



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

Lezioni e Letture



onferimento della Laurea
magistrale ad honorem in Scienze
archivistiche e biblioteconomiche a
Michele Casalini

Award of the Laurea magistrale ad
honorem in Library and information
science to Michele Casalini





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Aula Magna del Rettorato
Università degli Studi di Firenze

21 maggio 2019



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Laudatio

In the history of Italian universities, today is only the second time that an honorary degree has been bestowed in Library and information science. The first such distinction was awarded by the University of Udine in 1995 to Conor Fahy for his studies on the ancient book; today's honour is the first of its kind to be conferred in modern librarianship. The proposal for this recognition emerged in the Master's degree course in Library and information science, which was established in 2008 following the transformation of the specialist degree course in archival and library sciences previously instituted 2001. The course, run by the University of Florence, was among the first in Italy to offer high-level training in the field and over time has consolidated its standing both within the university and on the national and international scene.

Michele Casalini fulfils the desirable qualities described in the Academic Senate (discussion of 15 October 2014): "The proposed candidate, through study, research, artistic or professional activities, must have made contributions of significant importance in scientific, cultural and socio-economic fields, in addition to having obtained results that have been internationally appreciated and recognized, thus contributing with his or her work to the advancement of the core subject of the degree".

Michele, together with his sister Barbara, is at the head of Casalini Libri, a bibliographic agency, founded by his father Mario, that is both known and respected across the world and well-established in the Florentine business and cultural scene. From the very beginning of its activity, the company has stood out for various merits: the provision of Italian publications to foreign libraries, realised through meticulous searching for works published by commercial and non-commercial producers and careful selection of suitable

titles; the high-quality cataloguing of resources, in compliance with the appropriate standards for universal bibliographic control; its dedication to continually renewing and updating its technology.

Distributor and promoter of Italian publications

Casalini Libri is the most important worldwide exporter of Italian academic books and periodicals (and publications from other European countries) to principal North American university libraries, including Stanford, Harvard, Berkeley and Yale, as well as to the world's the largest library, the Library of Congress. In Europe, Casalini Libri's most notable partners are the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the British Library and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, not to mention important contacts with the main national libraries of other continents.

Bibliographic agency

Over time, Casalini Libri has established itself as an Italian bibliographic agency parallel to the official national bibliography, proving both authoritative and reliable in bibliographic control and offering timely and convenient services. From the nineteen-seventies on it has been the Italian component in the international "shared cataloging" project that the Library of Congress had stipulated with twenty countries to manage the description of volumes in foreign languages; and is to this day a partner of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging (PCC). Producing around sixty thousand records of bibliographic information on new titles annually, Casalini Libri presents itself as a comprehensive source and as a centre of excellence in the research information chain. Casalini Libri has a team of expert catalogers who are open to innovation. It is an honour to note that many of its approximately one hundred staff members are graduates of our degree courses; some have successfully completed a Master's degree in Cataloguing or PhD in Historical Studies, Book Sciences, Institutions and Archives.

Casalini Libri, through *ilibri* database, offers offers a commercial and bibliographic service, but first of all a cultural service that contributes decisively to the dissemination of Italian scientific research across the world, a fundamental service for all of us researchers. That the books published by Italian publishing houses and research institutions are found in the collections of the world's most prestigious libraries, is thanks to the initiative, authority, reliability and perseverance of Casalini Libri. This is most true in the case of scientific products published by universities, academies, museums, archives, small publishing companies and even by single scholars: entities that do not have the means to distribute their scientific works, with the risk or, more likely, the certainty that these resources, which are often of high intellectual value, remain in storage, are not catalogued and, therefore, are absent from the information circuit.

Innovation and digital services

Casalini Libri first perceived the importance of information technology for the long-term success both of the company and of libraries and, consequently, of its institutional users and, above all, scholars. The *Torrossa* platform, for example, is a service that allows the global distribution and online use of Italian digital publications. It brings together the resources of numerous Italian publishing houses, some of whom are naturally competitors but become *de facto* collaborators and representatives of Italian culture when their publications are presented side by side in the same resource and become searchable and usable throughout the world thanks to the metadata that accompanies and describes them. Casalini Libri has established an *alliance of Italian publishing*, an intelligent solution to try to resist the giants of distribution, who often use aggressive and audacious tactics. Thus the company represents a fundamental defence of the Italian publishing in the international context and contributes significantly to nurture the construction of the global research community, which is indispensable for the progress of culture.

Michele Casalini

The activities of the family business are reflected in Michele's personality; at the core of his thinking and actions are humanistic values combined with the ability to construct relationships with other economic and cultural partners. Michele's world is the world of the bibliographic universe, of publishing, of cataloguing or, as it is called today, of creating and assigning metadata, of creating and distributing bibliographic resources, of defining the new languages and codes that emerge new technologies and new products, of more and more refined bibliographic services that are typical of the digital age. Michele Casalini can be defined as an ambassador of Italian culture in the world through the dissemination of bibliographic resources produced by Italian authors and publishers.

