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Sara Wingate Gray

University College London

Abstract

'Librarian identity' is a contested arena, seemingly caught up in a values-war between traditional principles of 'citizenship' and late 20th century's shift to a democracy of consumerists. New professionals may be wary of associating with established systems of their own professional hierarchies when professional associations may be perceived as not having paid enough attention to how this shift in values has been effected, yet this is the key question to address: how has this shift towards 'information management/consumption'; the library member now as 'customer'; and new models of library provision by private or social enterprises, impacted on the profession's identity as a whole? What does it mean to call yourself a Librarian in the 21st century? This paper will trace the roots of the philosophy of Librarianship, in its changing shapes, to establish how professional identities are formed, ranging from Edwards and Dewey's originating 'librarian' as book keeper/cataloguer or library 'economiser'; through to Otlet and Shera's 'Documentalist'; Ranganathan's librarian 'helper'; and present day incarnations such as Lankes' librarian as 'community knowledge creation facilitator'. Incorporating historical analysis of the roots of librarianship's philosophies, this paper develops a thesis relating to how modern day librarian professionals, practicing in non-traditional areas and ways, may be helpful in suggesting a route out of the LIS echo-chamber of identity crisis, alongside the evidence of librarianship's historical trail. It is proposed that by investigating librarianship's underlying philosophies, and by listening to those who may not necessarily have traditional library qualifications or work in traditional settings, but who work as members of the profession in information and info-literacy skills, a way to forging a new identity can be observed. Examples of member/non-member outreach and activities are provided to illustrate how this new identity can be shaped to rise, phoenix-like, in a radical new, engaging, and engaged form.

Keywords

philosophy of librarianship, library history, librarians, library profession

In today's 21st century world landscape, awash with technology, as well as war, attrition, peace, censorship, freedom and understanding, remains a timeless character: The Librarian.

Presently situated here in the unsettled days of 2012, the immemorial identity of The Librarian nonetheless also contains friction and divergency: in both name and the role she is expected to perform professionally. "In terms of nomenclature there are mixed opinions regarding the term 'librarian'", the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) 'Defining Our Professional Future' 2010

report (CILIP 2010)¹ found, wherein respondents claimed the term had "negative or misleading associations amongst the public, and often amongst non-professional librarians within the profession", the report going on to add, however, that "most librarians are happy to be called 'librarians'. They feel this is a

Corresponding author:

Sara Wingate Gray, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom.
Email: uczcswi@ucl.ac.uk

term that the public recognises even if they are unaware of the difference between a qualified and an unqualified librarian” (CILIP 2010: 16), while the report also noted that it is a “fragmented profession”, citing respondents stating “that this is not an industry but a profession of librarians and information professionals ... there are too many differing sectors ... those working in [the] commercial sector are more likely to describe themselves as ‘knowledge managers’ rather than ‘librarians’ [who]... see their role as increasing the knowledge base and expertise within their organization.” (CILIP 2010: 13).

This equivocacy can also in fact be demonstrated by the multiplicity of definitions available for the term ‘librarianship’, which perhaps also speaks to the multifarious nature that the Library and Information Science (LIS) discipline appears to possess. Buckland notes that “[t]he term ‘librarianship’ is ambiguous” (Buckland 2010: 13) – as it can not only “refer to a set of techniques” but also the “occupational field of those who are known as librarians” (p.17) – and neatly sidesteps the very issue of ambiguity he has himself raised, by declaring (after a brief exploration of librarian technique versus occupation issues) “[n]either definition is satisfactory” (p.26).

Buckland does however point towards two other definitions, but introduces them by way of caution, noting that the term “information science” has “[u]nfortunately ... been carelessly used and even, on occasion, treated as a near synonym for librarianship” (Buckland 2010: 13), which although a technically credible point to make, in that there *are* distinctions to be made between, for example, techniques and applications relating to ‘information science’ versus ‘librarianship’, it is not necessarily helpful in defining ‘librarianship’ to introduce such a strict delineation as Buckland seems to require.

