

“Elective Affinities” Or (A)Chemies Of Librarianship

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The above title is partly also the title of an important Goethian novel. We use it here not out of senseless “preciosity”, but entirely intrinsically. That is, out of reasons which are expressly organic, and connected just as much to the topic, than to the problem-oriented and intentional horizon of our intervention. The first of these reasons is exactly the endeavor to present/review a *chemistry* bibliography, recently published in the *Bibliotheca Bibliologica* collection edited by the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library Cluj, the author being the chemist-bibliographer Elena Moraru.¹

On the other hand, the title of Goethe’s novel is itself a **chemical** term of his time. At that time, the Swedish T.O. Bergmann called *attractio electiva* the strong internal tendency of “elements” to detach, to break from their old bonds, and connect in new ones, according to certain uncontrollable predispositions, electivities, and “impulses”.² And the disorder of order, or the order of disorder – that is, the problematic and tendentious horizon in which all these permanently happen both in the great history of nature and, metaphorically, in the world of human bonds and contexts –, always fascinated, overwhelmed (and also inspired) Goethe. And not just him.

So I also wish – or rather, feel the need – to discuss the aforementioned bibliographic work in its ampler context, which is today, again metaphorically speaking, just as intrinsic, amalgamated, problematic, and maybe even overwhelming, than that other work, the exploring of which has always been, from Goethe onwards: a (hidden) defiance.

The *Bibliographic Subject Index of the Review of Chemistry* impresses already by its dimensions. The two volumes which have come out so far, contain 607 and 817 pages, respectively. Thus, she has indexed

¹ Moraru, Elena, *Indicele bibliografic tematic al “Revistei de chimie” Bibliographic Subject Index of the Review of Chemistry*, vol. I. (1988-1998). 817p. *Bibliotheca Bibliologica*. New series. 27 (46). The *Philobiblon* collection of the “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 2003.

² Cf. Roman. Ion, *Prefață* (Preface), in J. W. Goethe, *Afinitățile electiv* (Elective affinities), Bucharest: Minerva, 1975, XIII.

the *Review of Chemistry*, which is “the most important [Romanian] periodical which has made known the research of specialists in this field from our country.”¹

This fact is even more welcome because the author considered it necessary to insert, at the beginning of the first volume of her *Indexes*, a short but consistent *History of the Review*. Here one may find out that it is the only Romanian review of chemistry which can boast a continuous appearance for over 50 years. In other words, Elena Moraru’s bibliography aims exactly the indexation of the most important Romanian periodical in its field, having a profile scientific and professional (technical) at the same time, and which “... is highly appreciated both in the country and abroad, all the articles being mentioned in *Chemical Abstracts*, or partially in other specialized publications from abroad, and which is sent to 20 countries.”²

However, the “history” of the review is not only useful as an information background for the bibliographic index. On the contrary, it makes us think of the immanent historicity of any bibliographic act. For, on the basis of such an index we realize – inevitably, perhaps –, that, in front of us, we find the articulated and continuous history of a segment of a discipline, which, then, can be understood and interpreted by the historiography of its field, already based on autonomous and “trustworthy” documentary efforts. And this applies to any serious and responsible bibliography or bibliographic index!

Such an effort and achievement is, certainly, the bibliography we focus on now. It lists – for the time being – (only) twenty of the fifty years of the review, that is, the period between 1978-1998. Even so, the number of entries rises to as many as 5371! These are divided into chapters and subchapters, which are in fact *subject fields* arranged alphabetically. But: “In the case of works which treat *several problems*, those problems were taken into consideration which *were the most relevant*, considering that the *rest* of the problems can be found in the *Index of terms*.”³

It is obvious thus that the *Index of terms* has here a function much more extended than simply mediating the retrieval of references; it

¹ Jitaru, Maria, *Prefață* (Preface), in Elena Moraru, op. cit., Vol. I., p. III.

² Cociașu, Corneliu Anton, *Revista de chimie – 50 de ani de apariție neîntreruptă* (The Review of chemistry – 50 years of uninterrupted appearance), in *Istoricul revistei* (The history of the review), Idem, p. XV1.

