

## Multiple names

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Non avrò più nomi, mai più.  
Non legherò la vita al cadavere di un nome.  
Così li avrò tutti.  
Luther Blissett, Q

In 1999 the novel *Q* was published, bringing to fame the name of Luther Blissett, already known to a less vast public (it is of secondary importance that the names of the “real” authors of the novel were revealed later). Other preceding publications carried the name of Luther Blissett as their author. That which seemed the name of a real author (and it is a real name, but not that of an author), or a pseudonym, represents instead a more complex reality, that of the so-called multiple names.

### What’s a multiple name?

Multiple Names are tags that the avant-garde of the seventies and eighties proposed for a serial use. They are commonly real or invented personal names which anyone can take on as a identity; the idea is to create a collective body of artistic works using the invented identity.

The first of these collective identities, was 'Klaos Oldanburg', used by British mail artists in the mid-seventies. A few years later, the American mail artist, David Zack, proposed 'Monty Cantsin'. In the mid-eighties emerged the rival names of 'No Cantsin' and 'Karen Eliot'. There have been multiple names for magazines ('Smile' originating in England in 1984) and pop groups ('White Colours' first proposed in England in 1982). The idea is to create an open situation for which no one in particular is responsible, to re-examine and break down the western philosophic notions of identity, individuality, value, truth.

The year 2000 saw the “ritual suicide” of Luther Blessett and the birth of Wu Ming, a new multiple name. In Mandarin wu ming means “no name”. If in the case of Pessoa it is the single person who is manifested in a multitude of heteronyms, in the case of the multiple names it is the collectivity which contains the multitudes, and paradoxically becomes single.

The name is formalized, tending to be univocal and uniform, but taking the categories for entities outlined in FRBR, we realize that the multiple names do not enter into any of these. They do not belong to personal names nor to corporate names; they approach both of these categories but belong wholly to neither. This uncertain character gives rise above all to the formulation of the name as being in a direct or inverted form. With some timely reference work, obviously of a practical nature, the problem can be resolved (assigning as one wishes from the codification of a Marc field); the lack of uniformity of choice made initially by the BNI and the BNCF can only underline the uncertainty of the situation: BNI indexed it in direct form, BNCF both in direct and inverted form; neither gave (nor do they today) qualifications. Luther Blissett is also the name, the real name, of a person; a qualification would not be inopportune, so as to avoid cases of homonymy. But what kind of qualification might be used?

The second problem, which emerges with the publication of the new novel of Wu Ming, 54 (who knows why the problem of Havana Glam, published as Wu Ming 5, and *Asce di guerra*, was

noticed or discussed by only a few): the problem is thus that of cross referencing between two multiple names. Certainly it should be done, as the authors themselves maintain, but have the preceding problems been resolved? In my opinion, no.

Let us see the results of a research undertaken in various OPAC.

### **Multiple names and library catalogs: a few examples**

For the most part we can say that, after an initial uncertainty, all too comprehensible, the inverted form is that preferred by all the bibliographical agencies, with some deviations. The fact that Luther Blissett Project is also accepted as an access point is irritating (some works were published with this name on the title page), even if one supposes that there are cross references between this form and that of Blissett, Luther. So far we have not found cases of cross referencing between Wu Ming and Luther Blissett. In Italy, Havana Glam has not been indexed to Wu Ming 5, but only Wu Ming, which is not true for other entities (BSB and LC, for example). We remain perplexed, and I admit this reluctantly, before the sight of three authority records created by LC (one of them is clearly wrong, but this is due to some false information to be seen on some works by Luther Blissett). On the other hand, the authority record for Wu Ming 5 is very accurate and informative, even if, personally, I do not find the use of the word collective pseudonym satisfactory for the case of Luther Blissett and Wu Ming. BNF uses the form Blissett, with just one t, and this leaves us in doubt, since the usual form is generally with two t's, and I maintain that it is a bit limited, for its possible use as a point of access, to define as Italian the nationality and language of the author. It is banal to say this, but it is easier to criticise afterwards than to make the decisions at the time of operation..

Qualifications are lacking in all the examples analysed.

What form has been chosen? Luther Blissett, o Blissett, Luther, o Luther Blissett Project (some texts present this latter as author), and in any case, has the form chosen been qualified, and if so, how? And Wu Ming, Wu, Ming, Wu Ming 5? Shall we pretend we did not see the number? But the homepage of the *Wu Ming Foundation* is explicit in the necessity of indicating more than one Wu Ming (considering the meaning of the name, the discussion seems paradoxical!). The Library of Congress presents as author di Havana Glam Wu Ming 5., with a reference to the real name, but without connections to Wu Ming *tout court*. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek does the same thing, without however a reference to the real name. Online are available texts of Wu Ming 1, Wu Ming 2, and Wu Ming 4, of which the real names are known. Cross references between all the forms and with all the real names? A new dynasty of the Ming?

### **Personal or corporate author?**

Returning to the first problem cited, and that is, to the “hybrid” nature of multiple names, we can make an analysis of the attributes of the personal entity and the corporate name presented in FRBR, while awaiting the results of the Working Group on FRANAR to verify which of these can result as valid. We see above all the attributes of the person as outlined in FRBR:

#### ***Name of person***

Personal name heading - name subelements

#### ***Dates of person***

Additions to the name - dates of birth, death, etc.

#### ***Title of person***

Additions to the name - title of nobility, honour, address, etc.

#### ***Other designation associated with the person***

## Additions to the name - other additions

Only the first of these attributes can be applied to multiple names; the second can be applied only in the wider sense and only with reference to the date of “birth”; the last is obviously so generic as to be almost universal in application. The attributes of a corporate name, however are the following:

### ***Name of corporate body***

Corporate name heading - name subelements

### ***Number associated with the corporate body***

Qualifier - number [of meeting, etc.]

### ***Place associated with the corporate body***

Qualifier - geographic name [place of meeting, etc.]

### ***Date associated with the corporate body***

Qualifier - date [of meeting, etc.]

### ***Other designation associated with the corporate body***

Qualifier - type of body [etc.]

In this case, beyond the attribute “name”, only the place is partially applicable to multiple names: one could indicate the place on a general level - nation, region or more specific - city in which the multiple name is operative (for example, the country where the name is most diffused, or the locality where the name was first used, as far as this is possible). We can consider them personal names as such, inasmuch as they are expressly declared to be that way (an oversimplified explanation, perhaps, but corresponding to the concept of the promulgators); moreover they do not have the specific characteristics of the definitions of corporate names; the fact that they deal with more than a single individual can approach the idea of a corporate name, but the results of the activity of the multiple name do not necessarily represent the aims of the corporate name, due to the obvious fact that there is no single corporate name with clearly defined aims; there is a basic philosophy which regulates the use of the name, but it would be more correct to say that it has an identity with a defined personality and ideas, that anyone can assume, and that anyone can alter. The works can be of performance, theatre, works of literature, art, music, writings, journals; the absence of copyright means they can be freely reproduced and transformed by anyone who cares to. It would not be incorrect to allow for the conceptual insertion of a new entity, definable as a multiple name: its existence is documented; the difficulties it imposes are evident; it is almost impossible as things stand now, to make a realistic assessment of their growing visibility and popularity.