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DANCING IN THE STACKS:

Dance Works and the Concept of Authorship in Libraries

Paper presented by
Dominique Bourassa

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Introduction

Today, the word “author,” in its narrowest sense, denotes someone who writes a book; in its broadest sense, an author can be defined as a “creator, cause, or source.” Choreographers, as creators of dances, clearly fit this broadest definition. And it is self-evident that the dances choreographers create are works in their own right as much as literary and musical works are. However, from an American library perspective, these concepts were not recognized until 20 years ago. And even today, library catalogs may seem to neglect the role of the choreographer as creator. In this presentation, I will take you on a historical tour of the treatment of dance works and their authorship in American libraries from the 19th century to the very latest developments that will transform the way users search and discover dances in libraries. I have divided the tour into four phases: the age of denial, the age of mistaken identity, and the age of recognition. Hopefully, the near future will lead us to a fourth age of increased awareness and discovery.

1. The Age of Denial: 19th century to 1941

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two important principles regarding works and authorship emerged in American libraries. The first principle, which became known as the “identification of the literary unit.” came out of the realization that the book being cataloged, such as a copy of Romeo and Juliet, is not a unique item, but a representation of a work. Identifying the title of the “literary unit,” and collocating all versions, even those with different titles, under a uniform heading became essential. The second principle is “the attribution of authorship.” All American cataloging manuals insist that works for which authorship is known should be entered under the name of the author. Therefore, to describe a work, such as Romeo and Juliet, one precedes the chosen title by the name of the author, William Shakespeare. As you can see in this 1919 catalogue of the Boston Public Library, the catalog collocates the two versions of Romeo and Juliet under the same heading, allowing patrons not only to retrieve all works by one author, but also to retrieve all the different versions of a work. The way titles and names are recorded, the completeness of names, the addition
of dates, the punctuation used, have changed with time but the principles remain. They are still at the basis of cataloging today.

During this period, the word “author” in libraries is strongly linked to the written word. When describing the treatment of other formats in libraries -- music, engravings, and maps -- cataloging manuals acknowledged other types of authors: composers, engravers, painters, cartographers, etc. However, none of them recognized the existence of choreographers and dance works. This is not surprising when we consider the status of dance in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century libraries by looking briefly at two early American library classifications. Thomas Jefferson’s classification was the basis of the system used by the Library of Congress in 1815. It was adapted from Diderot and D’Alembert’s “Système figuré des connaissances humaines,” which was itself derived from Francis Bacon’s division of knowledge. The schema divides all books into three general categories “according to the Faculties of the Mind”: history, philosophy, and fine arts. Unlike music, architecture, and painting, dance is absent from the fine arts section. Dance also does not appear in the main description of the first edition of Melvil Dewey’s Decimal Classification, published in 1876. One has to consult the index to learn that “dancing,” should be classified in the 793 section (“in-door amusements”), along with books about games, crocheting, and needlework. It is clear from early schemata that dance was not considered a serious art; it was related to amusements and feminine activities, and it was not accorded the same treatment as other arts.

2. The Age of Mistaken identity: 1941-1994

In 1941, the American Library Association published A.L.A. Catalog Rules, the first cataloging manual to discuss the treatment of dances. This manual defines the words ballet, pantomime, and masque and even mentions the existence of dance notation. However, it only treats dance works as subordinate to the music, instructing the cataloger to enter “musical settings for ballets and other compositions … under the composer of the music,” and to provide an additional entry for the “author of the choreography if it is the work of another person and his name appears.” Only
when choreography was published separately from its music could it be entered under the name of the choreographer.\textsuperscript{18}

