

That Inordinate Passion For Status

The author analyzes critically the work of several writers who believe, in varying degrees, that librarians exhibit an excessive, even droll, concern for faculty status. Disagreeing with these writers, the author discusses economic and professional reasons why the desire for status is legitimate and serious, giving concrete examples of the need for a freedom the librarian must have that only faculty status can furnish. Conclusion: The concern for status is not frivolous.

WHILE THE LAST DECADE has witnessed considerable articulation among librarians in favor of faculty status, there have been opponents as well: Kenneth Kister, who describes what he sees as librarians' attempt to imitate the faculty and their blurring of the distinction between librarianship and teaching at a time when they ought to be earning their status as librarians only;¹ Daniel Gore, who rates the idea as farcical;² Richard Thompson, who believes librarians need faculty status no more than do physicians, nurses, accountants, or policemen;³ Lawrence Clark Powell, who evidently thinks the way to status is simply hewing away at the job in hand and keeping one's nose clean;⁴ and Robert Blackburn, who marvels at what he calls the librarian's "inordinate passion for status."⁵

In this paper I should like first to comment on the positions taken by these writers and then to make some suggestions as to why I believe the librarian's concern for status is "inordinate"—if indeed such is the case.

As I understand them, each of these writers either questions faculty status for librarians altogether or the method librarians use to accomplish it, but each in so doing raises one or more serious questions about his own position.

As I understand Kister, teachers are educators; librarians are not. Teachers deal with substance and are concerned with the *why* of a given matter; librarians deal with procedures, the *how* of the matter. Teachers make value judgments about subjects, but librarians are relatively neutral toward subjects. However, if librarians claim they are educators they thereby may have some leverage in attaining faculty status, and this is why they attempt to ape the faculty.

The spirit of Kister's piece suggests that only those who are habitual classroom teachers are involved intellectually with learners. He does admit that the staff members give "casual" instruction to readers and sometimes are invited to lecture in classes. But he never specifically recognizes those whose everyday activities involve them in instructing, guiding, advising, encouraging, demonstrating, and interpreting in bibliography, grammar, logic, documentation, vocabulary, statistics, or simply the lan-

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guage of the printed page in face-to-face relations with all seekers, even the faculty. Kister all but ignores the reference librarian, readers' advisor, and subject specialist. In fact, however, if the librarian in this vortex of academic inquiry is merely concerned with procedures and the *how*, then he quite clearly does not belong there; nor does he belong there if he does not qualify, or is not working on his qualification, in a subject other than library science on the graduate level, since his business is not administrative but instructive.

Not only is he involved in value judgments in advising readers and researchers, but in his selection of general and special reference tools, as well as books of his specialty in the general collection, his quest necessarily ranges far.

Thus Kister, who charges some with blurring the distinctions between teaching and librarianship, evidently does some blurring of his own. In his ardor to show how teachers and librarians are unlike, he fails to account for the distinction between those positions that are administrative and those that are instructive.

One would also believe from Kister's piece that a library is a mysterious entity interpreted by skilled information specialists, who, however, are neither concerned with nor cognizant of the aims, purposes, and procedures of the very clientele they serve. Kister's stand in granting to the librarian a *service* function but prohibiting for him any kind of role as *educator* apparently indicates a radical disregard of the very nature of the academic library. He appears not to recognize that here we are not dealing with any old library, but a significant unit of an institution of higher learning whose sole purpose is the support of that institution, whose every important move is to be made not simply for the sake of general *service*, no matter how clever or magical, but in terms of a *college* service—a specific

kind of college with a specific kind of patron, specific curricula, course offerings, aims, methods of teaching, level of teaching, ratio of graduates to undergraduates, and a specific overall philosophy of education.

If we can agree that the library is, or ought to be, at the vortex of academic inquiry—a learning tool for the student who does his most serious work investigating a specialized field—then how are we to furnish this kind of service unless we are concerned with and cognizant of the subjects that are studied, the educational policies being observed, the methods underlying our teaching, the plans of courses being taught, the general academic planning being done, and the very aims of higher education itself? In other words, the library generally, and the readers' service staff particularly, appear to have no choice but to be closely involved with the *educational* process as special educators. Yet this seems to be the very role that both Powell and Kister deny them.

Again, Kister quoting Powell says "Unless librarians do what faculty do—teach, research, publish—they will not achieve true faculty status. If they do, then they are faculty, not librarians."⁶ While Kister evidently thinks there is something unusual about librarians teaching, researching, and writing, certain evidence seems to point in a somewhat different direction. Anita Schiller's study of 2,265 academic librarians indicated that 15 percent of her respondents taught courses for credit, and Perry D. Morrison showed in his study of 707 librarians, that one-third of the respondents had previous teaching experience.⁷ None of this of course includes the noncredit informal teaching with which most reference librarians are involved, nor the day-to-day individual instruction in reference and research which they do regularly.

