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**TITLES AND SUBTITLES:  
PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THEIR HISTORY AND FUNCTION**

Suppose a reader takes A. J. Cronin's book *The Stars Look Down* and reads its title. What does he expect the title to tell him? Something about the contents of the book. Will the title give him the information?

Suppose he has read the novel and returns to the title to understand its meaning. Will it help him? It will, but only if it occurs to him that the title may be a quotation. Then the reader will open *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* – if he has it – and trace the title to a passage from Matthew Arnold's poem *In Memory of the Author of Obermann*. The passage runs like this:

That Gracious Child, that thorn-crowned Man!  
He lived while we believed.

.....  
Now he is dead. Far hence he lies  
In the lorn Syrian town.  
And on his grave, with shining eyes  
*The Syrian stars look down.*

Only then the title of the novel will become a comment on the sense of the story about British colliers and their struggle for bread and safety. Now the title will imply a reality in which Jesus Christ is not alive, but dead. Not risen to his glory, but dead in a forlorn town where on his tomb only stars look down.

Thus read the title adds an additional – religious – depth to a social-problem novel.

I hope that the example with which I am opening this study has suggested quite a number of problems connected with reading and interpretation.

I believe it is time to turn scholars' attention to what we might call paratexts which form a framework of the main text of a written work,

especially fictional. To these belong titles, subtitles, supertitles dedications, mottoes, prefaces, introductions, afterwords, notes, annexes, glossaries, colophons and all other additions to the main text, which in most cases function as additional information and/or commentary.

The present-day tendency is to reduce them to an absolute minimum, possibly with the exception of learned editorial prefaces to the works of modern, or not so modern, classics and of scholarly editions of older works like Chaucer's or Shakespeare's. But in the times of the Renaissance and in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries titles told whole stories. The Romantics often acted as authors, editors, and commentators in one person. This is to be seen, for example, in Byron's *Giaour*, in which, by the way, Byron the poet seems sincerely pathetic while Byron the note-maker sounds ironic or satirical.

Some difference between the author's and the commentator's attitude to the text may also be seen in the paratexts of Scott's novels.

But let me concentrate on titles and look back into their distant past.<sup>1</sup>

#### FIRST-WORD, EPONYMOUS AND GENERIC TITLES

Only very few titles survived from ancient Egypt, owing to the fact that the beginning of a papyrus containing text was far more exposed to impairment or destruction, than its end.

The Egyptians seem to have favoured long titles. An autobiography begins as follows:

*A Prince, the Lord Lieutenant of the South... the Judge of Nekhen... the King's only friend, respected by Osiris, the First of the Western Ones, Weni speaks.*<sup>2</sup>

A collection of teachings or maxims (sboiet) opens like this:

*The Beginning of Teaching devised by His Majesty the King of the Upper Egypt and the King of the Lower Egypt, Sehetep-ib-Ra, Amen-em-hat, let*

<sup>1</sup> I shall limit my inquiry to the Mediterranean Civilization though I am aware that in this way I am excluding the Persian and Arabian East which excited the European imagination in the Middle Ages and later with its poetic titles of magical beauty, to mention only *Kitab alf laila va laila* (*The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*). A touch of something Biblical or oriental may be recognized in the titles of John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *House of Life* and William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*.

<sup>2</sup> Owing to technical difficulties in finding English translations of the quoted ancient texts I have rendered them for the purposes of this paper into English, translating the Polish translations from Egyptian by an expert egyptologist Tadeusz Andrzejewski, *Opowiadania egipskie* (Warszawa: PIW, 1958).

him live happy and in health, justified with voice, which he has expressed as the Message of Truth to his Son, the Lord of all things.

Paradoxically, some colophons – “inscriptions at the end of a book, or a literary composition, often naming the author and scribe or printer, with place and date of execution etc., as on a modern title page”<sup>3</sup> – sometimes act as titles to the old Egyptian texts.

They all begin with the words: *Behold, it has been accomplished . . .* which resemble the Medieval *Explicit liber . . .*

The so-called story of *Two Brothers*, has a colophon which tells us much less about the contents than about the circumstances:

Behold, it has been accomplished happily and in peace under the direction of Kegob, the Writer of the Dual White House, who belongs to the Pharaoh's Dual White House, let him live happy and in health, and the Scribe Hori, and the Scribe Mer-em-ope. The Scribe Ennene, the owner of this book has made it. That will be an enemy to him who will speak badly about the book.

One surviving colophon enumerates the characters of the story:

A story has been accomplished about Setne Kha-em-wese and Nefer-ke-Ptah, and Ah-were his wife, and Mer-ibbi, her son in the year 15 on the first day of the season of growth.

When we open *Le Mort D'Arthur*, we shall find interesting parallels with the Egyptian practice. Sir Thomas Malory does not give titles to his Books, but sometimes sums up their contents in the colophons.

Book I ends simply with: “Explicit Liber Primus,” but Book III with: “Explicit the Wedding of King Arthur.” Book V ends with “Thus endeth the fifth book of the conquest that King Arthur had against Lucius the Emperor of Rome, and here followeth the sixth book, which is of Sir Lancelot in Lake.” Similarly, Book VI winds up with the formula: “Explicit the noble tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake, which is the VI book. Here followeth the tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney that was called Beaumains by Sir Kay, and is the seventh book.”<sup>4</sup> Malory's whole work ends with two lengthy colophons – one by the author, the other by W. Caxton. Both are short summaries of the book and contain a mention about its author.