In fact, paying attention to the historicity of the LIS discipline provides much evidence to support convergent forms of defining ‘librarianship’, with arguably the initiation of some defining aspects of the profession provided by the example of individuals involved with the Library of Alexandria, the “largest and most renowned library of antiquity” where a “catalogue (pinaces), compiled by Callimachus of Cyrene (chief ‘librarian’ 260–240 B.C.), divided the collections into eight subject classes” (Borda 1996: 20). The pinaces (or pinakes/pinakoi) is widely recognized as, in effect, something akin to the first (surviving) ‘library catalogue’, an organized bibliography of Greek literature which was vast, and, in fact, “far more than a mere catalogue. It included brief lives of the principal authors ... the dates of the production of the plays. It was divided into eight classes: – (1) Dramatists,

(2) Epic poets etc., (3) Legislators, (4) Philosophers, (5) Historians, (6) Orators, (7) Rhetoricians, (8) Miscellaneous Writers”, with some sections ordered by date, others by subject, and others arranged alphabetically, while “[i]f the authorship was disputed, the various views were stated” (Sandys 2010: 122). Here, then, it is possible to trace the origins of many of the skills that ‘librarians’ of today in fact recognize as being classic facets of the profession’s identity, such as cataloguing, indexing, and classification, which, while the CILIP report acknowledges these as “[t]he more ‘traditional’ librarianship skills” too, it finds that they are now “used by a smaller proportion; cataloguing and classification skills are employed by just under half of those completing this survey, and indexing skills are used by a quarter” (CILIP 2010:37).

Interestingly, it is clear from the many accounts relating to the Library of Alexandria that those enjoined directly in performing its services were not only primarily scholars – learned as grammarians or historians, for example – but that many were also poets. Zenodotus (an epic poet and grammarian) and Lycophron (included as one of the seven ‘tragic poets’, known as the Alexandrian Pleias) are such examples, while Aristophanes (c.257–c.180 B.C.) followed on from the work of these predecessors in producing edited texts of Homer and monographs on proverbs, although not contributing any original poetic works himself. The eye and ear of the poet too, can be discerned in more modern day librarianship incarnations – the poetry of librarians Philip Larkin and Elizabeth Jennings being two more famous twentieth century examples.

As Librarian, Zenodotus classified the epic and lyric poets, while ... Lycophron ... the comic drama. He [Zenodotus] compiled a Homeric glossary, in which he was apparently content with merely guessing at the meaning of difficult words. Shortly before 274 [B.C.] he produced the first scientific editions of the Iliad and Odyssey ... He deserves credit ... for making the comparison of MSS the foundation of his text ... His recension of Homer was the first recension of any text which aimed at restoring the genuine original. (Sandys 2010: 119–120)

Editing, fact-checking and source verification, amongst other skills, can also therefore be seen as key requirements of ‘librarians’ during this period, with a relatively large margin allowed for ‘creativity’ (of interpretation, of action, etc.) which might well be the envy of more contemporary LIS colleagues. This era can be referred to perhaps as the pre-eminent age of the librarian scholar, and no doubt owes a debt of

inspirational pedigree to the work of Aristotle and his own understanding of the importance of maintaining, accessing and preserving libraries.

Another shift in praxis for the profession can also be found in the role and activities of monastic libraries, wherein under the direction of the 'librarius' and the statutes governing book procedures, "lists of books lent" (Hessel 1950: 26) were kept and maintained, as well as classification and inventory tasks being performed, and a distinction being made between collections requiring different users and uses, such as reference or circulation. Manguel notes that "[p]erhaps the earliest example of subject cataloguing in medieval Europe is that of the library of Le Puy Cathedral in the eleventh century" (Manguel 1996: 193), while Hessel points to the "wandering and spread of manuscripts from monastery to monastery, first from South to North, then back again in the opposite direction" (Hessel 1950:16). Here then, it is possible to see the beginnings of the modern skills of collection management, and 'interpersonal' or 'communication' skills as they would likely be termed today, while Summit notes "[English] monks produced models of compilation and bibliographical organization that continued to exert an influence well beyond the Reformation" (Summit 2008: 237).

Moving into the later period of monasticism (and the following Dissolution), and the founding of the first universities with libraries, a greater tension arises between servicing users and preserving books which revives the (Middle Ages) practice of the chained book, with Streeter dating the 'Chained Library' in England to about 1320 (Streeter 2011: 6). Rather maligned as a practice by historical sources, Summit introduces the interesting argument that the rationale was in fact "to make books available to readers rather than to 'hoard' them (the modern analogue is the telephone book, which is 'chained' to its booth precisely because it is shared property)" (Summit 2008: 237), suggesting that the 'book-keepers' or 'library-keepers' of these times were in fact mindful of the ease with which items could be stolen or destroyed and thus lost for use by the community. This stress on 'use' and the 'utility' of the book as a form which enables and facilitates communication gains a particular emphasis in librarianship of (relatively) 'modern' times, highlighted by librarian scholar, and "father of library science" (Jeevan 2005: 179)² S. R. Ranganathan, in his seminal work *The Five Laws of Library Science* (Ranganathan 1957).

