The motive for attracting readers was not 'for the sake of figures', but 'for the assurance that we are offering and making known cultural, spiritual, recreational, practical services'.[45]

One of the means of achieving this goal was a poetry reading and writing group for teenagers, initiated at CPL under her administration in 1927. 'The best of the poems by the members of the group' were collected in a loose-leaf binder and kept in the Stevenson Room (the teenagers' department), while the best of the best were published in a pamphlet, *Preludes to Poetry*, which sold out its printing. One young woman wrote that 'through the simple experiences of the group, we are spiritually better equipped, and better poised and we have, and will continue to have, a growing appreciation of the true poetry of our surroundings'.[46] In 1929 Freeman approved the establishment of a similar group for adults, with similar goals, which continued at least until 1933. The group devoted half of its time to reading and critiquing poetry and half to writing it. It was economically, socially, and racially diverse, including at least two African Americans, and people of all ages from their twenties to their seventies.[47] Although Freeman did not lead the group, her influence was felt through the members' attendance at her public book talk 'Poets and Poetry of our Times'. It was reported that many members of the group had been published, including the later explorer and lecturer Bernice Goetz in the *New York Herald Tribune*.[48] In 1933, because of an influx of members with little background in poetry, the library instituted a monthly series of talks on poetry 'to give in their sequence, some slight pedigree of American poetry beginning with its English sources'. Freeman was among the presenters.[49] Even the children's department hosted 'two or three clubs [for] the reading, memorising and writing of poetry',[50] in response, no doubt, to her influence.

She inspired the literary and artistic efforts of several of her co-workers. An L. Buker set the twelfth-century anonymous poem 'A Hymn to the Virgin', which begins 'Of one that is so fair and bright', to music in her honour.[51] The author and poet Ina Brevoort Roberts, Director of the CPL Publicity Department from 1924 to 1938,[52] wrote a lengthy poem, 'Annotations to Librarians — M.W.F.', which celebrated Freeman as 'Lawyer, librarian, expert poetaster', one whose task was to fill the needs of 'The book-needing public, the book-hungry public' by distributing 'C.P.L. lists and R.W.A.P. [Reading With A Purpose]'. It imagined her as 'an air-ship [named] Marilla [..] zigzagging out through the blue | Cleaving the wind and mocking at Newton | Diving and swirling, erratic, but true' on a 'daring and taut-nerve adventure'.[53] The library worker Gordon W. Thayer wrote 'Lines on M Day (May 12, 1942)', which celebrated her work at CPL, and ended:

> With the circulation now waning
>
> And the pages in training
>
> C.P.L. is feeling the war.
>
> If we're to keep stepping,
>
> We might need some pepping.
>
> Oh, Marilla, come see us some more.[54]

The latter two poems, and possibly all three, were written for a luncheon held in her honour by the Women's City Club of Cleveland two years after her retirement.

The local journalist John Goldstrom wrote, 'Myself a drab prose writer, I could attempt poetry for her'.[55] Whether he did is not known, but clearly he felt her

inspiration as that of a muse. On a lighter note, an unknown hand penned several lines of doggerel in her honour in the summer of 1905. The lines appear on the back of a lunch and dinner menu card from an ALA post-conference excursion to Alaska. Whether they were written during the cruise or at a later date is not known, but the text suggests that they may have been as one couplet reads, 'When Fair Marilla leaves the Deck | Who comes to stay and Rubberneck?'[56]

The undoubtedly best-known and most complete evidence for Freeman's role as a muse and her inspiration of the cultural, the spiritual, and the emotional is that of Floyd Dell (1887–1969). Although mostly forgotten today, Dell is acknowledged by scholars as 'a vital force in forming and guiding the literary taste and social thought of America' during the first three decades of the twentieth century. He first became known as a book reviewer and editor, writing for the *Friday Literary Review* in Chicago from 1908 to 1913, and later for New York's *Masses* and *Liberator* magazines. His published works include two collections of original plays, three volumes of collected essays and one of modern literary criticism, a critical work on Upton Sinclair, an autobiography, and eleven novels, the first and best being *Moon-Calf*. This *Bildungsroman* was reprinted eleven times in the first two years after its publication.[57] Dell later acknowledged that the character of the librarian Helen Raymond was inspired by Marilla Freeman.

