

Combining Information and Library work with the Arts and Artistic Creativity, Research and Theory: It *is* all possible!

A focus on Paul Catherall

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Does a Library and Information Professional have to be doomed to stay within a very limited and confined area? I have often asked myself this question over the years, particularly when I worked so closely within the profession. Whilst being convinced that this cannot possibly be true, in a rational sense, my practical experience proved that, in reality, this often seemed to be the case. Such experiences might also help the reader to understand my change in career direction over the last 5 years or so! Yet, libraries, information, books and literature are wonderful - where would we be without them? They offer us the opportunity to lead a richer and a fuller life. So it can be quite disillusioning, I have found, when one comes up against an environment which sometimes seems to be dominated by relatively minor and insignificant issues.

Anyway, what has all this got to do with the title of this piece, one might ask? Paul Catherall is an Information Professional who shows that this richer life is, indeed, possible. By day he works as an Information Professional, as a Web-Developer for the academic library at the North-East Wales Institute (NEWI) of Higher Education. He is also the Web Development Officer for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Career Development Group, Wales (CDG Wales)

(See:

http://www.careerdevelopmentgroup.org.uk/divisions/wales/english/committee_members/members.htm).

In addition, Paul is the Web Master for this e-journal, *Information for Social Change* (ISC). ISC is also an organisation in liaison (OIL) with CILIP. (See Paul Catherall's profile in 'Profile for members of ISC Editorial Board' - <http://libr.org/isc/profile.html>). Yet, Paul also combines his professional work as a library and information web-developer with a wide range of other interests. What are some of these other activities then?

Paul is very keen on writing, publishing, research and the arts. In regard to the arts he is particularly keen on literature and poetry. His first book was published in 2004 on the topic of e-learning. The book is entitled *Delivering E-learning for Information Services in*

Higher Education, published through Chandos Publishing: Oxford. Building on this he has now started studying for a PhD (part-time) at Manchester Metropolitan University on the topic of e-learning and the new and different ways in which students are starting to learn today. The title of his research project is: *What are the skills challenges faced by students in the use of educational technology?: Perceptions of undergraduate students studying professional courses in a part-time, distributed study context*. Furthermore, he also hopes to place his PhD within a theoretical framework, so with this in mind, he is currently exploring Grounded Theory. As he says:

Key features of Grounded Theory that interested me included the focus on a 'substantive area' as opposed to a research question or hypothesis and the facility to develop a theory from raw data...
(Catherall, 2006c, p.1)

Grounded Theory will enable Paul to keep an open mind about various possible theoretical perspectives, he says, and much to my delight he tells me that this includes the possibility of exploring a Marxist theoretical perspective at some point in the future. Paul has also written a number of articles, on a variety of themes - see references at the end of this article, for examples of some of these. This includes articles in *Information for Social Change* on topics such as career development in a non-traditional library role, influences on e-learning and writing for the information sector. He has also written a very informative piece on a globalisation, libraries, information and education event that was organised by the Career Development Group Wales (CDG Wales) and ISC at Swansea University in 2005, that I participated in, along with Anneliese Dodds. This has been published in a number of different publications, including *Impact*, the journal of the CILIP Career Development Group (see Catherall, 2006b).

In regard to the arts, much to my initial surprise and delight, a book of Paul's poems with illustrations also by Paul (including a captivating cover), was published earlier this year, with PublishAmerica. These poems were written by Paul over the last 10 years (1995-2005). The poems cover a variety of themes, and they:

...deal with a range of themes ranging from the simple to the complex and from the transcendental to the macabre... (Catherall, 2006a, p.7)

One unifying theme that runs through them all though, I think, is the way in which the poet compares and contrasts urban life with nature and rural life. Living in North Wales, Paul must feel very close to nature himself in many ways, I am sure. I was very moved by this little book, so much so, that I wrote two reviews of it - one for Amazon.co.uk and Amazon.com and another for this issue of ISC. Glenn Rikowski also inserted an entry on his web-log about it

(See: <http://journals.aol.co.uk/rikowskigr/Volumizer/entries/1029>). Thus, poetry and the arts (Paul also has a BA in English Literature with Media Studies) is clearly something that means a lot to Paul and is something that very much inspires and delights him. I am sure that it also helps him with his day-to-day work as well as with his wider research agenda. Drawing on the expertise that Paul has gained from his web work, Paul has also set-up a website for his book of poems – see: <http://poetry.draigweb.co.uk>.

So, the arts help us to live a rich and rewarding life, but the arts will always struggle to survive in capitalism, it seems to me. Money cannot easily be made from the arts, and the arts cannot readily be transformed into saleable, tradable commodities. Indeed, it is fascinating to realise the extent to which the genius Mozart himself seemed to feel this. In a letter that Mozart wrote to an Italian friend on 4th September 1776, he said:

Most beloved and esteemed signor, I beg you to tell me what you think of my most humble music. We live in a world where the arts should be encouraged so that we may enlighten one another. But in the country where I live music must struggle even to exist (Mozart, 1776).

Yet Paul, in his own small way, is helping people to appreciate the arts more, and is doing a little to help to overcome the fact that he thinks that poetry is sadly in decline.

Thus, Paul Catherall can be an inspiration to us all, I think, or at least to those of us that want to live a richer, deeper and a more rewarding life in general, and in particular, to those of us that want to show that the library and information profession can be a rich and rewarding experience, and does not have to be confined within narrow walls.

Life is for living – let us embrace it, and not limit ourselves in unnecessary ways. As ever, let us look towards a better future and a brighter and a fairer world. Also, let us look towards a world where humans can find fulfilment and self-expression and where the arts can be more fully embraced. But meanwhile, let us also aim to live a rich and fulfilling life through the arts, as much as we are able to, whilst living within the capitalist confines that we currently have to operate in.

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Paul Catherall's websites

Paul Catherall's website for his poetry book, *Foibles, Frolics and Phantasms: illustrated poems (1995-2005)* See <http://poetry.draigweb.co.uk>

E-Learning Information Portal, maintained by Paul Catherall –
See: <http://elearning.draigweb.co.uk>

Paul Catherall's Research Home Page for Manchester Metropolitan University.
See: <http://draigweb.co.uk/elearning/>

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