³ Moraru, Elena, *Notă explicativă* (An explanatory note), in Idem, Vol. I, p. V. Italics mine. I.K.

was conceived and constructed in order to *deepen the analytical nature of the bibliography*, as the keyword or the descriptor in the *Index* sends to *all* the entries treating one particular subject, including those which treat it in a “secondary” title. We all know how important this feature is for the correct – that is, specialized! – information of specialists, therefore we will return later on, from another vector of “elective affinities of librarianship”, to this matter.

Inside each subchapter of the index, bibliographic references are arranged alphabetically according to author heading, naturally also respecting the chronological order of appearance of the articles, the elements of their bibliographic description following the “professional” order familiar to the users of such an instrument. The titles of the articles – here, as in the publication itself – also appear in English translation, and the existence of abstracts in any language of wide circulation is also signaled. Similarly, the *Index of terms* also contains complete English translation, and therefore this bibliography may certainly become a useful working tool for international inter-library exchange departments. The volumes are also completed by an *Index of authors*, specifying the number of the entry where one particular author’s work can be found in either volume of the *Bibliographic Index*. With one single glance, therefore, the user may have an overview about the “proliferation” or notoriety of an author in the literature represented in the bibliography.

I have said: the work impresses from the very beginning by the size of its volumes. All of the aspects highlighted in the followings prove and illustrate what as a rule – and rightfully – should be called “professionalism”. Certainly the use of this qualifier is fully justified in the case of Elena Moraru’s work.

However, it seems to me that despite its many uses, in fact pleasingly frequent, the full meaning of the term “professionalism” often remains here unexplained and essentially even unconceived. What exactly and essentially is “professionalism” in the case of a bibliographic subject index in *chemistry*? May the meaning of “professionalism” refer here only to matters of technical competence – bibliographic, “info-documentary” –, proved by the recognition and application of methods, rules, procedures, and computerized programs of their elaboration and editing? Certainly NOT! No “purely bibliographic” competence alone can possibly enable – let alone “guarantee” – any kind of professionalism for a bibliographic index focusing on a particular field of scientific research. However skillfully may any diligent and thorough bibliographer use all sorts of terminology tables and/or classification thesauruses (e.g.,

the pertaining UDC classes), if he/she does not have an adequate specialized training structured enough for the understanding and interpretation of the *specialized content*, then all the texts of the authors, and the terms in the “tables” will only remain empty words for him, guessed by chance, or merely found externally.

Therefore, I mean to emphatically state that when I refer to the *Bibliographic Subject Index of the Review of Chemistry* conceived and elaborated by Elena Moraru as “professional”, then I mean this term in its full sense. That is, with pointed and highlighted reference to the fact that this bibliography was completed by someone who is herself a CHEMIST **as well!** Moreover: the author of the bibliography is a doctor in chemistry, gaining her title by a dissertation entitled: *Indigenous stationary phases used in thin layer chromatography*, presented in 1983.

Therefore, her coming from the field of research, and employment to the university library in 1991 was a real gain – clearly seen even today – just as much for this institution, than for the completeness of the profession’s meanings and requirements.

In the 1980s there was quite an extended “discursive” discussion – though superficial – in Romanian specialized literature about a term the gravity of which should be seriously re-emphasized today. The term is: “librarian with a double specialization”. In fact, it refers to persons like Elena Moraru: masters both of librarianship techniques and methods, and of another well-defined domain of scientific research. Essentially, the term does not only refer to this much. The librarian, (double) specialist, educated and trained in another definite domain of science and research, certainly has a much more complex and substantial contact with the content, the meaning and significance of scientific library institutions and their activity.¹

In all the cases when a librarian, for his activity, has to deal with the *information content* of his document, which of course always belongs to one discipline or another, the need for a competence responding to the

¹ However “insufficient” the classical traditions of libraries and the diversified self-definition of librarians may be considered today, they cannot be surpassed without consequences by their mere *forgetting*. I should refer here first of all to the traditions of the university library in Cluj. In the inter-war period, for instance, the director of the institution proudly presented the fact that there were important intellectuals active here, even in key-positions, most of them having works and even doctorates in diverse and various fields. See Barbul, Eugen, *Biblioteca Universității Regele Ferdinand I. din Cluj* (The library of King Ferdinand I. University in Cluj), Cluj: Cartea Românească, 1935. 60-70.