Ranganathan evidences the 19th century library and librarian's place on this 'utility' spectrum by detailing the restriction of access to books through such modes as library opening hours – "[b]ooks might

be taken out only during two hours on two days of the week" (p.38) – and by linking a lack of professionalization, and its concomitant lowly-paid and lowly-considered not-quite-yet-professional, who "one must be really thankful . . . does not succumb to the temptation to keep all good new arrivals in his exclusive private custody" directly to the concept of facilitating 'use' of books, and thus this as one of the defining elements of the 'professional' librarian, "a post under the dignified title 'Librarian' . . . the salary shown against the entry may imply a deplorable lack of appreciation of the need for a real librarian, who can get the BOOKS USED" (p. 53) [capitals emphasis in original], and so he places the concept of 'use' or 'utility' intrinsically at the core of definitions of librarianship.

In fact, this dynamic tension or *Spannung*, is arguably always at the core of the professional service of the librarian, caught, on the one hand, between servicing the usage needs of the individual user, and on the other, the needs of the collection. Scarcity (artificial or otherwise) of resources acts as a constraint, and means that sometimes the librarian must consider the collection's needs over and above those of an individual patron, especially when the collection's needs double as the community's. This creates a tension in use, what could be termed perhaps the 'Library Utility Paradox', which is always in flux, and is in some ways uniquely manifest in public libraries, as they must wrestle with providing both an individual service while performing their role as a 'public good'.

This age of the dedicated 'library-keeper' or 'book-keeper' pre-empts the official arrival of professionalization of the profession (marked by the founding of library associations in the USA in 1876 and in the UK in 1877) but demonstrates the presiding characteristics at play in 'librarianship' up to this point, drawn from the various requirements thrust upon those engaged in such typical practices as bibliography creation or cataloguing, collection creation and management, as well as book preservation or resource sharing, each in turn given more or less emphasis during specific periods of time or historical contexts.

These changing shapes of 'librarian identity' and the philosophies influencing its making and remaking can be seen to more rapidly shift as a move towards formalization of both the profession and the library movement per se occurs from the 19th century onwards. Edward Edwards, with his vision of a 'library economist', working out practical, common-sense answers (as Greenwood would have it) of "the problems connected with public access, classification, cataloguing and other branches of library work"(Greenwood 1902: 137) leads the initial way, followed by a

pronounced modification through the work of ‘documentalists’ Paul Otlet and Suzanne Briet, who both focus on the nature of the ‘document’, rather than the library, itself. This philosophy is based on the use of the word “conduit” as the pertinent metaphor – that ‘ideas’ and information ‘flow’ – and then coupled with the notion that information and ideas exist as content ‘in’ something, be that books, databases, or files etc., which is in turn picked up by Ranganathan’s ‘books as information containers’ mantra.

Shera notes that “librarians were especially apprehensive over the invasion by documentalists”, swiftly followed by an apparent deluge of “information scientists” (Shera 1973: 265), both groups, according to Shera, maintaining “an open contempt for librarianship itself” (p.271). Shera characterizes such developments as fractures, that is, examples of the “widening split in librarianship” (p.271), recognizing that this schism, with its “desire of an alien group to change the terminology of the invaded” generated “more emotional heat than intellectual enlightenment” (p.271) in Shera’s eyes, and where others see discrete discipline delineations Shera sees parts of a composite whole, so that, for example, “[d]ocumentation, therefore . . . is nothing more than a form, or aspect, of librarianship” just as information science is “interrelated and interdependent in a variety of ways” (pp. 275–276).

On this basis, it is thus extremely useful in fact to refer to definitions of ‘librarianship’ which incorporate ‘alien’ viewpoints, in an attempt to reach a more holistic understanding of the term, in what Irwin viewed as the “country of librarianship” where the librarian is “concerned with books as vehicles of knowledge” (Irwin 1949: 64) and “[l]ibrarianship is above all an individual service” (p.188) concerned with “value and the potentialities of the human mind” (p.123). Irwin posits that librarianship can be understood instead as “applied bibliography”, and where “[t]he end of librarianship is only achieved when each reader and each book is treated as a living and unique individual” (pp. 37–38) he sees that since “knowledge must be free, so also is freedom necessary to librarianship” (p.110).

