

Budd, John M. *Self-Examination: The Present and Future of Librarianship*. Beta Phi Mu Monograph Series. Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited, 2008. 281 pp. ISBN: 9781591585916. \$60.00

Tony Fonseca, Nicholls State University

In the introduction to his Foucaultian inspired reflection on librarianship, John Budd gives voice to perhaps the most prevalent of sinking feelings which I have felt since becoming a professional in the field, that librarianship is a discipline characterized by “an absence of reflection” (vii). *Self-Examination* is written to address that need, to “provide opportunities and suggestions for reflection,” or to put it another way, to fill the need for a “consciousness of purpose” (vii). In essence, Budd places himself in admirable company, following in footsteps of Pierce Butler, Jesse Shera, and Michael Gorman, scholars known for their search for a professional philosophy. The challenge for Budd, which he accomplishes quite successfully in this text, is to create a comprehensive and relevant study. His introduction cues readers in to the approach he takes throughout the book: Budd is most comfortable when he theorizes and philosophizes, and although this sometimes means getting bogged down for brief periods with quibbling (as with a discussion of information versus knowledge), pondering these minor distinctions more often than not leads to valuable questions and realizations.

Generally speaking, *Self-Examination* seeks to chronicle the evolution of librarianship, with the informing principle of “consciousnesses and the ways they [humans] categorize their worlds” (ix). In his first chapter, Budd gives a genealogy of the profession, using a Nietzschean view of history, paired with and played against a Foucaultian view of genealogy. The chapter does an admirable job of examining parallel events, in essence taking a non-linear view of

history, and this accounts for a complex historical reading. In other words, Budd gives readers not just a chronicle, but a context. His main argument is that libraries have always had a human purpose; they've always been created to serve a human need, which changes over time. His history begins with the Sumerians and their addressing preservations issues. Thinking sociologically and psychologically, Budd posits that the use of dried tablets to preserve some documents suggests a newfound importance of some types of writing (at first, mainly issues of commerce). He continues his history with a discussion of Hammurabi and the emergence of cultural and political texts, noting that this indicates communication and preservation have become more of a political act. Budd identifies The Library at Alexandria as the benchmark event between concerns of preservation and access/categorization, emphasizing further that human need drove the creation and evolution of the library's existence. In a parallel track, he chronicles the same religion versus secular knowledge issues with monasteries, leading to the reign of Charlemagne, which marked the secular's being introduced in libraries again in the Western world. Meanwhile, in another parallel track, he notes the importance of the Eastern world's contributions, namely the Library at Cordoba, which boasted over 600,000 volumes in an eclectic collection. Budd's overall argument here is that these events mark the move from orality towards written literature, leading to the advent of printing as a reaction to a growing need to mass produce texts.

In Chapter 2, "Place and Identity," he points out that the purpose of librarians and libraries have evolved (for example, from the early ALA stance of librarians being arbiters of taste to the current emphasis on the democratic nature of information), making a few interesting points that should subdue fears of the Googlization of information, that Americans cannot dream of a world without libraries, and that education and libraries are ubiquitous in the U.S. Although

he does note the ongoing financial crises which libraries face, he makes a cogent argument that the solution is for librarians to make society conscious of the elements of libraries of which they are unconscious. The remainder of the chapter describes many of the problems faced in the profession today, beginning with the tendency for librarians to self-segregate by type, professional affiliations, and interest group; discusses the attempts of the ALA Council Task Forces to codify a set of values for the profession; and explains the tension between LIS educators/programs and practicing professionals, which he sees as an extension of the overall education problem of “accounting” versus “accountability.” Never at a loss for the memorable phrase, Budd spins the tension as a battle between the preparation of future librarians, as opposed to the preparation of people to work in libraries, concluding that if LIS education is *only* about skills, then LIS programs do not need to exist.

In his third chapter, Budd tackles the nature of information, noting its complex nature, citing Warren Weaver (1949), that information is one’s selection, given freedom of choice, in one what says versus what one could say. Never settling on a simplified version of any definition, Budd writes that information provides mechanisms for people to discern meaning, and he relates information theory to the theories of categorization and communication. He then delves into the relationship between semiotics and librarianship, or the intersection between informative objects and their meaning, ultimately raising the fundamental question of the discipline: What does it mean to say that librarianship is an information profession? Although he is never able to offer a succinct answer, Budd approaches one through his coverage of the history of categorization and categorization theory, with homage to theorists Paul Otlet, Henry Bliss, and George Lakoff.

The next three chapters of *Self-Examination* discuss ethics, democratization, and the idea of the information society. In those chapters, Budd raises many important questions. For example, he asks, and I paraphrase, do librarians have ethical responsibilities when it comes to mediating information? To address such questions, Budd offers a well-researched synthesis of diverse theorists, such as (in this example) Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill, relating these theories back to the ALA Library Code of Ethics. The final chapter is Budd's foreshadowing of things to come in librarianship, and in his "Optimistic Synthesis" he looks at important issues faced in the profession today, such as problems with architecture, and the ever growing threat of the digitization of information.

While *Self-Examination* by itself cannot fill the hole that the lack of reflexive, theoretical, philosophical literature in librarianship has created, it certainly can serve as a digging implement, giving future scholar librarians the fundamental tools they need as a starting point. An excellent researcher and synthesizer, Budd serves as an example of one of the master authors in the field. Librarians purchasing this text for their collections will be pleased with the thoughtfulness that went into the overall concept of this text, as well as with the erudite quality of the prose itself.