requirements of this content cannot be eliminated without extremely serious consequences, directly involving the core of library activity and the profession of librarian. Of course, in most of our libraries such kinds of activities happen daily. Not only in scientific and research libraries. I refer for example to document classification and indexation, which simply cannot be seriously done without understanding the content of the documents, and even being in accordance with it, that is, with the range of its references within a certain discipline or disciplines. The situation is identical, as we have just seen, for the majority of bibliographic and info-documentary activities. In fact, even reference services cannot function otherwise. The case of “special collections” activities is just as clear, and even more so that of specialized libraries. Moreover, in case of central libraries, especially university libraries, like the Central University Library in Cluj, many branch libraries, having to do with a specialized public, are always exposed to requirements which are mostly “specialized”.¹

Consequently, the need for a “double-specialist librarian” has not diminished, but on the contrary, it is – I think – continuously rising, due to contemporary and natural tendencies of the dynamics of disciplines and the need for up to date information. The construction or elaboration of specialized databases, whether full-text or – especially – based on abstracts, or “only” bibliographic, cannot happen only on the basis of LIS competence.

Coming back to our topic, the chemist Elena Moraru, was employed at the Central University Library Cluj, coming from the field of research, in 1991. However, there is a question naturally and seriously raised today in the power fields of the games of “elective affinities” in the actual (al)chemistries of Romanian librarianship, namely: could she, with the same competences, dispositions, and requests (which today could be even better outlined and stringent than 13 years ago), *still be employed here today?*

The answer to this question lies written in a paragraph of a legal disposition, which reads as follows: “Art. 8. – For occupation of auxiliary didactic functions the following training conditions must be observed: a) for the job of a librarian, information specialist, and editor – graduation with a university diploma of an educational institution specialized in librarianship, or other educational institutions the graduates of which

¹ About this problem, and the particular case of branch libraries see also Morărescu, Gabriela, “Biblioteci filiale – biblioteci specializate” (Branch libraries – specialized libraries), in *Biblioteca* (The library), 6 (2003), 177-179.

study during their school attendance specialized disciplines of librarianship; the job of a librarian, information specialist, or editor can also be occupied by other graduates of universities, colleges, or high schools with a diploma, for a determined period, if they have attended an introductory course in the field.”¹

The answer to the above question is therefore clearly *negative*. The author of the bibliography of our concern here, as well as other valuable persons who are – still – working in the libraries of Romanian education could not be employed any more... Moreover, and it is just as serious a problem, following their future retirement, they could not be replaced – for the time being, only, we hope – by people with similar competences.

So, the question naturally raises: where and who will elaborate in such a prospective future specialized bibliographies of the level and quality of this one, on which we are trying to draw attention now? The answer is just as simple and disappointing in this case either. Because this perspective simply eliminates university libraries from this circuit, making such activities possible only in the framework of public libraries, “county”-libraries, or the library network of the Academy – otherwise equally valuable and active.

I am quite aware of the fact that this conclusion – however well argued, illustrated and to the point – may touch upon certain “tender spots” connected to the laudable efforts to establish librarianship education in Romania.² Despite these possible “tender spots”, we must still focus on the *goal* first! And this goal leads to the *curricula* of these institutions, which – cannot happen otherwise – concentrate on matters technically and disciplinarily called: *Library and Information Science*... It is an incontestable achievement. Nevertheless, only with the condition that this science and this education should always affirm and re-affirm the responsibility towards the *content of the information* guarded and used in

¹ *Lege privind statutul personalului didactic* (Law regarding the statute of didactic personnel), published in the *Monitorul Oficial* (Official Monitor), Part I., No. 158 from 16 July 1997.

² It a historical, circumstantial – but real – aspect of university-level librarianship education in Romania, that most of the faculty members, and especially the highest ranking ones – Associate Professors and University Professors – do not possess, and cannot possess, due to historical reasons, graduation diplomas of a university institution of librarianship. Consequently, according to the current legislation, they *could not even be employed* at a Romanian university library, except perhaps only temporarily, and for a determined period of maximum 180 days! Should we go on insisting on the grotesqueness of the situation?!

libraries and information centers, so much in processing and information processes, as in info-documentary ones. All this inevitably presupposes a competence connected exactly to the *specialty of the content*.

In their alchemy, the works of the forces of elective affinities are never – Goethe knew – lacking dramatism. So, there is no further need of “dramatization”. Natural history, as also the history of librarianship, thoroughly presents it.

Here is then another use of a “chemical” bibliography of chemistry.