

Farkas Gyalui, Former Deputy Director of Cluj University Library

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Abstract

The present article is a short presentation of the life and activity of Farkas Gyalui, former Deputy Director of Cluj University Library. Librarian, journalist, writer, and teacher, as well as an active agent of the cultural life in Cluj, Gyalui dedicated most of his life to the institution he for long wished to lead. As a librarian he was interested in the history of printing and libraries and wrote many important studies concerning the state of Hungarian and foreign libraries and library science, being a supporter of several modern developments in this field (legal deposit, interlibrary loan and public libraries).

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We are going to discuss in this paper the personality and activity of the scholar and librarian Farkas Gyalui, whose real name was Farkas Mendel and who was one of the personalities who marked the activity of the University Library of Cluj.

He was born on November 24, 1866 in Gyalu (today Gilău) into a Jewish family. He later became a lifelong citizen of Cluj. His studies, which he began in the Unitarian College and then continued and finished in the Calvinist College, and his entire professional activity in the institutions of Cluj connected him to this town. Due to his predilection for linguistics he translated French texts for the Cluj newspaper *Magyar Polgár* (The Hungarian Citizen) when he was only 15 years old. After leaving school in 1883 he abandoned the town for a short while, continuing his studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Budapest, but the next year he left this institution and returned to Cluj where he enlisted in the Faculty of Letters, Hungarian–French specialization. He obtained his doctorate in letters with a dissertation dedicated to the scientist János Apáczai Csere (1625–1654). In March 1886 he was introduced almost by

force to the editorial staff of the famous newspaper *Kolozsvári Közlöny* (The Gazette of Cluj), where he became the lifelong friend of István Petelei, the pillar of this publication.¹ In 1889 we meet him in the editorial staff of the morning paper *Magyarság* (Hungarianness), and then he became the contributor of the Budapest newspapers *Pesti Hírlap* (The Pest Newspaper) and *Budapesti Hírlap* (The Budapest Newspaper). Despite his success in journalism he preferred the post of a librarian in the University Library in Cluj, an institution to which he remained faithful until the end of his life refusing to accept the offers of the Budapest University Library, and moreover of the British Museum which offered to make him the head of its Hungarian department.² Thanks to his activity as a journalist, he became acquainted with significant personalities of the Hungarian literary and cultural life of the age such as Pál Gyulai, Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth, Géza Gárdonyi, Ferenc Herczeg, Béla Tóth, Elek Benedek, Mari Jászai, Sándor Endrődi, János Fadrusz, Ödön Jakab, Sándor Szilágyi, Mihály Szabolcska, Viktor Rákosi and many others with whom he maintained a close collaboration both personally and through a rich correspondence.

At the same time, in the library, as the result of a ten years long activity, he managed to create and publish between 1892 and 1902 the systematic catalogue of the library in 5 volumes including in it no less than 45,768 works.³

In 1897, supported by the Ministry of Education and Religion, he made a long study trip during which he visited public libraries in Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Belgium, Holland and Austria in order to gather technical data to be used and applied in the new university library which was to be built in Cluj. He was most impressed by the libraries of Basel and Strasburg.⁴ He related the majority of his

¹ Gyalui Farkas, "Első és utolsó találkozásom Petelei Istvánnal" (My First and Last Meeting with István Petelei), *Páosztortűz* (Watchfire), Oct. 12, 1924, p. 184.

² The manuscript collection of the National Library of Hungary (from now on MCHNL), Ms. 37/796 Farkas Gyalui's letter to Gyula Pékár, Cluj, 16.I.1934, leaf 1.

³ *A kolozsvári M.Kir. Ferencz József Tudományegyetem Könyvtárának szakcímjegyzéke* (The Systematic Catalogue of the Library of the Hungarian Royal Ferenc József University in Cluj), Kolozsvár, 1892–1902.

⁴ The manuscript collection of the Hungarian Academy's Library (from now on MCHAL), Ms. 36/796, Farkas Gyalui's letter to Zoltán Ferenczi, Paris, 18.VI.1897. leaf 2.

experiences during the journey in a volume published in 1900.¹ On this occasion, the board of the International Bibliographic Institute in Brussels entrusted him to translate into Hungarian their propaganda booklet.

