

THE INSTITUTE FOR SEMANTOGRAPHY

A Non-Profit Institution for the Promotion of Semantics and Semantography

5 Maroubra Bay Road, Pagewood, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia



SEMANTOGRAPHY SERIES No. 112

Sydney 7th January 1954

SEMANTOGRAPHY AND THE LIBRARIAN'S PROBLEMS.

A Letter addressed to (alphabetically)

John Metcalfe, Esq.,
Principal Librarian
The Public Library
of New South Wales
SYDNEY N.S.W.

and

H.L. White, Esq.,
Principal Librarian
The Commonwealth
National Library
CANBERRA A.C.T.

Dear Mr. Metcalfe, dear Mr. White,

Allow me to express my gratitude to you both with this letter in which I examine the role of the librarian in our complex world. I have been director of the patent department of a large European firm and have carried out extensive scientific library research in various countries. I for one learned to appreciate the value of a library. I for one learned also to realize their main handicap: too many publications in too many different languages - "a social problem of the first magnitude" as Professor Lancelot Hogben wrote, inventor of Interglossa and co-author of "The Loom of Language."

Hogben and Ogden, Jespersen and Zamenhof and the many others.

Alas, Professor Hogben did not learn the lesson of the Loom of Language. He embarked upon a new international language based exclusively on Greek roots - Interglossa. For the last 300 years some hundreds of international languages have been invented and - discarded. The reason: the strength of the mother tongue is irresistible. People will go on babbling from the cradle to the grave in the same language their mother babbled to them. In Canada, in the United States and in Australia settlers who came into the country generations ago, even centuries ago, still speak French, or German or Swedish, or Italian etc. In Australia there are towns where German or Italian is the language of communication and where English is a foreign tongue to all intent and purpose.

Symbols bridge all languages; my experiences in Europe and Asia.

I am a chemist who worked mainly in the field of radio electronics. I used mathematical symbols extensively. I realized that the chemists have evolved a chemical Semantography in which H_2O means water in all languages of the world, and in which the "meaning elements" show the real composition of water. Then, in radio technology pictorial symbols have been evolved which have the same meaning for radio mechanics in Europe, or Africa or Asia or elsewhere. When I brought my radio set to the Chinese radio shop in Shanghai I could "tell" him in the pictorial symbols of radio that I want a triode or a pentode or a condenser, etc. Fortunately I have also learned some of the pictorial symbols of Chinese writing. I realized that pictorial symbols are the answer to the Babel of languages and went to work. Semantography is the result.

Help for the Librarians of the World

The importance of libraries and librarians has been recognized and money is allocated for them. In consequence thereof, industrious printers and publishers (realizing that money is where you find it) are pouring out printed publications by the tens of thousands. The more money is allocated, the more they print - until the mere filing, shelving, indexing, etc. etc. becomes a Herculean task, until the accumulated mass of paper stuff defeats its own purpose.

One help for librarians is the micro film, which however needs the same indexing, etc, as is needed for books and journals. But it is already a deterrent

to profit-seeking printers. The other help will come from Semantography. It may take 50 years or 100 years or more - but this Semantography will come.

How Semantography will help the librarians of the world

In my lectures to students of Sydney University I have explained the idea of an international science abstract (see Semantography Series No. 37, 43, 44 which are in your library) Briefly I propose filing cards indexed in the Dewey system or any better forthcoming system, containing a title, giving the research and the result in a few words, as for instance "Treatment of sheepwool with D.D.T. ineffective" After that a short abstract of the original treatise or article is given in not more than 100 words. These cards are issued by universities and institutes all over the world and exchanged in much the same way as patent specifications are to-day exchanged between different countries. These filing cards when issued in an English speaking country carry the words in English and the symbols above each word. French Universities will issue them in French, etc., etc. Thus, anyone speaking the language of the original card do not need to bother about the symbols. But anyone else who speak only Swedish or Hungarian, etc., can read the symbols in his mother tongue. Private hospitals, industries, doctors engineers etc., could subscribe to the cards in their particular field and could thus be quickly informed what goes on in the whole world in their particular field. If one subject in one card is of great interest, the original treatise can be asked for from the issuing university, etc. For more particulars see the above mentioned issues of the Semantography Series.

The Pains of the Pioneers.

In my library research into the origin of inventions I have invariably found that the pioneers of new ideas found no recognition, no help and no reward in their life-time. The keepers of ideas, the men of orthodox science did not extend any help to the pioneers of new and unorthodox ideas. Only after their death was the value of their pioneering work recognised. But what could they have done if only a little encouragement would have been given to them.

The Librarian - Trustee of Thought, Trustee of History.

Why did librarians extend help to me, and why could I not find this help from other people, especially scholars? After 11 years of intense struggle, after hundreds of approaches to scholars and scholarly institutions I can only conclude that every living scholar is most concerned with his own claim for immortality. He himself feels very much frustrated. He won't help another frustrated guy along. The librarian, however, is surrounded by books written by men who are long dead. He alone can estimate the value of information and thought which might endure. He makes no claim for immortality. He is the trustee of immortal thought and he can see the value of a work for later generations. You both and a few other librarians abroad have given me practical help.

The squandering librarian and the enlightened librarian.

The librarian has to answer to the men who govern the library. He is given money not to be squandered for valueless books. He must spend it wisely. With this evaluation in mind he will spend the money on books with an impressive author, a professor of a university. An outsider has little chance. It is only for the courageous librarian to be unafraid of reproaches from his governors. He has the judgement to recognize a book of value and be it from an unknown guy, be it from a man not attached to any institution of learning and be it even for an outlandish work, which the author has mimeographed himself. The history of new ideas shows that every new idea was first an outlandish idea for which no publisher would risk money and no librarian would risk reproaches from his superiors. Later generations will cherish the courageous work of those few librarians who in spite of all opened their purses and their shelves to the pioneers of new ideas. They are the enlightened librarians. They are the ones who have given courage to the pioneers to keep going though the going is tough, to hold on in spite of all obstacles and to keep on living and working for the benefit of later generations.

You have given me this courage and to the last of my days I shall for ever be thankful to you.

Yours sincerely

C.K.Bliss