Publishing? One only has to scan the literature of the field to see that con-

siderable writing—much of it important—is being done, or to check the index, *Library Literature*, to see the great number of periodicals devoted to librarianship alone, or to check Morrison's study which shows that over 70 percent of respondents on the average among several categories had at least published something.⁸

Research? Both catalogers and reference librarians do some research as a regular task, either in order to identify and verify the description of various elements of the materials being processed, or to satisfy the degree of evidence needed in research questions. If we examine the character of articles and reports being published by librarians continually, we would see also that many of them could not have been published without extensive research.

Thus it is not strange to say that many librarians teach, research, write, and publish, yet they are not teachers in the strict sense. What are we to call them? The truth is there are laggards in both occupations. Some librarians write, research, and publish; some do not. The same is true for teachers. There are poor librarians and able ones, poor teachers and able ones; but quite a few scholars emerge from both occupations. Why hold up teaching alone as a sacred standard of scholarship, especially when some of our most famous professors do little teaching? The universities honor them by actually relieving them of their teaching tasks so that they can do research, write, and publish. One trouble with Kister's and Powell's position seems to be its rigidity; the formula is much too pat.

Richard C. Thompson asks in effect that, since physicians, accountants, architects, and policemen, connected with the university, are not designated as faculty, then why should librarians be designated as such?⁹ I can only say that while these worthy occupations could not be dispensed with by the university,

they represent identities all their own and their functions are not even remotely analogous to library work. How is the accountant, the architect, the physician, or the policeman involved directly and steadily in the development of the minds of students, a function assumed generally to be the *raison d'être* of the institution, itself? If one is asked how librarians are so involved, then one can say simply and without exaggeration that they acquire and organize the very record of civilization and guide students and faculty in its use.

A problem in Thompson's position apparently is that he is trying to compare occupations that are incommensurable. To keep the business office abreast of its annual expenditures, debits, and credits, is one thing; to guide a student in English to the discovery that Ralph Waldo Emerson made his most significant contribution to world literature by way of profound Oriental thought is quite another.

Mr. Powell tells us that librarianship is "an opportunity to serve people, learn from them, and love them. And perhaps gain status thereby."¹⁰ The general spirit of his piece indicates that devotion to one's task and relentless execution of work on the job is the way to win status. Precisely. Men have done the same for centuries in all endeavors. Let us hope that that opportunity will never die, because it is a last vestige of desirable individualism we have. What we have to do now is to protect that individuality and give it identity. Virtue may have its own reward, but it alone does not get bread for the belly nor provide a condition of employment in which one can serve himself and his institution best. The message of that virtue must be said loud and clear enough that administrations will be caused to recognize it. The one way it can be protected is by official academic recognition from administration, and the means of carrying the message in this brash world is through the

collective voice of teaching faculty and librarians together. They need each other.

Since Powell however would have the librarian pay his price for status only by individual effort—each one pulling himself up by his own bootstraps—then how should the teachers earn theirs? If he would have the teachers possess their status by fiat but the librarians theirs by sheer individual struggle, perhaps with a measure of boot-licking, then a serious question of academic principle and justice arises.

Daniel Gore, now rather well-known for his sport of baiting librarians, may have been pecking at the wrong people. His "Mismanagement of College Libraries" and "A Modest Proposal" are rather similar in that they both deal with the unprofessional aspect of library work, the first scoring the librarian for what Gore thinks is frittering away time in menial tasks while pretending his work is important academically; the second proposing that the college do away with most librarians, hire clerks, and retain a skeleton-work of professionals to direct the clerks.¹¹ In short, what Gore has been concerned with is that a considerable part of library work is clerical and the ratio of professionals to clericals is too high. His first assumption is true; the second too, but it seems to be improving.

The record indicates however that librarians themselves have long been striving to get a balance between clericals, semiprofessionals, and professionals. Some problems of personnel in universities and colleges, for instance, may be beyond any remedy available to the local administration, and many times complements of personnel offered may be too few or imbalanced.

The individual staff member, after spending some seventeen or eighteen years in preparation for his occupation, is not likely to allow idealistic notions of what is or is not professional stand

between him and his employment; he is more likely to accept the situation with the hope that better times may lie ahead. So he performs a combination of professional and nonprofessional tasks, especially in public services, where the show must go on. In this context librarians are merely straw men set up by Mr. Gore, who fails to get at the real problem—that of top management in the matter of personnel.

