

“To Be A Librarian”¹
– Nastasia Fodorean: Times And Circumstances –

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The practice of writing history, and especially the history of “institutions”, solely based on administrative “documents” and papers produced or achieved in the course, and as a consequence, of their “mechanical functioning”, stored as archival units, may rightfully frighten us. Because it is exactly people who are absent from these “histories”...

It is also impossible to write the history of the University Library in Cluj – once the interest in this enterprise will finally be outlined – without taking into account human destinies. The personal unfolding of these is also determined by forces, contexts, chances, and circumstances which can seldom be individually “ruled”, but on the *corpus* of which persons and personalities leave their unique and irreplaceable fingerprints.

This is also the reason why the journal *Philobiblon* decided to “feature” in its pages, as regularly as possible, persons and personalities who, by their work and abilities, contributed not only to the daily functioning, but also to the evolution of the University Library in Cluj. And this is of course – it cannot be otherwise – an experience and an exercise of re-living, which must focus mainly on the *future*. Though contemporaries with our fellow-humans, we are still part of a hidden dialogue with our ancestors and descendants. And one of the privileged “places” of this dialogue is constituted exactly by “institutions”, by those who created them and who keep them together in the dynamics of their own meanings.

Thus, in order to carry out this intention, I asked Nastasia Fodorean to commit her “life history” to paper, paying special attention to the ways her destiny was intertwined with the modulations of the history of the library – and the profession of the librarian – for an important period of 32 years. This opportunity has confirmed once again the fact that such “stories” always outline, by their vitality, many more general institutional aspects and “historical” contexts, which as a rule

¹ Being dedicated to Nastasia Fodorean, the title of this text is taken from the title of one of her articles: *To Be a Librarian*, published in *Philobiblon* Vol. II. no. 1., January-June 1997, 99-102.

remain invisible even for “monographic” intentions. These, however, are utterly lacking for the time being...

A graduate of the Faculty of Letters in Cluj, specialized in Russian and Romanian, Nastasia Fodorean chose the career of a librarian – as most of her colleagues from that generation – merely for exterior and circumstantial reasons: to find a job in the city and university center of Cluj, where her husband was placed as a young Assistant Professor to one of the Departments of the Faculty of Economics. Her knowledge about libraries in general and their activities was very vague, and was exclusively based on – extremely positive – impressions and experiences gained during her student life. That is, as a user.

At that time, in the year 1972, employment in the University Library was achieved by a “contest”. The lack of institutions for higher education in library science in all Romania, and the general absence of a specialized and diversified structure of library activities resulted in the exam subject for the post being completely unspecific: translation. Moreover – these “contests” were (also then) opportunities for hidden services, as they were most often “won” by “wives” and “nephews”, i.e. the wives and nephews of officials, university people and other potentates.

And thus Nastasia Fodorean’s employment was *postponed* as long as the wives concerned were “solved” and employed, as well as the niece of the Rector of that time. Finally, it was the result of interventions from officials of the communist party, that her results were now evaluated at their real value, what she actually achieved on the “contest”. She was finally placed in the Cataloguing Service, where she worked uninterruptedly, becoming from 1997 the Head of the department until her retirement in 2004.

All these of course meant for her not only a new job, but also a *new profession*. However much she was helped by her education in the philological field, library cataloguing meant the discipline of new rules emerging from the specific experience of a librarian engaged in the preservation, arrangement, and utilization of documents, and making them available to readers. Even typing was a new skill for her.¹ All this was completed, of course, by the atmosphere of the political context.

Under such conditions, the great danger for any re-training is in fact a complete and general *de-training*. Surely general de-training reached many of the circumstantial employees of Romanian libraries in

¹ Typewriting would later become a means of extra earning, meant to diminish the burden of everyday needs.

this period. However, this was not the case for Nastasia Fodorean. She meant and indeed succeeded to make use of her literary culture and philological rigor and thinking, gained and practiced during her university studies, in the new framework of cataloguing activities. These activities themselves have been substantially modified in their rules and methods, during those 32 years of her professional life, reaching from calligraphic library cards to typewritten, then typographically multiplied ones, and then to automated cataloguing, first in the library integrated system VUBIS, and then in ALEPH, used even today.¹

“Learned”, diligent, talented, with “healthy and trustworthy social origins”², and a member of the Communist Party, Nastasia Fodorean was still not spectacularly promoted in the administrative hierarchy of the library. Although recognized and rapidly co-opted as a lecturer – together with only five more people from all over the country – for the training courses in cataloguing organized by the Ministry of Education, most of her superiors, her department Heads in the library came from areas outside cataloguing, and were her professional inferiors, but also unsatisfactory as managers.

In addition, there was the absence of an applied professional dialogue, where professional and institutional problems would have been raised and settled on the basis of rational and matter-of-fact arguments, many efforts being wasted in meaningless actions, lacking any goal or benefit. Such an action was, at the beginning of the 1980s, the cataloguing of older books which came to the library by sinuous histories (being confiscated from private libraries after various trials and political lawsuits; publications also taken over from private libraries following the “legal” or “illegal” emigration from Romania of the former possessors; the “reorganization” of different libraries and historical collections according to circumstantial regulations referring to “secret stocks”, etc.), but which were left unprocessed until then. These publications were finally partly catalogued, but they were sent back to the stacks with their cards, which were themselves made in one single copy... That is, they were not actually put into circulation! It seems that such problems could

¹ During the discussed time several cataloguing regulations were applied. An important step in bringing Romanian standards closer to international ones was the introduction, in 1976, of the *Guide of Cataloguing and Classification of University Library Collections*, elaborated by a collectivity coordinated by Victoria Curcăneanu in Bucharest. The **ISBD** standards were introduced into the Central University Library Cluj starting with the year 1984.