Dell was sixteen years old when he encountered Freeman in 1903 at the Davenport (Iowa) Public Library, where she was Librarian from 1902 to 1905. In his autobiography, Dell says that she was 'extraordinarily beautiful' and that he 'fell in love with her deeply', but that the thirty-two-year-old Freeman's interest in him was as a 'young poet, who, besides encouragement, needed to learn conscious control of his art, and [..] [to acquire] friends among [..] writers'. His reaction was to resent 'bitterly that a goddess should stoop to these practical matters'. Despite his resistance, 'she very gently and very firmly and very wisely' pushed him 'out into the world of reality'.[58]

This is reflected in the character of Helen Raymond and her relationship with the adolescent Felix Fay. He describes the Librarian of the Port Royal Public Library as 'the spirit, half familiar and half divine, which haunted this place of books [..] the spirit of literature; she was its spirit, made visible in radiant cool flesh'.[59] Helen feels that it 'was part of her duty, as she conceived it, to encourage people who showed any enthusiasm for books [..] by revealing herself to them as a fellow-enthusiast'.[60] She wishes to establish a mentor–protégé relationship between them, while he views himself as 'as worshipper' of 'some lovely and infinitely maternal Goddess'. She recommends a course of poetry reading to him,[61] and she reads his poems critically, finding 'beautiful things in them; and many serious defects', which she points out to him, and thus begins a lengthy mentorship.[62]

Eventually, Helen introduces him to a poet, probably based on Charles Banks, a Davenport poet and journalist, who also becomes a mentor to the young man and introduces him to the world of publishing.[63] Felix's first published poem appears in the *Century* magazine, where Dell's second poem was published. While Helen is depicted more as a muse than as a mentor, Freeman sent two of Dell's poems to the editor, describing Dell as 'a young newspaper writer and socialist, scarcely more than a boy, whom some of us feel to have unusual promise as a poet'.[64] The fictional relationship

ends when Helen leaves for a job at a larger library, just as Freeman left Davenport for Louisville, Kentucky, in 1905.

The book was so widely known that when Freeman arrived in Cleveland in 1922, the *Plain Dealer* announced that 'Dell's Librarian of Port Royal Steps from Book'.[65] The article wrote of her as 'Helen Raymond'. She reflected that it was as well that he had achieved success as a novelist, as 'he had the beginnings of a lovely poetic gift, but probably not a strong enough poetic impulse to make it his life work', a judgement that seems based on hindsight.

Dell dedicated many of his poems and his 1925 novel *This Mad Ideal* to her, 'a friend of certain mad idealists'. The novel is the story of a young woman who rejects marriage in order to pursue a career as a writer. Although by no means a fictionalisation of Freeman's life, the main character bears more than a few resemblances to her in personality and ambition. Whether she rejected proposals of marriage is not known, but it is a certainty that she never married and pursued a career related to literature and writing.

John Masefield was already an established poet when he and Freeman met, and there is no evidence that she influenced his work, but their relationship is a feature of all biographical works about her. They met when he visited Memphis in January 1916, on his first American tour.[66] Freeman introduced him to the Nineteenth Century Club, a ladies' literary club, as 'one of the Immortals in the flesh'.[67] The day after the event, a Sunday, he requested a private tour of the library which lasted 'for two or three hours, till his train left'. They 'walked through the Library, drew books from the shelves, talked of them, and of everything in the universe'.[68]

Masefield wrote to 'Dear Marilla' on the train that he 'loved our long collogue this morning' and liked 'your library so much'. He expressed the 'hope to see a library of that kind in England soon'.[69] A year later, in preparation for his second lecture tour of America, he wrote that he hoped to be able to visit her in Memphis, as 'there is much I should like to ask you';[70] whether about literature, libraries, or American attitudes towards the war in Europe is not known.

Their correspondence continued at least until 1937, consisting primarily of Christmas and New Year greetings, which Masefield addressed to 'Dear Marilla', although Freeman always addressed him as, 'Dear Mr. Masefield'. Masefield also sent her autographed copies of his books as they were published. He frequently expressed the wish to visit again, saying that 'you shall tell me about law and I will tell you about poetry'.[71] It is tempting to speculate how she felt about being identified as an expert on the law, and a mere student of poetry. An undated letter, probably written in 1922 or 1923, suggests that Freeman was working to produce Masefield's plays in Cleveland.[72]