Gore, in his schoolboyish piece, "Faculty Status for Librarians at Arbuthnot," continues to belabor the menial tasks done by librarians.¹² If we employed a lawyer, physician, or accountant yet gave him some subprofessional work to do, we could very well expect him nevertheless to demand a recognition of all his time spent as professional time, it being up to us to furnish work appropriate to his level of preparation. Why should librarians act differently? Mr. Gore merely describes the symptoms; he never gets at the disease.

Robert Blackburn is concerned with what he believes to be the inherent differences between teaching faculty and librarians, both professionally and psychologically; he sees a condition detrimental to student use of learning materials. In his thoughtful article he says that one of the characteristics of the librarian is "an inordinate passion for status. . . . Faculty rank seems to be a sought after goal, almost as an end in itself."¹³

There is some truth in what Blackburn says, but there are reasons for status other than its being an end in itself. I suggest two basic reasons why I believe the concern for status has occupied the minds of librarians: (1) the need for a trade-union, bread-and-butter security, and (2) the need for full academic recognition in order to play a more effective role in the academic program.

For the first I shall give some accounts of libraries in state-supported colleges

in Pennsylvania. Here the personnel, except laborers, are divided into two groups: the academic group consisting of teaching staff, deans, librarians, and counselors on one side, and the civil-service group consisting generally of such personnel as those handling the business end of the institution—clerks, secretaries, bookkeepers, and business managers.

Librarians in the public schools of Pennsylvania have for many years belonged by public law in the category of teachers, and state college regulations mainly have followed the same pattern.¹⁴ At Mansfield State College, for example, the staff have not been aware that they were ever treated in any way different from the teaching staff. Staff enjoy tenure, take sabbaticals, serve on faculty councils, and have all the other advantages that faculty have. Their ranks range from that of instructor to associate professor and they are employed on a nine-month basis, with options for summer employment. However, there can be cause for anxiety, for no matter how hard-won or desirable the condition of employment, it can prove not to be exactly safe from modification. Recently the head librarian, along with counselors, was placed in the administrative category rather than the academic. This was not only an about-face in the traditional policy of status for the head librarian—often more likely to have faculty status than others on the staff—but it left the rest of the staff in an ambiguous position.

There are other sources of concern, and librarians' reactions reflect it. Thus when a team of consultants made a year's study of state personnel in 1969, and recommended a separation of librarians and others from the teaching faculty, several papers from librarians of the state colleges and from Indiana University in Pennsylvania made their appearance, totally rejecting the proposal.¹⁵ In this they have been support-

ed by the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties and help has been offered by AAUP, both of which have librarians in their membership.

Further, since the entrance to professional librarianship in Pennsylvania state-supported colleges has demanded a greater amount of preparation than the entrance to teaching in the same institutions, librarians see any alternative to faculty identity impossible, especially since any alternative could mean civil service classification and removal from academic effectiveness.¹⁶

In short, affiliation with faculty, both in their work and in the faculty associations, provides an umbrella of protection in a very real and material sense for that comparatively tiny group of specially-prepared academic people in Pennsylvania. As they see it, remove that umbrella and anything can happen.

The second factor in the concern for status involves identity and professionalism, both of which are related to the librarian's educational background, his personal interest, his activity in the profession, and the manner in which he views himself in the academic world. Morrison, studying 707 academic librarians, found a wide range of personal characteristics, but as a group they were cultured and intelligent, with a high mean score of self assurance, from families of high social and educational status, but not necessarily economic, a lack of drive or anxiety over status more befitting the upper class than the middle class, a majority (59 percent) of them possessing more graduate credit than the first professional degree, about one-third having previous teaching experience, over 70 percent having published, and much less likely to regret entering their occupation than others in other occupations.¹⁷

Anita Schiller's study of 2,265 academic librarians showed that 85.5 percent had at least the first professional

degree; that 25 percent, in addition to the first professional degree, held advanced nonlibrary degrees as well. As noted before, about 15 percent of Schiller's subjects were teaching credit courses, and two-thirds belonged to national, state, or regional associations.¹⁸

Some data indicating how academic librarians see themselves in the academic community was recently given by Josey in his study of 101 academic librarians in the state of New York.¹⁹ About 98 percent of these responded positively to the opening statement of the ACRL Standards, which says in effect that librarians should have all rights and benefits that teaching staff have, and 90 percent viewed themselves as faculty of their respective institutions.

Thus there is some evidence that academic librarians may believe—with considerable justification—that they have something worthwhile to offer. Believing in themselves, knowing that a solid academic program cannot exist without them, they evidently feel that academic potential deserves academic recognition, if such potential is ever to realize its worth.

