Paul Evan Peters begins his discussion of library standards with a convincing argument that the acceptance by librarians of the need for order and standards is not a character flaw. Rather, in promoting the use of standards, librarians are efficiently forwarding their missions to build and organize collections and to make them accessible to their clients. Pointing out the economic realities of contemporary libraries, Peters further argues that standards are appealing because they help librarians to control costs.

I wish to use the opportunity presented by this article to explore the question of why standards are so important to libraries and librarians. I will approach this task by articulating my views on various aspects of this question and by drawing upon the experience of libraries and librarians to illustrate those views. I hope my argument may advance the general understanding of some of the values of libraries and librarians. Toward that end I will develop the theme that standards provide libraries and librarians with a key method for translating their values into actions. I also hope that this article will be informative and entertaining to those readers of this journal who are not librarians. Mostly I hope that the readers of this article will take from it an appreciation of the standards agenda of libraries and librarians, how that agenda has changed over time, and what form that agenda will assume in the years ahead.

The Stereotype

We all know exactly the stereotype of the librarian that I have in mind. It is a very familiar one, and it is not very complimentary to libraries or librarians. It subscribes to the view that librarians love order more than they love anything else in the world. It further subscribes to the view that libraries are conservative institutions in which new things are evaluated solely in terms of how well they fall within and advance certain long-standing traditions. This stereotypical view of libraries and librarians suspects that their devotion to standards arises from a desire for uniformity. It fears that there is no room for creativity and uniqueness in the worlds of libraries and librarians. It resents the fact that libraries and librarians play such a key role in the relationship between authors and readers. It also looks

forward to that relationship being ended when technology renders libraries and librarians obsolete.

I concede that all stereotypes, like all myths, have some basis in fact. I will, that is, so long as it is acknowledged that such facts are overwhelmingly historical rather than contemporary in their origins. I also believe that a librarian without an inclination toward order or a library without an institutionalized respect for tradition is a librarian or a library without much of a future. I hasten to add, though, that such a concession and admission do not necessarily lead me to the stereotypical view of libraries and librarians. Neither the quest for order nor the conservation of tradition has been the *sine qua non* of any library or librarian I have ever known. Libraries and librarians rarely, if ever, reason for or against a proposed policy or practice on the basis of "order" or "tradition" as such. This stereotypical view of libraries and librarians suffers from a confusion of means and ends, mistaking a visible manifestation of effort by libraries and librarians for one of their goals or objectives.

The Mission

This confusion can be sorted out by reflecting upon the mission of libraries and librarians. At least in the United States, the textbook statement of this mission holds that libraries are institutions and librarians are professionals dedicated to the public's right to know and to the acquisition, organization, storage, preservation, and accessing of transmitted and recorded knowledge in support of that right. Looking from this perspective, it becomes understandable that libraries are built upon a foundation of tradition and that librarians strive to bring order to the vast scope of knowledge products and services that express that tradition. In short, this is precisely what we want from libraries and librarians. We want libraries to be ready to make our tradition available to us and our children upon demand. We also want librarians to have prepared themselves and their collections so that similar things can be brought together and so that we can get advice that saves us time and improves our results. The stereotypical view of libraries and librarians does justice to neither. It portrays their strengths as their faults and misses the point by confusing what libraries and librarians do for what they believe. If we are to understand why standards resonate so powerfully for libraries and librarians, we must look beyond this stereotypical view.

Collections and Access

A good place to begin is with the concept of "access," something that is currently attracting a lot of attention in libraries and among librarians. Libraries now build and coordinate their collections by painstakingly analyzing what sorts of materials need to be accessed by their clienteles, to what depth, and in what timeframe. Computer-based bibliographic information systems of all types make great quantities of data about specific materials and individual library collections accessible on a national and even international (as well as local) scale. New