² Her father was the Deputy of the Chief of the Police in Sălaj county.

not be raised then except in the obscure and illusory framework of “individual discussions” with the (communist) “Party Bureau” of the Institution, full of frustrating hopes, and which, under the seal of the “confidentiality” of confessions, promised both direct effects, and protection from the possible administrative consequences. All these were in reality nothing else than means and forms of manipulating public space, which, otherwise, was not avoided, nor employed for the use of reason. I myself participated in one such public “meeting” in the department, and I appreciated the open, substantial, and to-the-point manner that N. Fodorean exposed and argued her position, a thing seldom practiced back then. Things remained, certainly, undecided.

Naturally, following such experiences there came a period of “withdrawal” and isolation, made more difficult by personal hardships, and even by material needs.¹

The events of December 1989 brought substantial modifications on all levels in the library’s life – though not lacking sinuosity and obscurity. Prejudices and passions were now intertwined in their agitation with a general lack of clarity and decision-making in the re-organization of the library. A favorable medium was created thus for all sorts of “lickspittles” and unscrupulous ambitions. A future detailed historical study of the employees’ careers, that is, of the human resources policy of the period, will certainly reveal the hybridism of both the criteria, and the projects.²

Nastasia Fodorean had to deal with the same “fog” on the level of recently created “professional associations” as well. In 1990 the *Association of School Librarians in Romania* (ABIR) was founded, at the beginning, clearly, in order to assure and cover the survival of the old *corpus* of “library managers”, then rapidly engaging in megalithic projects and spectacular enterprises of professional tourism, as well as

¹ Following her divorce, and on account of the situation thus created, in order to supplement her modest income. N. Fodorean practiced not only typewriting, but she also became a *hired cook*, informally, at the family of those privileged, who on account of their position had access to food and other material supplies, which were refused in Romania, and especially during the 1980s, to the ordinary citizen. In fact her “reward” was not money, but a part of the meals prepared from these rare commodities.

² A more detailed study of these aspects could only be undertaken in 1996, and its “telling” and significant results were published in 1998. See István Király, Adriana Székely, “A Study on the State of the Profession of Librarians with University Degree in the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library”. In *Philobiblon*, Vol. III, Number 1-2, Jan.-Dec. 1998, 213-235.

recruiting a suitable range of users. As for the “substance”, problems and energy were long exhausted on gratuitous acts.

The year 1995, however, brought about radical changes. She was asked to teach general library science and cataloguing at the newly founded College of Library Science of the University in Cluj. She engaged in her new job with enthusiasm and self-giving, her work with the students – future librarians – meaning an enormous responsibility for her. During this period the idea was nurtured to publish a periodical for library science students, which was tactfully and responsibly coordinated from the very beginning by N. Fodorean. It is due to her that the journal bears the title *Acribia or the Anastasians*, with direct reference to the name of Anastasia F.¹ In 1998 the College – which could not be accredited for various reasons and essential academic requirements – was transformed into a form of double specialization in the framework of the Faculty of History and Philosophy, becoming the Department of History-Library Science, where she is still teaching cataloguing.

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Cataloguing is rightly considered one of the traditional and “key”-activities and departments of any library institution. However, having spoken repeatedly with many cataloguers, I realized that very few of them actually understand *what exactly* is the central point of their activity. Nastasia Fodorean is surely one of the few. Because for her library cards were never goals in themselves, the perfection and accuracy of which would only serve the maniacal necessities of upsetting inclinations in rushing into details, but were seen as serving first of all a catalogue meant for usage of all kinds. The catalogue itself, its order and discipline, asks for the same attention and concentration as the production of unique catalographic descriptions.

Even more, she always understood the catalogue as a system. Just as much the system of different types of catalogues – which constitute in fact the nervous network of any library –, as the system of the library as a whole, a system which in fact is itself open, as a call – cultural, intellectual, human, scientific, or otherwise – towards an existential opening. All these have made Nastasia Fodorean herself open and efficient in the changes that occurred in her field, the meaning and

¹ The *Philobiblon* has been reviewing the issues of this journal from its very appearance; unfortunately it now seems to be at an impasse.

direction of which have led exactly towards the inter-connectedness of, and communication between, systems.

It is not at all surprising, for me at least, that I myself have realized and formulated certain ideas about the meaning of constructing and using a library and its specific means on the grounds of a discussion that I had with Nastasia Fodorean exactly 20 years ago. I realized then that the construction and authentic reading of any library catalogue is essentially a reading “in horizon”. For any person who “opens” a library catalogue – of whatsoever kind – the cards and/or entries will open up a horizon. A horizon of the works of one author, a horizon of titles which by their alphabetic terminology raise connections, a horizon of subjects (in the case of systematic-thematic catalogues), or a horizon of the geographies which are also historically presented there (in the case of geographical catalogues), etc.

That is, I realized that the meaning of catalogues is not – and cannot be – anything else than the meaning and horizon of a library in general: to offer and maintain the possibility and articulations of a dialogue with its “questions” and problems which belong to us, and with the way in which, by assuming them, we live our own lives in the defiance of a *now*, forged in the opening of time’s challenges...

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