Following the rule of this period, a VHS of Kenneth MacMillan’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet} would have to be entered under the name of the composer of the music, Sergey Prokofiev, followed by the title of the musical work, with an added entry for the name of the choreographer. Obviously, this way of treating, or if you prefer, mistreating dance works is problematic because it does not recognize them as autonomous works. In addition, it only credits choreographers indirectly. MacMillan’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, for example, premiered at Covent Garden in 1965, twelve years after the death of Prokofiev. For an even more extreme example, consider Balanchine’s \textit{Concerto Barocco}, set to Johann Sebastian Bach’s Concerto for two violins in D minor. According to the library rules of the time, a bibliographic record for \textit{Concerto Barocco} would treat Bach, a composer who died nearly 200 years before the 1941 premiere of the ballet, as the creator. Dance lovers would normally identify this work as Balanchine’s \textit{Concerto Barocco}, not Bach’s \textit{Concerto}, and the previous work as MacMillan’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, not Prokofiev’s.

You can also imagine how difficult it would be to find dance works choreographed to selections by many composers, such as Balanchine’s \textit{Jewels} composed on music by Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky, and Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky. Providing access to video recordings of ballet selections by different choreographers becomes even more challenging. For example, think of the number of entries that this VHS, \textit{An Evening with the Bolshoi Ballet}, produced in 1986, would necessitate. Cataloging records for such compilations rarely provided access to individual works, composers and choreographers, making it difficult, even at times, impossible, to find specific dance works in library catalogs.\textsuperscript{19}

\section*{3. 1994 to today: the Age of Recognition}
In 1994, the Library of Congress issued the first and only cataloging statement clearly considering “choreographic works” as autonomous works.20 The “Library of Congress Rule Interpretation 25.5B” (LCRI 25.5B, as it is known) states that because choreographic works “represent individual creative works and to meet the needs of the dance cataloging community, … uniform titles for them will be constructed according to the guidelines … recommended by the Dance Heritage Coalition.” These guidelines were based on observation that “a ballet’s title appeared to be the primary access point for research.”21 It was therefore decided that the best way to describe a choreographic work was to enter it under its title, instead of the name of the choreographer, followed in parenthesis by the qualifier “choreographic work.” A title such as Romeo and Juliet (Choreographic Work) represents all choreographic works based on Shakespeare’s play.22 To describe “a particular choreographer’s version of the work,”23 one adds the last name of the choreographer to the qualifier: Romeo and Juliet (Choreographic work : MacMillan). LCRI 25.5B also covers other cases, such as choreographic works created by two or more choreographers; those derived from another work; and reconstructions. The publication of LCRI 25.5B led to the creation of 18,000 uniform titles for choreographic works.24

The main benefit of this simple and elegant rule is to allow for collocation of works with similar titles.25 It enables a person to find a choreographic work quickly by its title even if the choreographer is unknown or unsought. One could argue that this rule gives prominence to ballets based on famous stories but is of no help for choreographic works with unique titles, or with similar titles that have nothing in common. For famous ballets, as you can see on the screen, the rule might even seem anglo-centric in comparison to other types of works for which the uniform title is usually the title in the original language or transliterated form, as you have seen with Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet. Did Béjart, or any of the other choreographers you can see on the screen, really want his work to be known by its English title? The rule is also not useful to users who might prefer to retrieve all the works by one choreographer. For them, this ignores a choreographer’s creative credit. Why should Shakespeare’s works be listed under his own name, but not the works of MacMillan, Balanchine, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, and other choreographers?
Despite the fact that since 1997, there is a specific rule addressing choreographic works, one should not assume that searching for such works in library catalogs has been totally standardized. Here is the New York Public Library record for a DVD of a 1966 performance of MacMillan’s Romeo and Juliet. This is a detailed record that follows LCRI 25.5B and includes the accepted form of title, along with added entry for the choreographer. In comparison, the Yale record for the same DVD follows the 1941 rule and enters the DVD under the composer’s name and work. In the Western Connecticut State University record, the title is entered following the rules for motion pictures. While MacMillan is still named in the record, he is now considered the choreographer of a motion picture. These are three different ways this DVD has been described, and there are even more. Obviously searching for choreographers’ works in library catalogs often requires using many strategies.