Here then, in Irwin, it is in fact possible to discern a ‘librarian identity’ closely tied to notions of freedom (in the democratic sense); as well as an attendance to notions of ‘human mind’. Both these elements can be seen to re-occur in discussions around the philosophy of librarianship, and in particular the work of Buschman in more present times has revitalized the particular concept of democracy, with Buschman noting “this relationship of LIS to democratic theory is aposiopoetic in both senses of that word: Democratic

theory is an unfinished, discontinued idea in LIS, or in its older Latin and Greek meaning, there is a silence maintained” (Buschman 2007: 1484).

Irwin’s concept of individual needs of the human ‘mind’ is similarly found to be re-articulated by both Foskett more than a decade later, and Osburn 50 years later, who cites Foskett as pointing to “[t]he uses of books all derive from an intellectual need” (Foskett 1962: 6, cited in Osburn 2009: 125), while himself determining that “any motivation for reading is, in fact, a purpose, so that all reading is purposive” (Osburn 200: 126). Osburn goes on to declare that “librarianship has allowed, or perhaps caused, the *purpose* of . . . technology to be overshadowed by the *mechanics* of . . . technology” (p.126) [emphasis in original], which in fact exactly follows Mukherjee’s questioning 50 years earlier whether “the drift towards the preponderance of technicalities, [is] a portent, of the superstructure of librarianship being regarded as more important than the ends to be served?” (Mukherjee 1966: 3).

In this way, it can begin to be seen how certain philosophies, beliefs and concepts gain greater or lesser adherence in the domain, some returning ghost-like to demand further scrutiny.

One such apparent ‘careless’ or ‘information science’ synonymous use however, pace Buckland for definitions of librarianship, is that of Meijer’s eponymous ‘Librarianship: A Definition’, which in stating here can be found in fact to be helpfully holistic in its content:

Librarianship is a form of cultural enterprise whose main characteristic is the stimulation of the optimum use of mankind’s cultural heritage insofar as it consists of coded thoughts recorded in documents that are and must be held in readiness for use with the ultimate objective of making possible cultural progress (also in the fields of religion and science) in its particular sphere. (Meijer 1982: 24)

Jesse Shera meanwhile cites Paul Otlet’s somewhat more concise 1934 definition: “a process by which are brought together, classified and distributed, all the documents of all kinds of all areas of human activity” (Shera 1973: 273), with the added caveat that it places the emphasis on process and procedure. One of Shera’s own descriptions: “[g]one forever is the librarian as sorcerer-priest with his papyrus roles . . . the modern librarian, in whatever branch of librarianship he elects to serve, must be well educated, professionally competent, and highly qualified to play an important part in the communication process of today’s world” (Shera 1972: 108), can be seen to similarly place an emphasis on the documentalists’

approach to the field – an approach which he and Otlet share – in terms of the importance of transmission modes in the process of informing. Shera elsewhere states that “[l]ibrarianship, in the generic sense, as a professional activity, is concerned with all of these agencies, operations, techniques, and principles that contribute to the objective of making graphic records as useful to human society as is humanly possible” or more succinctly, “maximizing the social utility of graphic records for the benefit of mankind” (Shera 1973: 274).

This is mirrored in Urquhart, who writes that “[l]ibrarianship is concerned with the flow of information to individuals” (Urquhart 1981: 56) who adds, rather afterthought-like, to his specific list of “Principles of Librarianship”, that “[t]here is one more principle which is so axiomatic to me that I have almost forgotten to include it: Librarianship is an experimental science” (p.20) which can be seen to both contrast and complement Mukherjee’s determination that librarianship is a “composite discipline” and “in the main a humanistic study” (Mukherjee 1966: 19). This thread of ‘communication’ and the ‘flow’ of the ‘information’ process, noted by Otlet, Shera and Meijer is also caught and more finely interwoven with the concept of ‘efficiency’ by Ronald Staveley, who states that “[i]f librarians regard themselves as operating a communication system, they must clearly accept responsibility for making every part of it as efficient as may be” (Staveley 1964: 11).