He has organised training courses, collaborated in the drafting of international projects, supported workshops, conferences and seminars aimed at promoting dialogue between leading experts in the field of library sciences, at fostering international cooperation and promoting bibliographic systems, standards and languages for the future. Together with his sister Barbara, he has co-organized the Fiesole Retreat series since 1999, an annual informal meeting that brings together in various parts of the world the representatives of the main libraries and the main representatives of the bibliographic information sector to discuss new opportunities in the development of collections; since 2009 he has given his support to the *Lectio magistralis* in *Biblioteconomia* of the University of Florence. Michele has promoted, both in Europe and in Italy, EDIFACT, Electronic Data Interchange For Administration, Commerce and Transport, an international standard proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission, which defines syntactic rules for structuring data for the book sector. In the bibliographic sector, he has contributed to the dissemination in Italy and in the RDA world of Resource Description and Access, the metadata standard for the digital age (Casalini Libri has used it since the first day of its implementation, on March 31st, 2013), in collaboration with the Library of Congress and other major US and European libraries, as well as contributing to the discussion and comparison on BIBFRAME,

Bibliographic Framework Initiative, the new data recording format that uses the technology of linked data for the construction of the semantic web; he has collaborated on research projects such as, for example, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS); actively participates in the definition of Share Virtual Discovery Environment in Linked Data), a bibliographic information management project that involves around twenty North American university libraries. Michele is a member of various professional associations including the American Library Association, the Society for Scholarly Publishing, the Book Industry Study Group and EDItEUR; he is a member of the Board of Directors of the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and a member of the Board of Auditors of the Amici della Musica of Florence; upon appointment by ANVUR, he is an expert member of the Database and new indicators Working Group, and was a board member of the Giovanni Michelucci Foundation. His main interests include the study of the reality of academic publishing in the humanities and social sciences (HSS) - with particular reference to the state of health of independent publishing and culture for the potential risks of marginalization of the sector - and the analysis of collaborative measures that can contribute to the preservation of the vibrancy and heterogeneity of cultural heritage for the future.

Current library context

Connect, preserve, promote. If we were to summarize the millennial history of libraries in the Western world, these are the verbs we should consider. Over time, each library has had to combine in different ways, with different focus, these three functions that still characterize and justify their existence as institutions of collective recorded memory.

Connecting is what the library shows it is able to do when, through its cataloging systems, it makes communication between bibliographic resources possible, but above all when it facilitates the consultation and the retrieval of these resources for readers. Books are carriers of a message: they are the elements of a plot that binds them reciprocally, so as to create new

knowledge. «Books are for use », said the great Indian librarianship theorist Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan: libraries, by connecting bibliographic resources, seek the best ways to decrease informational entropy and, in doing so, try to bring the reader closer to the sources of knowledge.

Preserving is the care that the library places in looking beyond the horizons of human life, beyond those often myopic - sometimes nefarious - practices which, because of their immediate usefulness, mark so much part of the choices of our daily life. If there is a value that characterizes the history of libraries from Alexandria to the present day, which has materialized in a symbolic space that bears the features of sacredness, it consists in the task of conserving memory from generation to generation. Libraries have always been meeting places, places of dialogue, debate, study, and the sharing of mutual knowledge: this came to be so because they preserved those recorded memories, those historical testimonies, which, when properly used, became the stimulation for free confrontation between differing and even opposing opinions, an attitude that we know to be the foundation of modern democracy. It is in this capacity to stimulate the growth of knowledge and, therefore, to accompany the progress of humanity that the library puts into practice its third function, the promotion and enhancement of culture. If the library did not listen continuously, it would not be able to respond to the information or recreational needs of its users; this alone would suffice to justify its existence. The library, however, is not content with responding: instead, it wants to prompt and encourage questions, to find the potential reader, it solicits the critical attitude of the citizen by promoting the services it can offer. The history of the media has taught us that the transmission of human knowledge does not rest on permanent structures or on instruments with immutable characteristics. From clay tablets, to rolls, to codes, to printed books, to microfilms to digital resources, the history of libraries has always been a restless story, marked by an incessant search for solutions to preserve, describe, index, make usable and enhance a bibliographic universe in continuous transformation, if not always constant.

The international library community has taken note of the epochal change that has affected the bibliographic universe, the languages of communication between collections and users, and is trying to conceive

new solutions by reaffirming its role as an authoritative protagonist even in the global digital environment. Its future is in the ever-broader integration with the cultural and technological context used by other transmitters of recorded knowledge, with information sources and encyclopedias: essential in order to evolve while maintaining its own centuries-old tradition.

Conclusions

Michele is well aware of these current problems. Being a far-sighted person, he has had the capacity to promote innovation in his business and in general among the most advanced library community, developing and spreading a new business model on the market and expanding the bibliographic services typical of the digital world. With Casalini Libri, he has understood that the new factor in the digital world is not the technology itself, but close and unconstrained collaboration with other partners. It can, therefore, be affirmed, with a metaphor, that Michele has initiated a new humanism of the digital age; he has worked for the benefit of the library profession, of publishing, of bibliographic control, of codes of communication and of bibliographic services appropriate to the current context; he has had the courage, the wisdom and the audacity of those who do not content themselves with the present but consciously participate in the creation of the future. Michele has contributed, and continues to contribute, to the advancement of librarianship in the digital age, achieving excellent results that are appreciated and recognized internationally, and that form the motivation for the laurea magistrale ad honorem in Library and information science, which the University of Florence confers on him today.

Mauro Guerrini

*President of the Degree Course
in Library and information science*