In 1905, Minister Antal Berzeviczy sent him to Turin to study the safety measures applied there to prevent library fires. There he got acquainted with the librarian A. Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI. Dr Ratti did not forget Gyalui when he became the Pope and sent him several gifts.²

In 1900, after the Director of the Cluj University Library, Zoltán Ferenczi had left for Budapest, Gyalui was appointed provisional Director. He greatly wished to become the permanent Director of the Library, although his wife was firmly opposed to this for the reason that her husband had not had enough time for his family up to that date, and in the new function he would have had even less. This was acknowledged by Gyalui himself in a letter: "It is true that for whole weeks I did not take a walk either with her or the children, I stay here in the library from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M."³ His newspaper articles gaining him a significant reputation in the liberal circles of Budapest, the members of these supported him greatly in his efforts to obtain the directorship of the Cluj University Library. This function, however, was in the end given to literary historian Pál Erdélyi. Though disappointed, he soon got over this moment, even becoming friends with his former rival later, and as a Chief Librarian he concentrated his efforts on the protection of the interests, the posts and the budget of the library: "I do everything in my power to defend the interests of the library, though I marvel that for this public cause I am forced to make such vehement efforts."⁴ On the other hand, he was very proud when speaking about the library employees' scientific achievements.⁵ In parallel he had a very active social life – he

¹ Farkas Gyalui, *Külföldi könyvtárakról* (On Foreign Libraries), I, Kolozsvár, 1900.

² Farkas Gyalui, "A torinói nemzeti könyvtár katasztrófája után" (After the Catastrophe of the National Library in Turin), *Budapesti Hírlap*, 5.IV.1905, p. 10.

³ MCHAL, Ms. 326/801, Farkas Gyalui's letter to Zoltán Ferenczi, Cluj, 20.II.1900, leaf 1.

⁴ MCHAL, Ms. 326/802, Farkas Gyalui's letter to Zoltán Ferenczi, Cluj, 5.III.1900, leaf 2.

⁵ MCHAL, Ms. 326/802, Farkas Gyalui's letter to Zoltán Ferenczi, Cluj, 9.V.1910, leaf 1.

went to the theatre, the opera, to vernissages, book launchings, he organized numerous literary soirees, and in the weekends he went on trips. Due to his many speciality studies and articles, on October 10, 1901, he became Professor of Library Science at the University of Cluj. In the course held by him, during 18 years, more than 1000 students learned about library science, the history of books, libraries, bibliographies, and press etc.¹ His good friend István Petelei made the remark related to this that some other person, a noble, would have used all the privileges of the professorship without making any effort, while Gyulai worked unceasingly in his new status.²

In 1906 he tried to establish a Library Science department, but his request was rejected by Albert Apponyi, the Minister of Public Education.³ He continued his efforts motivating his request with the fact that in Hungary some people want to make libraries without librarians, for with the exception of some state libraries there are dilettantes in such institutions.⁴

The library science course held by him until 1919 had the following modules: I. The development of writing and the press, especially the history of Hungarian presses. II. The history and art of book making, especially the history of book binding and illustration. III. The history of libraries. IV. Theoretical and practical library science. The birth and development of modern libraries. The construction and furnishing of libraries. The organization of catalogues. Library types. Laws and treaties regarding libraries. V. Practical bibliography: the description of publications. Elaborating bibliographies and repertories. The technique of scientific work. The most important bibliographic works.⁵ Beginning with university year 1912–1913 he initiated a new course entitled *The History and Bibliography of the Press* which contained lectures about the history of Hungarian and the international

¹ “A könyvtári tudományok a kolozsvári M. Kir. Ferencz József Tudományegyetemen” (Library Science in the Hungarian Royal Ferenc József University), *Magyar Könyvszemle* (Hungarian Book Review), 1901, p. 417.

² MCHNL, Oct. Hung. 1823, István Petelei’s letter to Farkas Gyulai, Târgu Mures, XI.1901.