What many of these definitions have in common so far then is the primary concept of ‘use’ or the ‘utility’ of books or documents, as ‘information containers’ which can be seen to follow S. R. Ranganathan’s statement that “[b]ooks make communication transcend the limitations of time and space. These may be said to transform the idea, to be communicated, into physical entities called Books, and thus make it fit for transport across space and through time” (Ranganathan 1974: 18) albeit with the aid of the ‘librarian helper’, who “helps people to help themselves”. ‘Books’ can be read as ‘documents’ for documentalists, and in fact it is not necessary to focus on the specific physical form here in this statement, but more the notion that by a “form, an idea is carried from any point to any other point on earth and it is also preserved for any length of time” (p.18).

Meanwhile Broadfield, somewhat discounted in his day and in less recent times, though he appears to be beginning to ride a welcome resurgence (Mai 2001: 14–15)³ notes that although it is not the librarian who has “... the responsibility to help ... [people] to be free and happy” however it *is* the “librarian” who

“should contrive to help people to live full individual lives by showing them the way without badgering them and thus depriving them of the chance of spontaneity” (Broadfield 1949: 13).

He sees this in the form of librarians making “a unique contribution by safeguarding freedom of thought, which is not only a vital constituent in liberty but a means for securing and preserving liberty as a whole” whereby the librarian’s “task is not merely to *satisfy* the requirements of the thinker ... He has the more fundamental task of helping *create* such thinkers and students” (p.13). In which statement it is possible to discern the ghost-like outline of democratic freedom once again making a visitation to the professional identity of the librarian.

Shera has also described, akin to Broadfield, the primary role of the librarian as being “a missionary of the human mind” (Shera 1972: 247) and it is worth looking to the definition of Curtis Wright, which maps here to Shera’s theory-of-human-mind description, as Curtis Wright states that “whereas librarianship can be studied ... as an existential object” or as “social phenomenon, its nature can best be studied, perhaps, as an integral part of the larger study of the nature of man which contains it” (Wright 1978: 10).

This aspect of librarianship, which suggests a centrality of a *dynamic* and *relational* requirement, in librarians socially engaging in, and facilitating, the interaction between both humans as individual ‘minds’ and as group mind-entity – which Boulding has described as the “noosphere” (Boulding and Senesh 1983: 1) – is common, with Ronald Staveley’s assertion (Staveley 1964: 17)⁴ in a section titled ‘On Subjects’ – which directly follows on from a first essay entitled ‘On Libraries and People’ – that “[w]e see persons in dynamic relationships, achieving things, making mistakes, reflecting, deciding and consummating thought and decision in purposive action. We see creation and also destruction, not simple animal adaptation. We say that all this is involved in history. Organic development, yes; but personal action too” (p. 17).

Thompson meanwhile appears to wrap these elements of *relation* and *dynamics* into his three-tiered librarianship analysis, where “[t]hree competing roles for the librarian may be posed: custodian, mediator and organiser ... Perhaps the librarian of the future will have an even more dynamic role as organizer, although the French word ‘animateur’ probably describes it better. He will go out into the field, creating relationships, activities or groups which did not occur spontaneously but which will enable the library to benefit all sections of the public” (Thompson 1974: 41).

Here, alongside the concepts of ‘use’, it is possible to locate further conceptual elements at play, most notably the idea of how librarians have an ongoing and fluid *relationship* with *people* who as a group then form a *society* – also often represented in these librarian and library discourses by a use of the term the ‘public’. Broadfield’s notions of librarianship’s philosophy are useful to return to here as they provide the potential to thereby detect a specific element of the identity of the public library and public librarianship per se, as well as the specifics of its form and matter. He writes that “[t]he philosophy of librarianship ... is ... constructed ... on the basis of the library’s service to man and society’s obligations to man, hence the obligation of society to the library which serves man” (Broadfield 1949: 35).

Here, then, it is possible to see the relationship that has been identified above, which is composed of the basic elements of the library and the human, with society as the group entity of the human. Now, earlier on in Broadfield’s work he makes the distinction between a scholarly “collector” of books, which has been seen to be the basis of early-modern descriptions and definitions of librarians, and between the creation of a scholarly library, wherein “the end of book collecting is the formation of the scholarly library” in that “a critical point is reached when [the] ... collection emerges from the dusk of private enjoyment to the light of public importance, and a new scholarship has to be constructed round the collection as a nucleus” (Broadfield 1949: 8).

