

To: ALA/ALCTS/CCS Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access

From: John Attig

RE: Revision to Appendix D, Glossary: Coloured illustration

At the *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials* Conference, attention was drawn to the strange case of rule 2.5C3 and the Glossary definition of *Coloured illustration*. Rule 2.5C3 instructs the cataloger to “Describe coloured illustrations (i.e., those in two or more colours) as such.” The Glossary definition reads: “An illustration in two or more colours. (Neither black nor white is a colour.”

This seems fairly straight-forward until you realize that, according to this definition, the following image is **not** a coloured illustration according to this definition because only **one** recognized colour is present: red.



Rare Books and Manuscripts Section

Association of College and Research Libraries
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Apparently the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section had encountered this definition before. The notes from the 1990 revision of *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books* include the following: “We leave it to cataloger’s judgment (or that of any available five-year old) to determine what a coloured illustration is.” The implication — which seems reasonable — is that the AACR definition does **not** pass the “five-year old” test. Our typical five-year old would have no problem deciding that the above illustration was in fact coloured (although she might well laugh at our spelling!); the AACR2 definition would undoubtedly strike her as an example of how silly grown-ups can be when they haven’t enough important things to do!

The present definition is defective and should be changed. There are a number of ways in which this might be done:

Option 1: Make minor changes

It is possible that what the definition **meant** to say was “black and white are not *different* colours”. Thus, for the image above, red would qualify, but so would either black or white (it really doesn’t matter which). Using this definition, a cataloger would probably come to the same conclusions as the five-year old, although the cataloger would need to interpret a grayscale image as shades of black and white. Other monochrome images, including sepia-tone photographs, might be more difficult to interpret.

Option 2: Use MARC 21 conventions

Field 007 in the MARC 21 bibliographic formats includes a number of elements that encode “color characteristics” for projected graphics, nonprojected graphics, motion pictures, and videorecordings; the codes and definitions are mostly consistent for these categories. The distinctions made are as follows:

- **One color:** printed or executed in a single color, other than black; monochrome; [presumably includes gradations of the single color]
- **Black and white:** printed or executed in black-and-white; [includes gradations, i.e. “grayscale”]
- **Multicolored:** printed or executed in more than one color
- **Hand colored**
- **Mixed:** the work or collection includes components with different color characteristics
- **Unknown**
- **Other:** used for “images which have been stained, tinted, or toned (e.g., sepia toned photographic items)”

This list provides a better breakdown of color characteristics than is currently called for in AACR2, even in Chapter 8, Graphics. It is clearer, because it distinguishes between one color and multicolored, and excludes only black from the definition of “one color.” However, it is not clear whether this additional specificity is needed in a simple statement that the resource contains color illustrations.

Option 3: Get out of the way!

Perhaps the best option is to delete the definition from the Glossary. If any available five-year old can be trusted to identify a colour illustration, then maybe a cataloger can also be trusted, if the rules don’t confuse the issue. The present definition confuses the issue and should be removed. It is also questionable whether the parenthetical “(those in two or more colours)” is helpful in 2.5C3.

Recommendation and revision proposal

It is likely that minor changes to the definition would only further confuse the situation. It is also arguable that the more precise specification of color characteristics is best left to the coded data elements in the MARC record.

The application of the “five-year old” test is convincing in this case. Defining color in the rules has only confused the issue. The rules should get out of the way, and let catalogers exercise their common sense in making what is not a terribly difficult decision.

Therefore, the following revisions are proposed:

Appendix D, Coloured illustration: Delete the following definition:

~~**Coloured illustration.** An illustration in two or more colours. (Neither black nor white is a colour.)~~

1. Rule 2.5C3. Proposed revision:

2.5C3. Describe coloured illustrations (~~i.e., those in two or more colours~~) as such.

- : col. ill.
- : ill., col. maps, ports. (some col.)
- : ill. (some col.), maps, plans
- : ill. (chiefly col.), plans

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