³ *Emlékirata Gyulai Farkasnak a kolozsvári egyetemen egy könyvtári tanszék létesítése ügyében* (Farkas Gyulai’s Memorandum Regarding the Establishment of a Library Science Department in the University of Cluj), Kolozsvár, 1906.

⁴ Farkas Gyulai, “A magyar könyvtárak ügye” (The Case of Hungarian Libraries), *Budapesti Hírlap*, 1.X.1910, p. 33.

⁵ „*Grafikai Szemle*” (The Review of Graphic Art), 1902, I, p. 8.

press. It seems that these courses, otherwise free, were held twice a week.¹

After the new building of the institution was finished the courses and the practical activities were held in the ceremonial hall. Around 60–100 students participated at a course, among them the future Calvinist bishops László Ravasz and Sándor Makkai, as well as the historian Imre Lukinich.²

In 1911 Gyalui's wish and dream partially came true. He became Deputy Director of the Cluj University Library. In this quality he tried to resolve the problems related to the right to retirement of library employees, and during World War I he took care of the normal functioning of the library in adverse conditions.³ When the bibliographers István Monoki and Antal Valentiny were taken prisoners at the Russian front, he sent a letter to the Norwegian explorer and politician F. Nansen, winner of the Noble Prize, who in this period was occupied with the fate of refugees and war prisoners, and asked him to take care of the two librarians from Cluj according to his possibilities. He identified the two men by means of a Russian deputy, his friend, in a concentration camp in Krasnoyarsk. The deputy sent one of his lawyers to the camp in order to contact them offering them better conditions of living than the other prisoners'. This proposal, however, was firmly rejected by the two. A typhus epidemics broke out, and the lawyer sent a physician to the camp, thanks to whom the two librarians survived. Later Monoki got to Sweden and from there he came back to Cluj. The circumstances of Antal Valentiny's escape and return to Cluj are not known to me at the present stage of my research.⁴

In the autumn of 1916, as the dangers of war increased, Gyalui and Erdélyi made huge efforts to save the valuable documents of the library, organizing the packing and adventurous transportation of the manuscripts and incunabula to Budapest where they were placed in a

¹ *A kolozsvári Ferencz József Magyar Királyi Tudomány-Egyetem almanachja és tanrendje* (The Almanac and Programme of the Hungarian Royal Ferenc József University in Cluj), Kolozsvár, 1901, p. 7.

² The Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese (from now on ATCD), Farkas Gyalui, *Emlékirataim* (My Memoirs), I, p. 65.

³ MCHAL, Ms. 326/818, Farkas Gyalui's letter to Zoltán Ferenczi, Cluj, 22.V.1912, leaf 1.

⁴ ATCD, Farkas Gyalui, *Emlékirataim*, p. 38.

bank vault. Fortunately, after the war those values were brought back to Cluj.¹

It is worth mentioning that Gyalui, already in 1897, published a volume in which he defended the law of legal deposit.² He tried to convince printing houses that it was necessary and important to send legal deposit copies to libraries, one of his arguments being that the deposit copy is also an advertisement for the respective printing house and that they are valuable, or even the unique source of future historical researches. His view on the role of library science was defined in a study.³

One of the main functions of modern library science – thought Gyalui – consists in facilitating the access of a large public to books, supporting the construction of libraries which should become real cultural workshops. Library science should teach the librarian his responsibilities and tasks in the library and how these could be performed. This science should present and emphasize the readers' rights, the book not belonging to the library, but to the reading public who use it in their intellectual formation. The library preserves the book, but only in order that it might be used as long and by as many persons as possible. Another task of library science would be to investigate the history of great libraries and to set them as encouraging examples which should be followed before the other institutions.