Freeman's 1926 request for an unpublished poem and copy of a photographic portrait for her literary club appears to have crossed a line, as the letter of refusal begins with a frosty 'Dear Miss Freeman'.[73] Three years later, all was forgiven, as Masefield wrote to 'Dear Marilla' that 'English people who have visited Cleveland say that it is a model of what a civic library should be'. He recalled 'our jolly talk' in Memphis, and asked, 'Why don't you ever come to England to study the libraries here? We have some really good ones here in Oxford'. He closed, 'Best special greetings to you. Blessings attend you'.[74]

In congratulating Masefield on his appointment as Poet Laureate in 1930, Freeman reminded him that she had called him 'one of the Immortals in the flesh' some fourteen

years earlier. She also reported that the Cleveland Play House had produced his plays *The Faithful* and *Anne Pedersdotter*, and hoped that he would be able to visit Cleveland in the near future.[75] In a later letter, she noted that A. E. Housman and Robert Frost had both visited the CPL, perhaps as an inducement for him to do the same.[76] Masefield and his wife did visit Freeman at the CPL in early 1933, although whether they attended the Symphony Orchestra performance and a private dinner that Freeman offered to organise is unknown.[77]

Masefield thrilled the citizens of Cleveland in his 1937 coronation address on American radio when he said, 'I shall never forget going to a city library in Memphis, Tenn[essee], and seeing a big and beautiful room for the use of the youth of that city which had been arranged by Miss Freeman, who now directs your great library at Cleveland O[hio]'.[78]

Freeman as gatekeeper and disseminator of print culture

It was in her professional writings that Freeman most clearly depicted the role of librarian as at once that of gatekeeper and disseminator of print culture, a gatekeeper who threw open the gates. Throughout her career and her life, she exemplified the 'liberal belief — consistently emphasised by the public library movement — that books and reading would promote democracy, bridge gaps between "alien" groups and unify the nation'.[79] She wrote that the public library must be 'the most democratic institution in the community' and 'have no prejudices of race, religion, politics, or literature'.[80] At the ALA conference in Atlanta in 1899, she encouraged librarians to act as both figurative and literal gatekeepers, 'not merely by opening the doors and waiting for people to come in, but by going out to seek them'.[81] She urged them to engage in outreach to children, schools, literary clubs, and 'the working classes', by creating collections designed to meet their needs and interests, and advocated the development of foreign-language collections for immigrants. She recommended advertising in local trade journals and in 'every department of every factory and industrial centre' in the community, and encouraged the development of travelling libraries (today's bookmobiles) to 'poor and remote parts of town, or adjacent rural districts'.[82] Uniquely, she suggested the creation of 'home libraries [..] of perhaps 20 carefully selected books' in extremely remote areas with 'a group of 10 or more poor children', which would be visited once a week by 'a sympathetic visitor' for an hour to discuss the books and 'interest and amuse them [..] in any way she chooses'.[83]

Not long after this, she spoke to librarians at the Indiana State Library Association annual conference about the necessity for publicity, saying that 'if the outside world is not drawn irresistibly to our building [..] we are merely ornamental nontax-paying cumberers of the ground'.[84] She suggested many different means of advertising a library's offerings, including 'a brief list of technical books enclosed in the pay envelopes' of factory workers.[85] This attitude of responding to (or drumming up) public interest characterised her philosophy of librarianship throughout her career, so that the year before she retired, she would write, echoing Ranganathan, 'Can we visualise for each book purchased its specific reader or group of readers? And for every potential reader his book?'[86] Following her retirement, she instructed hospital library volunteers on the

importance of discovering and meeting the needs of hospital patients, from Spanish-language materials to citizenship textbooks to vocational manuals. She specifically recommended biographies, popular accounts of medical research, and current bestsellers. She justified her recommendations by referring to a letter Franz Schubert wrote on his deathbed, asking for more of James Fenimore Cooper's works. 'When we think that the last wish on earth of this dying immortal was "to be so kind as to help me to some reading", can we doubt how important building morale is in the role of the hospital librarian?'[87]

Her objections to censorship extended to protecting the rights of the 'average reader' of genre fiction, while at the same time she maintained that 'Our objective is still "the best books for the greatest number"; and our belief, that this can be best attained by meeting — and educating — popular demand in the free library'.[88] Hence librarians should do their 'best to choose the "best" of the westerns, the mystery stories, the adventures, the just-a-sweet-love-story type, the historical-biographical novels, the plentiful problem novels' with the ultimate aim of leading the 'average reader' to 'exceptional books'. While championing open shelves, she humorously suggested that the library 'compile a menu of strong meats' so that those who sought 'restricted books' might have the 'joy of breaking' the 'imagined tabu'.[89] She also wrote of a dignified professor's love for mystery and adventure fiction, and the public library's responsibility for providing for his 'week-end adventure', because 'the university professor's salary is something else again in these days of horizontal cuts'.[90] Writing during the Great Depression in the United States, she asserted that 'access to imaginative literature is really saving many of our [unemployed] readers from losing their sanity' and possibly preventing 'the "red" portion of our population' from open revolution.[91]