However, this does not fully answer the question raised by Kister, Powell, and others, namely, why do librarians demand to *be* faculty the same as teaching staff, since relatively few of them spend a great proportion of their time in formal classroom teaching? I now wish to examine briefly the question of status concern as related to professionalism.

Carroll DeWeese has discussed a study that sought to distinguish between library staff members of a low concern for status on the one hand and members of a high concern for status on the other among thirty-nine professionals in a large midwestern, land-grant university library.²⁰ The librarian of high status aspiration tended to be more professionally oriented and more concerned with professionalization of li-

brarianship; he desired more autonomy for his profession and greater recognition for his work, and he more often mentioned work as a main satisfaction in life than did those of low status concern. His inability or unwillingness to leave his profession was linked with high status concern within that profession.

The librarian of high status concern was also more likely to see professional associations as important and he experienced more conflict with the faculty than those librarians of low status aspiration who reported relatively little difficulty. The last named characteristic appears especially significant, because it indicates a pattern which evidently links a felt need for status with the concomitant conditions that cluster with or about it—professionalism, autonomy, authority, responsibility, and, as a related issue, professional preparation. With professionalization the librarian becomes something of an "authority," but it must be a recognized authority or it is nothing. Without it, "cooperation" with patrons becomes confused with groveling, and groveling in this case is not merely a matter of inverted pride. In this connection, I cannot agree with Powell who implies that the patron is always right, because such a policy if acted upon would violate the very principle upon which professionalism rests. Ultimately we must act according to what we know the customer *needs*, not what he vaguely feels that he *wants*.

Further investigation, no doubt, would shed further light on library-faculty tensions. A review of library literature will reveal that professors once ran the library; that some of them do believe that librarians for the most part are merely technicians; and some professors would still like to run the library, with librarians of course doing the work—the most serious point for conflict of authority imaginable.²¹

Thus a belief in one's profession, de-

votion to and satisfaction in the work, and certainty that it is important in the academic sense, all accord with the wish for a freedom to exercise those convictions so that one's real responsibility can be met, so that the library may proceed on an even keel, not subject to every buffet or pressure from faculty, administration, or students, for the benefit of all concerned. In this context I believe faculty and administration may rest assured that, by the very nature of professionalism, there will be few free-loaders who demand status, because status ultimately goes with professionalism and professionalism logically demands devotion to one's work and a much greater overall responsibility.

Let me illustrate concretely the implications of status, autonomy, authority, and responsibility. If I plan and execute a teaching program in bibliography exactly as that which I have in mind and which includes student responsibility to me, I have no doubt that it will succeed, since my past experience indicates such to be true. But as soon as I begin compromising with the English staff—each one wanting something different—a whole new ball game begins developing; and if I now face the possibility of a mere tour of the library and a few handouts, or some other equally trivial plan, all of which I disapprove, then indeed do doubts assail me, because eventually the manner of my very presentation is affected adversely. Thus, not only do I become the goat of the project, but, more important, students are betrayed.

The teaching staff generally has all the authority needed by academic fiat, but in the same area—many times even where the librarian has a *bona fide* faculty status—the librarian has only whatever authority the instructor of the class he is visiting gives him, and the students, even if compelled to attend his meetings, know that what he has to offer for them is a take-it-or-leave-it proposi-

tion. If I resist the demands of faculty in this instance, tension is more than likely to result.

In the problem above then why should I be subservient if I have both the bibliographic competence plus even more credit in the humanities than in library science, plus teaching experience, plus faculty status? I do not try to tell the English professor how to teach Melville and Faulkner. Why should he dictate to me how to teach bibliography, either in the general area or in the humanities? As far as academic integrity is concerned, I am a professor the same as he and can resist legitimately any encroachment on my freedom to instruct as I see fit. Further, I cannot afford to be merely separate and equal, because I know of no other group other than faculty that affords the essential protection of the freedom I must have in such matters. Thus, only faculty status allows me to meet the responsibilities I know are mine in the task of making the library a place worthy of scholarly practice and its patrons adept in one of the most mature and useful academic endeavors they will ever engage in—dependent investigation.

It has been my purpose, then, to indicate that the concern for status among academic librarians is perhaps more than simply an anxious preoccupation with academic social climbing, justified by the droll argument that one is what one is not. The question of status is not a mere figment of the imagination, but as real a problem as any in the academic world, and it is rooted in the very purpose and philosophy of higher education.

However, in the end, the question of status eligibility is not really whether one teaches or how much one teaches in a classroom—even though such function might lend academic weight—but whether one renders a direct scholarly service to the academic program. Moreover, if the conscientious, well-educated

librarian, live to books and ideas and people, conscious of the undeniable opportunities of his library, appears to be "inordinately" concerned with status,

then it behooves us to look deeper than surface evidence for the cause of this concern.