4. The age of increased awareness and discovery

Cataloging agencies are now developing the first international cataloging standard specifically “designed for the digital world.” Resource Description and Access (RDA) is a standard that can be used by any type of cataloging agency (library, museum, archive, etc.) to catalog any type of content and media known today and developed in the future. Its text is already available in English, Chinese, French, and German with more translations underway.

Having briefly surveyed the treatment of dance in cataloging history, you may not be surprised to learn that, at the moment, RDA still says very little about dance. In August 2013, the Library of Congress initiated a process to help determine the best course of action regarding choreographic works. LC argued that the current approach of entering choreographic works under their titles seems “odd and unprincipled … in retrospect.” To trigger the discussion, LC asked questions that might seem ludicrous to dance scholars: “Is a choreographic work a ‘work’ in the RDA sense?”; “Should the choreographer be considered the creator of a choreographic work?”; “How should the preferred title of a choreographic work be chosen?”; “What is the relationship of a
choreographic work to a music work?,” etc. After reviewing the comments submitted by various cataloging agencies, the Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA “agreed that a choreographic work was a ‘work’ in the RDA sense,” and in August 2014, LC proposed that choreographic works be entered under choreographers names.

Most cataloging agencies, including the British Library and the German National Library gave support to LC’s proposal. On the other hand, in the United States, LC’s proposal engendered a great number of comments, in part because the suggested instructions “represent a significant change in practice.” The American Library Association agreed “that there is no principled reason to continue the current practice of identifying choreographic works by title.” But the specialists, in particular the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of the New York Public Library and the Dance Heritage Coalition, did not agree with LC’s proposal. They protested that choreographic works should continue to be described by their titles, in part, because they feel this practice “reflect[s] the needs of dance scholars: allowing all versions of a work such as Swan Lake to be collocated in a single place.”

One week ago, after evaluating these comments, RDA’s Joint Steering Committee officially decided to treat choreographic works just like other works of known authorship. Therefore, in the near future, instead of Romeo and Juliet (Choreographic work : MacMillan), this work will be described as: MacMillan, Kenneth. Romeo and Juliet. Of course, this will not happen overnight because to transition to this RDA standard, the records of over 21,000 choreographic works will need to be manually changed in our national database.

Let me briefly explain the basic principles behind RDA so that you can understand the impact of the new cataloging standards. At the moment, in library catalogs, items like those you see on the screen are mostly independent from one another. Yet, they are related to one another, some more directly than others. RDA aims to create a more user-centered approach to seamlessly find, identify, select and obtain relevant resources by embedding multiple relationships in catalog records.
In RDA, the work is an abstract concept defined as a “distinct intellectual or artistic creation.” It is basically *Romeo and Juliet* as it exists in MacMillan’s head, even before it has been performed. RDA broadens the concept of authorship to creatorship. In fact, as you can see, RDA offers a long list of possible creators, among others choreographers. As with the definition of work, that of choreographer is non-judgmental. It includes any creator of any work of movement: ballets, modern dances, reality television dances, figure skating and gymnastics routines, etc. It also includes dance companies, such as Pilobolus, as creators. According to RDA, the authorized access point for a work should be constructed by combining the preferred name for the creator and the preferred title for the work. If we accept the choreographer MacMillan as the main creator of Romeo and Juliet, his work has to be entered under his name to show the relationship between the work and its creator.

A possible RDA work record for MacMillan’s *Romeo and Juliet* will lead users through myriad relationships that the Web can link efficiently. For example, it will link to various performances (expressing the work). These will in turn link to people and groups involved in realizing these performances and to items held in libraries. MacMillan’s record will link to other works, such as the work from which the choreographic work is adapted, to the musical work on which it is composed, and even to descriptions, analysis, reviews, etc. Conversely, the records of other types of works could link to those of choreographic works. Shakespeare’s record for *Romeo and Juliet* will link to choreographic adaptations, such as MacMillan’s work and many other ballets. So could the record of Prokofiev’s work. Such relationships will allow users to navigate library catalogs more easily no matter where their search starts, and increase discovery and relevance.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, for over two hundred years, dance works have been ignored and then misinterpreted in American libraries, and choreographers were never treated like other types of
creators. RDA will rectify this by highlighting choreographers as creators while recognizing the collaborative and dynamic aspects of their works. In doing so, it has the potential to transform the dance library catalog into a danced library catalog.