Gyalui also supported the development of the public library system which only in that age began to appear in Hungary. At the same time, he considered that in this endeavour the initiative of the society was also necessary, excessive centralism only aggravating the situation. He criticized book lists proposed for acquisition for rural libraries which, however, were drawn up in Budapest.⁴

At the same time he also warmly recommended the implementation of international interlibrary loan.⁵

After Transylvania's annexation to Romania in 1918 Eugen Barbul became the Director of the University Library, Farkas Gyalui, however, due to his merits in this field was kept in the Library by the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

² Farkas Gyalui, *A nyomdatermékek köteles példányai* (The Legal Deposit Copies of Publications), Kolozsvár, Minerva, 1897.

³ Idem, *A könyvtári tudományok célja és feladata Magyarországon* (The Role and Function of Library Science in Hungary), Kolozsvár, 1904.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵ Farkas Gyalui, *Külföldi könyvtárakról*, p. XII.

new administration which appointed him to the function of Technical Director of the institution. In this function Gyalui – according to his memoirs – collaborated very well with the new head of the library on every level, and appreciated the new Director's normal, realist attitude. With Gyalui the majority of the Hungarian library employees remained in their posts. During these years Gyalui and his other colleagues in the library had a cultural and historical task.

His many and varied literary writings were published in the newspapers of Cluj (*Magyar Polgár, Kolozsvári Közlöny, Erdélyi Híradó, Kolozsvári Hírlap*), Budapest (*Budapesti Hírlap, Pesti Hírlap, Budapesti Napló, Magyar Hírlap, Fővárosi Lapok, Magyar Nemzet, Magyar Újság* etc.), Braşov and Oradea, in journals of Cluj (*Erdélyi Múzeum, Erdélyi Lapok, Erdélyi Irodalmi Szemle, Erdély, Pasztortűz, Erdélyi Helikon*) and Budapest (*Ország Világ, Budapesti Szemle, Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények, Magyar Nyelvőr* etc.), as well as in several yearbooks and almanacs. He translated among others works by Carmen Sylva, Maupassant, Jules Verne, Emil Zola, and Alfonse Daudet.

His literary works were published in the following order: his first short story collection came to light in Cluj in 1895 with the title *Nálunk vidéken* (At Us in the Countryside). Next year he published the historical novel *A szabadtító* (The Liberator). His comedy in one act *Mézes hetek után* (After the Honeymoon), after three Hungarian editions, appeared in German, Romanian, English and Finnish translations as well. It was followed by the monologue *A telefon vidéken* (The Telephone in the Countryside), which had its première in the National Theatre of Cluj on November 27, 1892. His 8 plays were performed on the stage of the National Theatre of Cluj, as well as on the stages of several theatres in Budapest and in Russia.

For his extraordinary literary and professional merits he was often awarded national and international orders and medals, and elected a member of different scientific and cultural societies. Thus, 11 years (1893–1904) he was the Secretary of the Transylvanian Literary Society, and in 1923 he became the honorary member of the society. In the 1890s he became a member and later Honorary President of the Masonic lodge Unio from Cluj. He was also a member of the Zsigmond Kemény Literary Society in Târgu-Mureş, member of the International Bibliographic Institute in Brussels, of the Gutenberg Society in Mainz, which honoured him with its silver medal for his activity in the domain of the history of printing. In 1916 Gyalui was offered nobility, but he preferred to this a raise in salary. In 1925 he was decorated with the Star

of Romania in officer rank, and in 1924 the French Republic awarded him the Order of Palmes Academiques first class to which the title Officier de l'Instruction Publique was added.

These results are all the more valuable as his family life was not without difficulties and problems. His wife, Gizella Brachfeld, a well-known violinist, died in 1914. As a token of love and respect, her tombstone in the shape of a violin was devised by Gyalui himself and is even now one of the most beautiful tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Cluj. A long time passed before Gyalui recovered after the loss of his dearly beloved wife. His daughter, Ilona, a French language teacher, settled in England in the 1930s and died there in 1939. His son, Jenő was the script writer and Director of the first film studio of Transylvania owned by Jenő Janovics. He directed several art films and documentaries. Farkas Gyalui died in 1952 in Cluj.

Having presented the librarian Farkas Gyalui's life and activity, we consider that his entire existence was dedicated to the books, the library, the literature and the culture of Cluj.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi