

Classics Alive! The Library of Alexandria in *The Librarians* and *The Great Library* Series

A common trope in Young Adult (YA) fiction and television is the secret magical library, holding and protecting magical worlds, which stem from its contents: books and artifacts. (French 2017; Mandel 2015; Everest 2015). This library offers the reader or viewer an invitation to join in a magical adventure which utilizes knowledge garnered from its contents. A developing trend in YA stories is the use of the Library of Alexandria (LofA), the “center and symbol of Hellenistic culture,” as the living foundation for both knowledge and magic (Thiem 1979: 508). This library in YA stories is protected by an ensemble of heroic characters who differ in gender and background. No longer is the single hero, typically male, the sole recipient of knowledge nor is he the solitary problem solver (TVTropes 2020). The LoA, a living foundation for all knowledge, that is guarded by a diverse heroic ensemble results in the exposure of classics to an audience of various backgrounds.

Taking a closer look at two YA stories, *The Librarians* television series, and *The Great Library* book series, I argue that the use of the LofA as a living, existing library that stores and guards magic allows for classical culture to seamlessly bleed into popular culture. In *The Librarians*, the Library is a sentient manifestation of the LofA, collecting “ancient knowledge” (S1.E1 “And the Crown of King Arthur”) and magical events are defined by their connection to the ancient knowledge of the Library. Language, myth, history, and art from ancient Minoan, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian cultures are common exposition material and in some episodes, ancient gods and mythical figures, come back to life or still live in the present-day. In the *Great Library* series, the Library, which never burned, controls knowledge and thus maintains power over the entire world. The reader is introduced to the inner political workings of the ancient

Library, particularly the possession of original books and control of the dissemination of copies to the world as well as the structure and organization of the actual LofA (cf. MacLeod 2000:4).

The use of LofA in YA stories also extends access to classical knowledge to those whom access has not always been available. The solitary male protagonist, possibly representing the seemingly exclusive world of academia, is now a team of protagonists, diverse in gender, ethnicity, and background, who bring different skills, striking a partial similarity to the *synodos* of 30-50 male scholars at the LofA (MacLeod 2000:4). In *The Librarians*, three Librarians, of different abilities and gender, are invited to join the Library, with each granted equal and complete access to ancient knowledge and magic. In *The Great Library* series, a group of postulants from all over the world competes to become part of the Great Library either as a scholar, soldier, or alchemist. The diversity of the ensembles in these stories opens up the invitation for male and female, academic and non-academic, to join the adventures and thus be exposed to classical knowledge and culture, even if in a subtle way through its connection with magic. The classical world, and the study of it, through the literary (re)incarnation of the Library of Alexandria in YA stories, is now open to any and all who are invited to enter the magical adventure.

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