1 An Apple Keynote Presentation with illustrative examples accompanied this lecture. For a copy, contact the author at dominique.bourassa@yale.edu.


Early cataloging manuals, such as Jewett and Cutter, 1876, do not define the words “book” and “work” but seem to use them interchangeably. On this subject, see also Richard P. Smiraglia, *The Nature of “a Work”: Implications for the organization of knowledge* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2001), 16-33; Subhankar Biswas and Durga Sankar Rath, “From Maunsell to Lubetzky: a journey back in search of the root of FRBR among the cataloguing codes of Anglo American origin,” *Annals of Library and Information Studies*, vol. 61 (March 2014), pp. 11-12, accessed Oct. 12, 2014, [http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/27749/1/ALIS%2061%281%29%2714.pdf](http://nopr.niscair.res.in/bitstream/123456789/27749/1/ALIS%2061%281%29%2714.pdf).

Pettee, 270.

On this subject, Pettee, p. 270, remarks in 1936, “the author is the first concern of the American cataloger… Only in the case of hopelessly anonymous works or works of multiple authorship, where personal authors are too many to be serviceable as an entry for, does he resort to the tile entry.”


The first librarian to clearly define the concept of authorship in a cataloging manual is Charles Ami Cutter who writes: “Author, in the narrower sense, is the person who writes a book; in a wider sense it may be applied to him who is the cause of the book’s existence by putting together the writings of several authors (usually called the editor, more properly to be called the collector). Bodies of men (societies, cities, legislative bodies, countries) are to be considered the authors of their memoirs, transactions, journals, debates, reports, &c.” (Cutter, 1876, p. 10).

See for example, Jewett, 62-63; Cutter (1876), p. 19.


Subsequent library classifications continue to class dancing among amusements or recreative arts. For example, the Library of Congress classification of dancing published in 1910 includes it in the section labeled “Sports and amusements. Games,” where it follows jugglery and legerdemain and precedes “Shows, Circuses.”


It is also revealing to note that during this period, titles of ballets eventually became acceptable as subjects such as: “Romeo and Juliet (Ballet).” Today’s library catalogs still contain some records preserving this old practice, as you can see from this record of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. Such records seem to imply that catalogers agreed that dances could be the subjects of books, photographs, programs of performances, etc., but they did not believe that the works themselves could exist in libraries.

LCRI 25.5B was adapted from the practice established at the Jerome Robbins Division of the New York Public Library. For a history of the development of LCRI 25.5B consult…


LCRI 25.5B.

Lourdou cited in Procházka, 17. It is interesting to note that these titles are only used as added entries or subjects never as uniform titles (LCRI 25.5B).

Procházka, 11.


In 2012, the Canadian Library Association notified the Joint Steering Committee for the Creation of RDA (JSC) that RDA included examples of choreographic works but did not include any instructions on how to choose the preferred title. They submitted a proposal to add “instruction for choosing the preferred title for choreographic works.” After discussion, the proposal was withdrawn. Bill Leonard, “Instruction for choosing the preferred title for choreographic works (RDA 6.2.2.4),” (6JSC/CCC/6, Aug. 3, 2012), accessed Oct. 12, 2014, http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/6JSC-CCC-6.pdf.


Reser, p. 1.

Reser, p. 2.

36 Reser, “Works Without Titles.”


39 Glennan, p. 1

40 Dance Heritage Coalition to Joint Steering Committee for the Development of RDA (Sept. 5, 2014), inserted in Glennan, p. 17.

41 Kathy Glennan, email to author (8 Nov. 2014).


