

TO BE A LIBRARIAN

Nastasia FODOREAN

Associate Professor

Bibliology and Information Science College, Cluj-Napoca

When I first entered the Central University Library in Cluj, I thought that the role of a librarian was merely to rationalise the administration of the library by using simple, effective, fast and cheap techniques. I came to the library in the 1970s, in the pen and pencil epoch: the processing of certain categories of publication has been compulsorily accomplished by pen and pencil. After more than 25 years in this library I now work on the computer. It is clear that the use of modern library techniques can only be really productive if librarians have double competence: one must have librarianship knowledge and technical skills. You must know something about computers, their capacity and limits and you must adjust yourself to their requirements even though sometimes it is hard to give up old traditions. You must converse with the computer, since this kind of work implies a permanent dialogue between the librarian and the computer; therefore it is a conversational method of work. The program used at the CUL Cluj is called VUBIS (Vrije Universiteit Brussel Information System) and it is quite easy to learn. There is a group of computer-operators who initiate librarians into computerwork so that in a relatively short time librarians learn how to solve problems quickly and easily. In this way, I think, a new generation of librarians have been born. I read somewhere that they are named cyberians.

Now, at the end of the century, when new branches of science and disciplines about which we know almost nothing, appear almost every day, the librarian, if not conscientious enough, is practically helpless when he must decide which discipline a certain publication belongs to. Therefore a librarian must be well-informed which needs much time, attention but also competence.

Undoubtedly, we have to admit that the new techniques pose the problem of deciding whether a publication reveals a special subject better than another publication. Inaccuracies and even omissions are inevitable since the number of interdisciplinary sciences grows continuously. Scientific discoveries bring about changes in our profession too. Without a group of very well trained librarians, each specialised in his or her field, things will not be done well, for sure. Readers will be unsatisfied when consulting our databases they find a false rendering of information. I knew from the librarianship courses I attended over the years that apart from the purely technical part of our work, even that of selecting books for a valuable collection, purchasing them rapidly and in the most

convenient way, serving the reader appropriately, there are things that escape even the attention of highly competent, well-prepared librarians. In my opinion, training such specialists will always exceed the financial possibilities of any library of the country. It was absolutely necessary to found a librarianship department in the Cluj University centre and we think it will bring about important changes in libraries. It is our duty to teach the student that the researcher expects the librarian to inform him about every work that has been written in his field of activity. An automatised documentation will satisfy him only if it contains all scientific publications and if it is not limited to the incomplete collections of a single library. The services of more libraries will be needed since a single library can not offer a perfect and exhaustive documentation. We must also teach the readers how to use our collections effectively. This is something that can easily be done.

We start from two basic principles: the first one is that the author of a work knows perfectly what he wants to communicate and he tries to tell this with the title of his work and then in the contents, in a more detailed fashion. The second principle is that the reader (researcher) also knows his field of research and his field of interest well.

Therefore, the reader must have some instruments of information at hand so that he can use the information, whereas the librarian must instruct him how to use them. The use of computers leads to the more judicious organisation of the librarian's work - it allows the library to fulfil its real mission which is a scientific one; the administration of his library comes only after that. This issue can not be understood without knowing something about the way that the present state of the library has evolved.

It is true that the majority of librarians were philologists and historians. However, with the evolution of sciences some problems appeared which philologists and historians could not solve without the help of some specialists in other fields, Chemistry, Mathematics, Informatical Science, etc. The hardships we met and the countless problems we had to solve prove that the use of computers in libraries is indispensable, but some of the solutions offered by them are only acceptable in the case of a small collection and these become unusable with thousands of volumes. Therefore we need real librarians, trained in a way that they combine the qualities of a scientist, a documentalst, a librarian. They must never forget that all their work is used by readers who often have too little time for documentation and proper research. In this case the librarian must provide him with all the necessary material so that he can finish his research as soon as possible.

During my classes with first-year students of the Librarianship College we do not deal with the practice of librarianship. We deal with theory rather than practice. Naturally, principles are not just presented for their own sake, but in order to use them. Otherwise, it is proved all the time that mere theory, no matter how good it be, is useless if it is not applied to appropriate circumstances. Vice versa, many practices are not used because they are opposed by obsolete concepts. The principles of librarians' work should be discussed in critical terms when we are preoccupied by a technical or any other problem. Similarly, we should consider carefully what we teach our students and the young librarians. We must not impose practices and then insist on their use rejecting any innovation, either good or bad.

When we think of the word library, we firstly think of the diversity of materials deposited in collections, and then secondly of the people who stay behind the desk, that is, the librarians, and those who remain in front of it, that is, the reader.

We have decided to prove to our students that the proper function of a library depends on the communication between reader and librarian, a communication that must be civilised. At the same time, we must teach them how to use the non-verbal elements of communication (glance, gesture and sign which are extremely important). However, language is and remains the essential means of communication. Technical, audio and visual devices increase the effectiveness of language.

We shall teach the students that libraries offer the possibility that information is extracted from the process of communication in the form of documents and is replaced later, after stocking, in this process. Libraries can offer the process of communication to a greater extent than other media. It follows that libraries store information in order to transmit it to the future. Generally, the span of time between the introduction of the information in library stock and the moment of borrowing from stock, that is, placing it at the readers' disposal, must be a relatively short one, as modern libraries' practice shows us. Therefore libraries are necessary in the maintenance of the flux of information. To maintain up-to-date information means that it must be gathered in a pre-established order. Libraries are mediators; they intercede on behalf of readers and librarians to obtain the necessary information with a relatively small loss of time. The more the flux of information grows, the more important the librarian's work becomes of gathering it. This ensures that large amounts of specialised information will be in blocks and this makes retrieval easier. Because libraries offer information or documents on information, they take an active part in the educa-

tional process. Their place is therefore well-defined: their importance becomes evident at the same time. Libraries are therefore indispensable.

Founding a librarianship college in Cluj has become necessary not only because of the changes in Romania before 1989, but also because of the total lack of information devices in this field. The tradition of the Cluj bibliological school has been also a motive. In the period between the two world wars, since the first conference of general bibliography (the first conference in this field in our higher education system) was opened in 1932 by Professor Ioachim Crăciun, this bibliological school has had a decisive role in the evolution of Romanian bibliography. The growing number of librarians, mostly unprofessionals, also creates the need for an appropriate training.

Our students will soon become librarians and work with the old generation of librarians who have learned everything "in situ" and who often became librarians because they had no other choice. But our students are not forced by circumstances to become librarians. They have chosen this profession and we will do our best to maintain and heighten their interest in this field. We will teach them everything that we have accumulated during the years but we will also give them the opportunity of teaching us, the old librarians. Perhaps it is all a question of "to be or not to be"... librarians!