But whereas the “collector *as* collector simply collects” and “does not promote scholarship”, that is he “is driven from behind by the urge to collect, not pulled from in front by an ideal of knowledge” (Broadfield 1949: 8) it can be inferred from Broadfield’s helpful syllogism (which he unfortunately does not develop (p. 8)⁵) that when a ‘collection’ is introduced *to*, and provided *for* a ‘public’ or society, and concomitantly in the *form* of some ‘access’ or ‘use’ that is intrinsically ‘public’, that it is possible to say this therefore embodies intrinsic elements pertaining to both the ‘public’ library and the role a public librarian in particular should play. It also provides a spectrum that is guided by the *more* or *less* emphasis placed on ‘public’ forms and matters of ‘access’ and ‘use’, which is effective to work with in distinguishing between the varying identities of different types of libraries and knowledge organizations, as well as librarians and information professionals.

With this useful grounding provided, it is possible to then return to the proposition of defining ‘librarian identity’ in the present, where it could be considered that a defining feature of a current definition is

perhaps the continuing ambivalence towards one. For instance, Lankes writes that “[f]unctional definitions of professions do not work. That is, if you seek to define the worldview of librarians by the functions they do, you will run into all sorts of problems” (Lankes 2011: 18) and he decides to neatly sidestep this issue (or as Lankes would have it, the “problem”) by instead defining it through a mission statement for librarians: “The mission of librarians is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation in their communities” (p.13).

Taking some examples of current non-traditional librarianship practice, it is in fact possible to distinguish not only some of the core aspects of what is argued here is a newly-awoken librarian identity at play, but to also demonstrate how this new identity is shaping to rise, phoenix-like, in a radical new, engaging, and engaged form: one which begins life entirely absent from the company of professional associations.

Two such recent examples are the work of Mile High Reference Desk (MHRD) and The Itinerant Poetry Library (TIPL), both self-appointed entities in the library world, set up to fulfill gaps in current services, having identified how to bridge certain gaps relating to the needs of members of the public and information provision in today’s 21st century always-on-the-move, and always digitally advancing, global landscape.

The MHRD librarian “collects maps, public transport brochures, and other points of interest (when available) for destination locations” and operates on any aeroplane that the librarian finds herself on, providing a “tailored service dependent on the current flight’s audience”. The aim of the service is to “[p]rovide an information resource in a traditionally closed environment that doesn’t have a outlet to ask questions or browse materials users can borrow and return, not purchase” and to “pose to the public a re-definition of [the] commonly used term and outdated concept of ‘library’ = not just books, and not just a place you visit.”

Also citing the desire to “[h]ave a library in unexpected spaces”, this specific philosophy of library service and identity is matched by the main objective of TIPL which has been operating since 2006 with the aim of “reaching the parts other libraries have yet to reach”, since then providing library services, and the services of a librarian, to the far flung corners of 12 countries, 32 cities and in more than 200+ locations worldwide. That some of these locations have included a boat, beach-hut, senior citizen retirement home and cocktail bar; which the sky-high example of MHRD’s services similarly matches in reaching

out to distinct but neglected potential participants, perhaps demonstrates the vision of these newly original purveyors of librarianship as keen to explore the possibilities that this new world of mobility – of digital services, connectivity, and people themselves, now offers the world of the librarian.

It is also demonstrative of these new, non-traditional library services that they are predominantly interested in ‘socially engaging’, reaching out to the community quite literally by going to the places where this increasingly mobile community is directly located, rather than waiting for it to come to them. This is a ‘librarian identity’ firmly dynamic and relationally-oriented, interested in the personal, one-to-one engagement, comfortable with an experimental praxis that seeks to not only help but challenge expectations of potential users, viewing them as participants, not audience members, in the knowledge seeking environment.

Constitutive of these aims is in fact a return to what Buschman correctly identifies as democratic theory, and the ‘necessity’ of freedom of knowledge, which Irwin posits as a central frame of reference for librarianship’s profession. This will toward ‘proactive’ rather than ‘reactive’ stances in this arena is in fact in evidence in the mind and desires, if not yet the collective Association actions, of the librarians and information professionals interviewed and surveyed as part of the aforementioned CILIP report, which states that “an oppressive regime with few voices arguing for the rights of the humble information user” has arguably been the trend to date, with “[t]hose in the knowledge and information domain believ[ing] that this is a role a professional membership organisation should be playing” (CILIP 2010: 18).

