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Typewritten manuscripts are welcome.  
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Use current *MLA Handbook* for in-text citation style for references.

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*PL*, Editors  
P.O. Box 2203, Times Square Station  
New York, NY 10108

**PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN** Issue #10/11 Winter 1995/96  
Published, produced and distributed by Progressive Librarians Guild  
3 issues per year ; ISSN 1052-5726  
Indexed in *Alternative Press Index*

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Subscription/membership rates:  
\$25 individuals; \$35 institutions; \$40 inst's overseas firstclass  
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## EDITORIAL: A BLAISE WITH INDIGNATION

In a recent article in the journal *Libri* called "Shibboleth and Substance in North American Library and Information Science Education" (1995, V.45 #1, pp. 45-63), Blaise Cronin slaps around just about every radical and/or progressive impulse in librarianship - including six editors and authors represented in this very issue of *PL*. It is an article full of indignation, sophistry, and language that can only be described as Erudite Lite.

Why is Blaise unhappy? In his words, it is because "Fundamentalism, inertia, resistance to change, fetishism, inbreeding, feminization, censorship, social activism, clutching at straws, and intimations of xenophobia constitute the principal [sic] elements in a dispiritingly self-critical catalog of what is awry in the LIS field." The source of these problems is pretty clear to Blaise: us. "Although the problematique I intend to highlight may be associated with only a minority of LIS faculty and others within the professional ranks, this minority exerts disproportionate influence on public perceptions of the field, in particular its scholastic credibility, and deflects attention from notable initiatives."

If this line sounds a little familiar, that is because it only lacks the standard conservative nostrum on the "failed Big Government social programs of the Great Society and the New Deal." What we have here is our own library equivalent of a hybrid of conservative attack specialists. Think of Blaise as a kind of Newt Grammbaugh. Unfortunately, this twaddle is coming from the dean of a large library school and it has to be taken at face value: "if existing schools cannot be purged of the dysfunctional attitudes and monothetic rhetoric which have retarded growth for too long [then we will see a] progressive decoupling of librarianship programs from

information science/information management programs. . . ." While Blaise is busy slapping us rads around, he conveniently overlooks, misrepresents and avoids some central issues. Here are two samples:

1) The professionals who engage in social activism are "politiciz[ing] their principle professional association." Such "patently pyrrhic efforts to shape social and political issues" is characterized as "grabbing at straws, of which political activism is among the most fashionable." At base, "none of this has anything to do with librarianship, as traditionally or reasonably conceived." (If you had not guessed, the June 1994 *American Libraries* piece on social issues written by Elaine Harger, Mark Rosenzweig and myself is the prime example of such "ludicrous" efforts and arguments, although at the time, each of us was unaware of our vast influence on library education and the profession.)

Of course what Blaise ignores is a central point. He is attacking those within the profession who are simply holding ALA to its own policy statements and acting on those policies. Apparently, he is quite comfortable for ALA to state such policies, but for librarians to actually do something about them is quite a different matter. Researchers and practitioners must disengage and pretend that the process of arriving at our current state of affairs was a fair, neutral, and bias-free process if we are to "save" librarianship and establish our field more firmly in research universities. What we have here is Melvil Pangloss. Of course, its easier to flog the rads than it is to stand up in a national meeting in front of colleagues and peers and argue that ALA should remove its policy statements against economic discrimination in providing services or collections, against opposition to discrimination towards lesbians and gays, and against U.S. government support for censorious and abusive foreign governments.

2) There is a particular analysis of librarianship which draws a special brand of Blaise's ire: "seriously misguided feminist thinking" which is a "blend of spurious reasoning and arrant speculation." In attacking Roma Harris' work as "infirmity feminism" he hauls out the old line that this kind of analysis ghettoizes women and women's occupations, and the scholarship is only a reaction "against the perceived masculinity of traditional, objective, mathematically inclined. . . research." How can one even begin to take seriously a critique which ignores a central point Roma Harris makes? To fully "professionalize" a traditionally feminized field like librarianship has always meant disempowering women within the field. The economic burden of such a process (read loss of jobs or job autonomy) falls on women. When a formerly empowered field is automated and deskilled, the process is reversed - men leave and women take up the less desirable jobs. The rethinking of the professionalization of fields - especially those dominated by women - is too easily dismissed by Blaise as "propelled by dogma." There are other, practice-oriented fields which are in something of a crisis. For instance, many MBA programs have suffered large enrollment declines since the 1980's. But since this is a field that has traditionally had a great deal of economic power behind it - and one which has never been defined as women's work - there are no questions about a "research base" or the dangers of feminist analysis. But then, Blaise already has an answer to this if you accept his argument in #1 above.

Of course, what I have been neglecting is the humor laced throughout this article. When Blaise writes that accreditation of library schools should be done away with, he suggests instead that libraries be accredited. This would enable benchmarking, consumer comparisons, and in a line that should become immortal, "It would also motivate library directors in the field to meet quality standards and aspire to 'best of breed' status." Not many authors can weave

references to the cult of Demming and the Westminster Dog Show into the same paragraph! Less humorous is the self-promotion in which Blaise engages. He positions himself as a "real" (as in not trained in the LIS field) scholar who is unafraid to ask the hard questions and be the kind of innovative administrator a library school needs. Blaise wants us to be grateful that he is loaning his prestigious credentials to our shaky field, calling all who question his knowledge of librarianship "xenophobic." All who do not heed his call consign themselves to the "lumpenproletariat . . . lacking the resources, imagination and will to reposition themselves for the twenty-first century."

Blaise is, of course, not the first to notice that librarianship is in turmoil and on the brink of an uncertain future, but he practices the sloppy scholarship he attacks in caricaturing the positions and problems he identifies. Is all scholarship in the LIS field excellent? No. Are all forms of feminist scholarship of uniform high quality? No. Are all social issues central to librarianship? No. Nobody has actually taken these positions, but then Blaise isn't actually interested in engaging the ideas and scholarship which deal with those issues. Perhaps he has done us a service here by provoking a response.

We (librarians and library school professors) do need to have a discussion about first principles. So far, ALA has given mostly lip-service to its progressive policies. Those who have tried to put them into action have faced what I can only call a backlash within the organization. Debating how librarians should be educated -- and for what purpose -- is about as fundamental as it gets. What is needed is a little less pretense about the "objectivity" and "neutrality" of these kinds of arguments against progressive policies and actions in the profession.

*by John Buschman*

## **SERVICE UNDERMINED BY TECHNOLOGY: AN EXAMINATION OF GENDER RELATIONS, ECONOMICS AND IDEOLOGY**

**by Roma Harris**

**L**ibraries are fascinating places to study at the present time. These institutions face the combined impact of increased public demand for information services, financial pressures arising from the downsizing of the public sector, and rapid changes in workplace organization that inevitably accompany the introduction of a vast array of new technologies and information products. In libraries, one sees played out the conflicts inherent in a society in which the economy is based more and more on information-for-profit and yet, in which there is a growing recognition that access to knowledge is a public good, one might even call it a public trust.

### *Librarianship as Women's Work*

Historically, North American librarianship has been very much a female-intensive enterprise. However, while women have been numerically dominant as laborers, their work has been controlled, to a large extent, by male administrators both within and outside the library systems in which they are employed. This male control continues, although its form has shifted somewhat in recent years. For instance, due largely to the corporate impetus to commodify information, the female-identified role of care that public sector libraries have played as social institutions in their communities is being undermined through attempts by systems-oriented librarians, senior library administrators, local politicians and vendors (usually male) to redefine these organizations as "information centers" in which