She was known nationally in the library profession for her involvement with films and public libraries, in particular the CPL bookmark programme begun in 1923. The library collaborated with film producers to create and distribute bookmarks that promoted library materials related to upcoming releases,[92] for which the Motion Picture Association of America reportedly called her 'the Nestor of movie–library cooperation'.[93] The programme was said to have 'set a large number of film fans to reading history, biography, travel, by calling attention to books that are as interesting and often as romantic as fiction'.[94]

From the 1920s until 1959 she edited the 'New Films from Books' column of *Library Journal*. All of her efforts in this regard were directed towards using films to promote the reading of books and the use of the public library, holding that 'the printed page is the one medium to which all eyes must ultimately turn for sifting, verifying, making permanent the impressions received from those two irresistible social forces, the motion picture and the radio'.[95] She went so far as to express the opinion that it was only through a connection with books that 'the motion picture may [..] begin to reach its very highest possibilities and rewards'.[96]

Among her many retirement activities was Freeman's work with the Academy of American Poets in its campaign to promote 'the love of poetry' and to discover and encourage poetic genius. The Academy sent a letter to the president of every women's club in New Jersey (and probably New York and every surrounding state), requesting that the club include poetry in all its programmes.[97] It recommended 'the helpful

inspiration of Miss Marilla Waite Freeman, lover of poetry and member of the Poetry Society of America' in achieving this goal, the latter giving the erroneous impression that she herself was an active poet. It noted that, as a librarian, she had 'wide experience in work with programme makers and in promoting the cause of poetry'. She would consult with the club on incorporating poetry into its programmes at no cost, other than expenses. There is no information about what those expenses entailed.

She was 'giving many poetry talks and readings' in New York City, and would do so for the club for a fee. Clearly, her motives were not solely altruistic. She was commended for her ability to discover 'to men as well as women the charm and indispensability of poetry in their lives'. The President of the Women's City Club of Cleveland is quoted as having stated, 'Miss Freeman reads poetry more movingly and interprets it more thrillingly than anyone who has ever appeared before this Club', a sentiment which, according to the Academy, had been 'echoed by many schools, clubs, and other organisations, and by well-known poets throughout the country'.

Clubs could select from such topics as 'Discovering Poetry',[98] 'Motion Pictures and Poetry: Two Moving Arts' (also published as 'Books and Films: The Eyes Have It'),[99] and 'Personal Glimpses of Some Modern Poets', in which Freeman's 'friendships with poets' were reflected. In the latter, she detailed her relationships and encounters with Vachel Lindsay, John Masefield, Jessie Rittenhouse, Margaret Widdemer, Amy Lowell, AE (George Russell), and Robert Frost.[100]

Three characteristic incidents

Several letters provide further insight into Freeman's personality and demonstrate that, while her relationships with Dell and Masefield were almost serendipitous, they were not her only connections within the world of contemporary literature, and that she was proactive in engaging with other literary figures of the day such as William Lee Richardson, Joel Elias Spingarn, and Frieda Lawrence.

Although only a single, two-page letter from William Lee Richardson is found in her collection at the New York Public Library, it is suggestive of those 'certain mad idealists' with whom she was friends.[101] Written from Chicago, it begins, 'Dear Marilla the Sphinx', complains that she has 'lapsed into one of your agelong silences', and supposes that 'you are so damn busy you can't bother with friends you used to know in the far away and long ago'. Richardson reports that his book *Literature of the World: An Introductory Study* will 'burst into print' about 1 May,[102] so the letter was written in 1922, when Freeman was in Cleveland. The place of writing suggests that perhaps the two were fellow students at the University of Chicago, but there is no concrete evidence for this.

