

Broken Pieces: a Library Life, 1941-1978. By MICHAEL GORMAN. Pp. 232, ill. Chicago: American Library Association, 2011. \$35.00. ISBN: 9780838911044.

One question implicit in all autobiographies is ‘How personal is too personal?’ and we may wonder this repeatedly as we read Michael Gorman’s account of his wartime childhood, London schooling and teenage exploration of Paris.

Of course, the historical meat of this book is the first-person account of library education in the 1960s; the glimpse into daily life at the British National Bibliography offices under A.J. Wells; Gorman’s own description of how he analysed the existing cataloguing codes and practices of the day and (though modestly prevents his stating it so bluntly himself) saved the second edition of the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2)* from the dangers faced by all committee-written documents – confusing language, poor internal cross-references and lack of concrete examples.

In the current debates about the rising cost of a Masters degree in Information Studies, how quickly we have forgotten that our post-war public libraries were staffed mainly by professionals who trained under the old Library Association exams. How many of us have given a thought to the impediment to professional progression experienced by military service during World War II, or the day-to-day jealousy that resulted towards men too ill or too pacifist to serve? Such considerations are as alien to the younger generation as rationing, and Gorman’s highlighting this aspect of office politics in the libraries in which he worked in the 1950s is salutary.

Similarly, Gorman’s account of the rivalry in cataloguing education methods at Illinois is not only entertaining but academically useful: there still exist today educators – and students – who believe cataloguing is all about committing the rules to heart and then following them rigidly. Not so Gorman: “It is impossible to teach a general cataloguing course without some consideration of cataloguing rules and classification schedules and their applications, but these should always be to illustrate the underlying structures and the principles they embody” (p.163). In today’s educational parlance, *Cat & Class* should be the subject of critical thinking.

After all, cataloguing codes are literary texts - and, arguably, in the twentieth century no-one other than Lubetzky analysed the codes as comprehensively as Gorman. Even heroes have heroes, and the autobiography provides a chance to acknowledge Lubetzky’s influence on AACR2 and recall their first meeting: “I inscribed the copy of AACR2 I gave to Dr. Lubetzky with my signature and the words *il miglior fabbro* (‘the better craftsman’)” (p. 201).

Overall, it is this attitude towards cataloguing and librarianship as craft that permeates this book and makes it something encouraging for new professionals to read. Library school is simply the second stage in an apprenticeship – not the end of the learning process. It is

helpful to read the account of such a prominent librarian of their own lifelong learning within the profession.

Ultimately, this is not an academic biography. Like all autobiographies, it is a first person narrative, and must be treated with all the suspicion to which any such narrative should be subjected. However, to answer the question in this review's first paragraph, the personal account serves to humanize someone who has been lionized within the profession. Gorman's introduction of his loner schoolboy self and his youthful dilettante self slices through any preconception we might have of Gorman as Icon.

What stays with us, a few weeks after reading, is not, to paraphrase James Joyce, a portrait of the cataloguer as a young man, but an expanded version of 'A true history of AACR2 ... (by one who was there).' In the history of cataloguing, we see a movement from the single author codes of the nineteenth century (most prominently Panizzi, Cutter, Jewett) to the committee-written codes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (AACR, AACR2, RDA). The current request from the US National Test Committee that the new international cataloguing code, RDA, be rephrased in straightforward English highlights the need for editorial work of the kind Gorman recounts performing for AACR2.

It seems there is a job to be performed to clarify RDA's terms. If the US National Test Committee's final report can be seen to suggest a job description, the second part of this autobiography may act as a person specification. If Michael Gorman is unavailable to fill the position himself, will the new Michael Gorman please stand up? Current cataloguing, as much as cataloguing history, needs a new hero.

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