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3. Richard Thompson, "Crutches and Crying Towels," a letter, *Library Journal* 95:1260 (April 1, 1970).
4. Lawrence Clark Powell, "Shoe on the Other Foot," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 45:384-9 (Dec. 1970).
5. Robert L. Blackburn, "College Libraries; Indicated Failures; Some Reasons and a Possible Remedy," *CRL* 29:171-7 (May 1968).
6. Kister, p. 3285. He refers to Lawrence Clark Powell's quotation in Powell's "Shoe on the Other Foot," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 45:385 (Dec. 1970).
7. Anita Schiller, *Characteristics of Professional Personnel in College and University Libraries*; Final Report (Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1968), 119p.; Perry D. Morrison, *The Career of the Academic Librarian: A Study of the Social Origins, Educational Attainments, Vocational Experiences, and Personal Characteristics of a Group of American Academic Librarians* (Chicago: ALA, 1969), 169p. biblio. This is a condensation of Morrison's doctoral dissertation in library science, accepted at the University of California, Berkeley, 1960.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
9. Thompson, "Crutches," p. 1260.
10. Powell, "Shoe on," p. 389.
11. Daniel Gore, "The Mismanagement of College Libraries," *AAUP Bulletin* 52:46-51 (Spring 1966); "A Modest Proposal for Improving the Management of College Libraries," *Educational Record* 48:79-86 (Winter 1967).
12. Daniel Gore, "Faculty Status."
13. Thompson, "Crutches."
14. *Purdon's Pennsylvania Statutes Annotated*, title 24, sections 11-1141, reads in part "Teacher" shall include all professional employees and temporary professional employees, who devote fifty per cent (50%) of their time or more to teaching or other direct educational activities, such as classroom teachers, demonstration teachers, museum teachers, counselors, librarians, school nurses, dental hygienists, home and school visitors, and other similar professional employees . . . certified in accordance with the qualifications established by the State Council of Education."
15. *A Personnel Program for Selected Faculty Employments in The Pennsylvania State Colleges and University* (Chicago: Public Administrative Service, 1969), 41p. Appendix.
16. The minimum entering requirement for teachers with the rank of instructor is a bachelor's degree plus fifteen semester hours of graduate credit. The entering minimum requirement for librarians—if they are to be employed in professional capacity and with the same rank—is the master's degree in librarianship.
17. Morrison, *The Career of the Academic Librarian*. One must keep in mind that the gathering of Morrison's data could not have occurred later than the late fifties. In the matter of status concern of librarians, Morrison himself noticed a changing pattern of personnel toward a more ambitious mood for professional advancement. Thus, after twelve or fifteen years, we might see that his librarians of upper class mentality may now have changed radically to that of middle class aggressiveness.
18. Schiller, *Characteristics of Professional*. Since broad rather than narrow concentration in subject fields has traditionally been advised for librarians, nondegree credit may be the rule rather than the exception. Some extra hours are studied for the immediate value of understanding or skills on the job. One of Schiller's subjects reported earning nine hours credit in law expecting the study to enable her to organize materials in that area more efficiently. Thus, in library science, particularly, the very nature of one's strength which is relevant may go unrecorded in some educational records such as that found in college catalogs.

19. E. J. Josey, "Full Faculty Status This Century," *Library Journal* 97:984-9 (March 15, 1972).
20. L. Carroll DeWeese, "Status Concerns and Library Professionalism." *CRL* 33:31-8 (Jan. 1972).
21. F. W. Bateson complained that few university librarians in America are scholars in their own right. His specific problem was the need for a bibliographer in the humanities, specifically in his own field, English. He proposed two alternatives: one, a member of the English staff be assigned the task with partial relief from teaching; two, assignment of a librarian, actually the first choice, according to Bateson. But he asked where one could find a librarian to fit this scholarly requirement. Librarians, he be-

lieved, suffered from a "bogus preoccupation" with "library service." "Degrees and diplomas are even accorded in this bastard discipline and often become a union card, the shibboleth that permits entry into the profession . . . Library science, I am told, can be earned in a fortnight." It is interesting to note that Bateson, a well-known English professor and scholar, is holding in contempt the idea of *service*, while Kenneth Kister, a librarian, whom we have discussed in this paper, used the same idea for his forte in his article "A View From the Front. . . ." For Bateson's discussion see F. W. Bateson, "Function of the Library in Graduate Study in English," *Journal of General Education*, 13:5-17 (April 1961).