Richardson 'looks to the librarians to order [his book], & the high schools for reference, & the colleges for elementary work; & of course [..] a few states for reading circle use'. He will be going to 'Yurrup' on 13 May and return in July. He asks her, again, to write, but 'Maybe your hand is palsied or something or your heart is cold. Not the latter, though'. Little can be discovered about Richardson, beyond the fact of his having co-authored the book in question and written and published several travel books, including *This World So Wide*, about his 1922 European (or 'Yurrupean') trip. At the

very least, his letter is further evidence for her dramatic and charismatic, not to say demanding and temperamental, personality.

In 1925 Freeman wrote to Joel Elias Spingarn, of Troutbeck estate in Amenia, New York, asking to purchase or borrow a copy of a privately printed essay, *Criticism*, by Whitman, her poetic ideal.[103] She explained that she had read 'a most interesting review [of the essay] by Isaac Goldberg' in a socialist newspaper, *The Haldeman-Julius Weekly*. When she returned the copy of the essay that had been lent to her, she praised the 'tremendous originality and inspiration' and remarked, 'I feel sure you will not mind my having made and kept a typewritten copy for myself'.[104] Whether or not Spingarn minded we do not know, and apparently she did not care. Her belief that rules should be broken in the service of a greater good appears to have been operating in this instance.

While the letter does not suggest that Freeman and Spingarn had any personal relationship, it is not unlikely that she knew of him by reputation. Spingarn was a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University from 1899 to 1911, a co-founder of Harcourt Brace publishers in 1919, and a leading member of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People from 1910 until his death in 1939. Although he was known as a poet, his most significant contribution was as a literary critic, and he published many highly regarded works of comparative literary criticism.[105] In 1925 Troutbeck 'was the meeting centre for some of the most important artists, writers and politicians of the twentieth century',[106] including W. E. B. Dubois, Martin Luther King, Jr, Langston Hughes, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, President Theodore Roosevelt, and, of course, Walt Whitman.[107] There is almost a sense that Freeman was attempting to ingratiate herself with Spingarn and so gain entry into this circle. If so, it does not appear to have worked.

If there were any doubts about Freeman's self-confidence and self-assurance in regard to her place in the world of poetry, her correspondence with Frieda Lawrence would put them to rest. In 1932 she wrote to ask if Lawrence would 'be willing to give me some first-hand information and material' to use in preparing a biographical sketch of D. H. Lawrence for the Cleveland Novel Club's discussion of *Sons and Lovers*. She expressed her indignation at Murry's recent biography, and hoped for 'some personal statement which would help me to clear away Mr. Murry's implications' that Lawrence was a 'sexual weakling'. She promised that any such information would be for private use only. She closed with an invitation to visit Cleveland and the CPL.[108]

Lawrence responded within days, saying, 'To answer your questions, I would have to write a book'. She 'resented Murry's book deeply [..] Lawrence was a person of absolute integrity — which Murry is not'. Furthermore, 'it's a lie that Lawrence was impotent. I was his wife, I ought to know. Very much the other way, I am thankful to say'.[109] One wonders how the ladies of the Cleveland Novel Club reacted to that revelation or if it was ever made to them.

Lawrence closed by inviting Freeman to visit her in New Mexico, and added that 'Lawrence's letters' were coming out soon, and 'then he will speak for himself'. The book would include 'some last poems [..] written before he died', and she was in the midst of writing her memoir, 'D. H. Lawrence and I'. Freeman replied gratefully, thanking her for 'clearing away at one breath the miasma of Middleton Murry's vaporings'

and expressing eagerness 'for your own book and Lawrence's own letter and his last poems', calling him 'first of all a poet'. It is not known whether this relationship developed further, although it seems unlikely, as there are no letters between them in Freeman's or Lawrence's papers, and Freeman never mentioned it as she did her other 'glimpses'.

Conclusion

Marilla Waite Freeman and her career do much to counter the popular stereotype of the female librarian as repressed, censorious, and unattractive, as even her critics would agree. She was dramatic, not to say flamboyant, liberal, stylish, and beautiful. She inspired readers and writers indirectly through the policies, collections, and services she created, and directly through the 'personal touch' and her public and private lectures. As a gatekeeper, she might almost be considered a failure, as her philosophy favoured free and open access to nearly anything the public demanded, which made her a success as a disseminator of print and print culture, and leads back to her success as a literary muse. Although few librarians serve as the inspiration for a literary figure (as far as we know), the majority of those who work with the public likewise provide access through the collections and services they provide, including outreach beyond the physical walls of their library buildings, and inspire their publics in ways both prosaic and poetic.

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ORCID

Suzanne M. Stauffer http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7948-804X