

NACO: The Widening Gyre

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More than a decade ago, OCLC convened conferences on authority control. One was called Authority Control in the 21st century. There were hints that FRBR was about to remake the world of authorities as well as the bibliographic universe. While neither has quite happened yet, RDA is imminent, and one wonders what implications it holds for authority work. IFLA's draft of Functional Requirements for Authority Data was approved by 2 IFLA standing committees in March 2009. The final text is being prepared for publication as part of the IFLA Series on Bibliographic Control, but a version is up on the Web. Functional Requirements of Authority Data focuses on ten entities: person, corporate body, work, expression, manifestation, item, concept, object, event, place and family. Most of these are familiar to name and subject authority workers. But wrapping my head around how work-expression-manifestation-item will impact authority work leaves me groggy. I think it will probably affect art catalogers less than dance, music and literature folks, but time will tell. We seem poised to enter a new era. But what else is new in name authority work?

I used to snicker when I heard that LC catalogers were limited to reference works at or near their desks. Why, I thought, I can go to any floor of my own library, inspect catalogues raisonnés, auction and exhibition catalogs, and look at a wide array of biographical dictionaries and other reference sources. But as time goes by, I have become more and more deskbound, like the LC cataloger whom I caricatured not so long ago. There's a lot I can do without leaving my desk. But I really knew the paradigm had shifted when I asked Sherman Clarke which form I should use to identify an Italian art gallery and the answer he gave me was based on the number of hits he got in a Google search.

For geographic names the paradigm has shifted from the Columbia gazetteer to GNIS for places in the U.S. and GNS (or Geonet) for foreign place names. Not quite as authoritative, but a lot more fun, is Google Earth, which along with longitude and latitude, actually provides a visual image, in this case, of Vincennes, Indiana's oldest city.

But aside from Google, Wikipedia, and the like there are some very valuable discovery tools available to someone establishing authoritative headings. For artists' biographical information, the source to which I turn most often is the current CD-ROM edition of the *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*. I've also had occasion to consult the Australian Dictionary of Biography online and the Archives of American art. This is really just the tip of the Web iceberg. Two weeks ago, confronted by what looked like a corporate name on this French exhibition publication from 1927, I found a very nice history of the textile manufacturer, *Bianchini-Férier*, at Answers.com. It turns out that the firm, which recruited Raoul Dufy in 1912, is still in business today in Lyon.

There's also the European Library 2.1, a gateway to the national libraries of Europe, which can be searched across all the libraries or one by one. Each of these libraries is a storehouse of information, and some European libraries maintain their own authority files: Here are snapshots of the Czech, Finnish and French authority files. Links to these and other resources will be added to the ArtNACO section of Sherman Clarke's Yahoo page, which he continues to maintain.

Authority records themselves have changed. Keeping pace with bibliographic records they now routinely contain references in non-Roman scripts (see the record for the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich), and OCLC can offer transliteration macros to make such references easy to construct. And they may change further. RDA seems to promise increased use of qualifiers like (Disk jockey) or (Saxophone player) to disambiguate like named persons. Here are two of my favorites, Star Trek fan site webmaster and Paper airplane hobbyist. RDA also may do away with our cherished abbreviations for born, died, circa and flourished. Someone please convince me that's it's easier to type the word "approximately" than the abbreviation "ca."

One interesting recent project is OCLC/RLG Programs' World Cat Identities project, which forms timelines for personal and corporate authors as well as personal and corporate subjects by mining the WorldCat database. The project took place in early 2007 and the results are interesting. Along with authoritative forms of names one sees a timeline of a scholar's work or scholarship on a particular person. Two

examples are current Frick Collection curator Colin Bailey and our own Art Libraries Society of North America. I urge you all to take a look at this very interesting and important discovery tool.

The Internet has also made communication and collaboration part of the name authority process. Last month I emailed a publisher and was quickly rewarded with exactly what I needed: a fuller form of the author's name and the year of his birth. In another case, communication with a librarian at the American Antiquarian Society changed a bare-bones heading I suspected matched an early New York State portrait painter into a much fuller heading representing this Northern painter turned Southern businessman and politician.

Authority control on the Web and in the international context remains a work in progress. Extracting and authorizing names from metadata is still a laborious, manual operation, if the article by a University of Tennessee librarian in the January 2009 issue of *Library Resources & Technical Services* is any indication. Yes, we can turn MARC authority records into XML, but moving in the other direction is a problem. Librarians at North Carolina State University have tackled the problem of organization name authorities to deal with electronic resource management. Both the Tennessee project, which focused on archival finding aids, and the NCSU project used the LC NAF as a starting point, but both used other sources, including Civil war and state records, the WorldCat registry, Ulrich's and the issn portal.

One recent successful example of an international authority file is the Virtual International Authority File. The expanded version now contains 7.8 million records built from 9.2 million source authority records from the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, and the National Library of Sweden. Users in any of these countries are able to view name records as established by another nation, making the authorities truly international and facilitating research across languages.

What else is new in NACO-land? People have been allowed to die. Beginning in 2005, the Library of Congress permitted the addition of death dates to headings containing a birth date followed by a hyphen. Although a large-scale project

cleaned up major artists like Chagall, Miro, Moore and Warhol, the ghoulish work continues. Just last month I personally "iced" American lithographer Stow Wengorath. Actually he'd been dead for 30 years! No more annoying users chirping "You know Marc Chagall died in 1985." Another sidebar was LC's decision to stop creating authorities for series titles. Luckily PCC members stepped in to fill the breach, ensuring continued stability in this area.

For me, the most satisfying part of name authority work at an art library is establishing an artist, or better still, a named work of art. Here are some named works of art I've had the pleasure of working on in the past year:

Otto Dix's "Hugo Erfurt with Dog"
Michelangelo's "Battle of the centaurs"
Velazquez "Surrender of Breda"
Titian's "Woman with a mirror"

Interestingly the painting title I chose for both the Velazquez and Titian paintings varied from the form found in a standard reference source, the World painting index. I opted instead for forms used by the museums that own the works and that appeared at least once in another recent source. The Titian was really a tossup: a painting by an Italian artist in a French public collection with no real unanimity among English sources. I put the book aside for a few months before finally biting the bullet.

In or on loan to the Frick Collection:

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin's "Private Academy"

So I leave you with some beautiful images and the thought that maybe after all I've become that desk-bound LC cataloger, albeit of a later generation: one bracing for the impact of FRBR and FRAD.