

Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

Cataloging Library Resources: An Introduction. Second Edition. By Marie Keen Shaw. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024. 229p. \$125 hardcover (ISBN: 978-1538186763).

The fundamentals of MARC cataloging have not changed in about fifty years. These fundamentals are described soundly in this textbook by Marie Keen Shaw. I can see the years of work and training on which this book is based, but as a professional cataloger with almost two decades of experience working with library, archive, and museum metadata, I can also see where this textbook went wrong as Shaw seeks to make sense of library-managed metadata through a MARC-based framework. MARC is necessary knowledge for anyone working with library metadata, but it is not a good framework from which to understand the increasingly interoperable future of library cataloging.

It is this reviewer's assertion that any book on library cataloging should briefly explain the history into which numeric (e.g., MARC) and semantic (e.g., XML, HTML) encoding standards emerged before describing how to use them for library work. This textbook does not do so. Especially since this book was updated to incorporate BIBFRAME, it is important to explain the distinction between numeric and semantic encoding standards correctly so that new catalogers have a technical understanding of why semantic schemas are interoperable on the web but numeric standards are not. It is pivotal knowledge for understanding how to use BIBFRAME, Dublin Core, and other web standards in tandem with MARC21, as well as for how to apply descriptive frameworks (i.e., AACR2, RDA) and the whole array of library-created controlled vocabularies in a useful manner.

My objection to how Shaw explains library cataloging can be summed up by my objection to how she begins her chapter on metadata:

This chapter introduces the concept of metadata and how it is used as alternate systems [from MARC21] to help patrons find and locate digital objects . . . Metadata as it relates to technology is commonly defined as 'data about data.' This definition confounds and confuses; it appears to be more doublespeak than helpful. (88)

I have seen it many times, where library workers developed the idea that MARC is for books in library catalog systems and "metadata" is for digital objects in digital asset management systems (89).

In fact, MARC records are a type of metadata. If one starts with the understanding that library resources (i.e., books, journals, archival collections, e-books) are containers for data themselves, and that MARC is a numeric encoding standard for describing that data in an easily indexable way, then hopefully one can also see how a MARC record is data about data (i.e., metadata). What many people like Shaw see as a distinction between MARC records and "metadata" records is actually a distinction between numeric encoding standards developed in the 1960s and the semantic encoding standards developed in the 1990s. Technically these encoding standards are interchangeable in a modern ILS for describing any kind of library resource.

Absent this understanding, Shaw tries to describe why BIBFRAME will replace MARC so that library records can “reach out on the internet or link to websites” (40). This description misses the important concept of search engine indexing and collocation that BIBFRAME is really enabling. Additionally, Shaw makes the definitive statement several times that BIBFRAME will replace MARC in the coming years, as it is important “to provide a much greater amount of information about [a library] item and its relationship to other people, places, subjects, and more” (40). Although BIBFRAME is undeniably an important standard that library systems are experimenting with and using, I think it is a mistake to assume it will be the primary replacement for MARC in the future. Shaw seems to be under the assumption that the Library of Congress is driving the train here with the development and adoption of BIBFRAME, but I cannot agree with that framing.

An additional problem with this book as a guide for learning library resource cataloging is that it makes no mention of inclusive description projects. Shaw includes whole sections on Melvil Dewey, Charles Cutter, and the origins of the Library of Congress classification system, but she makes no mention of the Anglo-Christian framing of these classification systems that have come under rightful scrutiny in recent years. Dewey in particular she seems to view with rose-colored glass, only nodding to his divisive life and legacy by saying that because he was “always on the edge of recalcitrance, his was a life not without controversy” (106). But she does not mention how these controversies have led to many of the reparative cataloging and classification efforts that are so important to the cataloging community today.¹

Shaw makes a few additional incorrect statements in this book, as in the paragraph claiming “U.S. copyright law was established under the direction of Librarian of Congress Ainsworth Rand Spofford in 1870” (122). In fact, US copyright law was established in the US Constitution (article I, section 8, clause 8) in 1787. If one looks at the webpage Shaw cites for her statement, they can see that Spofford is credited not with establishing the law, but with the “centralization of U.S. copyright registration and deposit at the Library of Congress.”² It’s a strange mistake that stood out to me among a variety of others that make this book problematic.

That said, given the pace of technological change and the length of time it takes to write a book, teaching library cataloging from a textbook is probably going to be challenging in the next few years no matter what book you choose. In the opinion of this reviewer, it would be better to go to the ALA Research Guides online and consult the information in the Cataloging Tools and Resources area, which is more heavily referenced and more frequently updated.³ If one is looking for a printed textbook, however, Arlene G. Taylor’s *Introduction to Cataloging and Classification*, now in its eleventh edition, is my recommendation.⁴

The next five years will likely be a real inflection point in library metadata practice. Anyone who wants to start in the field now is going to need to know how MARC and BIBFRAME records are created and standardized, but more than that, they are going to need to know about the whole metadata ecosystem that those records will be expected to engage with. Library schools and library certificate programs should be training new catalogers to understand this whole environment.—*Jill Strykowski, MSLIS, MA (jill.strykowski@sjsu.edu), San José State University, California*

References and Notes

1. For information on this movement, see CritLib, “Recommended Resources,” accessed January 27, 2025, <http://critlib.org/recommended-readings/>.
2. Library of Congress, “History of the Library,” accessed January 15, 2024, at www.loc.gov/about/history-of-the-library.
3. ALA Library, “Cataloging Tools and Resources,” accessed January 15, 2024, at libguides.ala.org/cataloging-tools.
4. Arlene G. Taylor, *Introduction to Cataloging and Classification*, 11th edition (Bloomsbury, 2015).