That today’s ‘librarian identity’ is a contested arena, apparently caught up in a values-war between traditional principles of ‘democracy’, ‘citizenship’ and late twentieth century’s shift to a democracy of individuals modeled as consumers, rather than users, is perhaps the key to why new professionals may be wary of associating with established systems of their own professional hierarchies. When such Associations may be perceived as not having paid enough attention to how this shift in values has been effected, and when association members “believe there is a strong need (and a current gap) in campaigning for the issues affecting the domain and its end-users”, perceiving that in fact “[a] body is needed to campaign and lobby for the rights of users in the battle against the copyright giants . . . [while] [f]urthermore, a gap exists for an organisation to promote the case for the ‘social capital model’” (CILIP 2010: 20) it therefore seems unlikely to be resolved by maintaining a status quo provision which apes private enterprise, and its

ideas surrounding the needs of the ‘customer’. Rather, it seems clear that what in fact will engage both users and new professionals alike in libraries, their services, and professional associations, and what offers an identifiable model of 21st century librarianship (with profile-raising capacity galore) is the ability of librarians and their associated professional bodies to become ‘freedom fighters’.

So, what, in effect, does it mean to call oneself a Librarian in the 21st century? Taking important cues from this historical analysis of librarianship’s roots, and the pathway becomes somewhat more defined. Gather the editorial and poetically creative and imaginative skills of Callimachus; the zeal and care regards verification, and crafty collection management, of monastic scribes; the proactive, personal ‘librarian helper’ abilities which Ranganathan lauds; and the ‘animateur’ outreach antics of MHRD and TIPL into an updated toolkit that also includes information literacy expertise, together matched with, in the vision of Staveley, a deep and intimate commitment to (exploring) humanity, and a mandate for democratism in information access and provision becomes clear.

In order to reach out truly to new professionals, however, library associations must in turn be clear about their commitment to this cause: this is a serious moral and humanitarian challenge which will not be won (nor win allies) by sideline-watching, or indeed prevarication. Professional associations are needed which are willing not only to support the individuals and groups involved, but also prepared to ultimately provide real muscle. In the end, this may be a call for a consortia-led onslaught by allied stakeholders, as one of the first strategies to consider, but fundamentally library associations which are inspiring, surprising and empowering are in fact those which create, support and provide inspiration, surprise and empower themselves from the get-go. Watch that Phoenix rise!

Notes

1. The report was produced by CILIP “to understand how its market and environment is likely to adapt over the next ten years” and to “identify the likely trajectory of the knowledge and information domain, uncovering what information professionals expect of their professional association”, and interviewed and surveyed library and information professionals as part of its research methodology.
2. Ranganathan is also lauded here as “the greatest information scientist the world has seen in the twentieth century”.
3. Broadfield is quite extensively quoted by Mai, in particular regards the contemporary relevance of his insight into the façade of the much-trumpeted library or librarian ‘neutrality’.

4. Staveley uses the plural form “we” throughout the text, possibly to suggest he speaks on behalf of ‘librarians’, but also likely, given the title of his work, it is in fact a purposive stylistic device.
5. Regrettably he instead drifts off, somewhat awkwardly, back into a rather vague delineation of how this all applies to determining the philosophy of librarianship, using his rather argumentative and at times unhelpfully caustic tone, which has perhaps been the root of some of the disagreement and discordance with which his work was initially received. This style has also probably not helped to promote some of the very relevant, useful and fascinating insights he makes here in the work.

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About the author

Sara Wingate Gray is a researcher, writer and artist. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Information Studies at University College London, investigating the philosophy of the public library. She has a BA in English Literature and Creative Writing (UEA) and an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry). In 2006 she founded The Itinerant Poetry Library, and was probably the first library entity to tweet (@librarian). In 2007 she was a Visiting Research Scholar at The Poetry Center and American Poetry Archives, based at San Francisco State University (SFSU), working with the Center and Archive to envision its digital future. In 2010 she was awarded a Fellowship in International Librarianship from IREX and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2011 she returned to SFSU in order to help steer and launch The Poetry Center Digital Archive. Her research interests incorporate: special collections and ephemera; poetry, and sound; analogue and digital convergence, and the future of libraries and archives in the digital realm. She has presented on these topics across the UK, Ireland, Germany and the USA. Contact: Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom. Email: uczcswi@ucl.ac.uk

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