These ancient Egyptian and the medieval English examples raise the question of the function of the title: must it necessarily function as the shortest summary of the work at the head of which it stands?

A negative answer is implied by the Babylonian and early ancient Hebrew custom of naming texts after their first words. The Babylonian

<sup>3</sup> I am quoting *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary* (Edinburgh–London: W. and R. Chambers, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Mort D'Arthur in two volumes*, Janet Cowen, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), Vol. I, pp. 59, 116, 192, 230.

epic about Creation has been called *Enuma Elish* after its beginning: "When Above heaven had not yet been named."

The Pentateuch followed the same custom. *Genesis* is called in Hebrew *Bereshit*, because it begins with the words "In the Beginning." *Exodus* is called *Ve-elle-Shemot* (*These Are the Names*); *Leviticus* – *Vayyikra* (*The Lord Called Moses*); *Numbers* – *Bemidbar* (*In the Desert*), and *Deuteronomy* – *Hadderbarim* (*With These Words*).

These purely "technical" titles were replaced in other books of the Hebrew Bible by titles derived from the then recognized genres, like *Chronicles* (in Hebrew *Dibre Hayyamin*, literally: "The events of the days"), like *The Song of Songs* (*Shir-ha-Shirim*), or formed after the offices or names of principal characters: *Kings*, *Judges*, *Samuel*, *Ruth*, *Esther*, *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah* etc.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible therefore, to distinguish in the Scripture different kinds of titles: the first-words, titles, the eponymous titles, like *Jeremiah* or *Judith*, and the genre- or generic titles like *Chronicles*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms* and *Epistles*.

#### PERIPHRASTIC TITLES, HISTORY AND CHRONICLE

Periphrastic titles seem to have been invented by Greeks. They begin with the word *peri* ("about") like the Latin *de*. One of the earliest titles of this kind was Anaximander's *Peri physeos* – *About Nature*. Aristotle wrote *Peri psyches* – *About the Soul*.

The Romans followed the Greek example and the periphrastic titles like Cato the Elder's *De agri cultura* and Cicero's *De imperio Cnaei Pompeii*, *De oratore*, and *De lege agraria* abound in Roman literature.

The fact that the literary culture of Europe was shaped by the Latin tradition and that Latin became the international language of the Church, learning, and diplomacy down to the seventeenth century,<sup>6</sup> made the titles based on Latin models spread everywhere including Britain.

Gildas *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (c. 547), Bede's *De Natura Rerum* (c. 703), Aldhelm's *De Laudibus Virginitatis* are early examples of

<sup>5</sup> I owe the information to the Polish edition of the Babylonian epic by Anthony Lange, ed. and trans., *Epos Babiloński Enuma Eliš* (Brody: Feliks West, 1909); to the *Introductions to The Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968) and to modern Polish translations of the Bible: *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu* (Poznań–Warszawa: Pallotinum, 1980) and the four-volumed *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu* (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1991–1994).

<sup>6</sup> Francis Bacon published his works both in English and in Latin not only because he wished to propagate his views all over Europe, but also because he had doubts about the permanence of the fashion of writing in English.

periphrastic titles. *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (c. 731), Nennius's *Historia Britonum* (c. 796), and *Epistola ad Acircium* (seventh century) are imitations of other Roman Latin titles.

It is also to be noted that the very word *title* in European civilization has been derived from the Latin *titulus* the first meaning of which is *an inscription*.

One of the lasting literary legacies of the Greco-Roman culture was the invention and introduction of some generic titles referring to historiography. Herodotus had been a pioneer, writing his *Historia apodexis*, the title of which might be translated as *An Exposition of Inquiries* (the "inquiries" = *historia*). This title, used as a generic name in the singular, opened the way to writing History and *histories* and *stories* of all possible kinds composed ever after in all European literatures.

Bede's and Nennius's *Histories* of the English and of the Welsh, mentioned above, have the distinction of being the earliest histories written in Britain by the natives.

The assortment of titles referring to Historiography has been enlarged by the Greeks in the Byzantine period and even earlier by the Romans. *Annales Pontificum* are the source of the titles of all later *annals*. John of Antioch's *Historia chroniké*, a history of the world brought down to AD 610, and his *Chronikòn Paschále* which ended about AD 629, originated the titles of all *chronicles*.

In England Ranulph Higden's Latin *Polychronicon* of the fourteenth century has been englished under the same title by John of Trevisa in 1402. The plural of the title – *chronica* – used by John of Fordun in his *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, was understood as a singular and established its English equivalent *chronicle*.<sup>7</sup>

The early use of the term *chronicle* did not distinguish it from the *annals* which are synonymus. For example, the so-called *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (which does not bear this title in its MS versions) began as *annals* like *Annales Cambriae* (955) in Wales. Only when its short annual entries grew into detailed account of events, the work approached the later idea of a chronicle as exemplified by *De Gestis Regum Anglorum* (1120) by William Malmesbury or by any other detailed presentation of historical events in chronological order. Still later the titles of *chronicle* and *history* were given to Shakespeare's plays.

Thus in 1598 the text was published of *The History of Henry the Fourth; with the battel at Shrewsburie, betweene the King and Lord Henry*

<sup>7</sup> The same thing happened in other countries of Europe. In Polish *historia* and *kronika* are felt as singulars.

Percy surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the humorous conceits of Sir John Falstaffe.<sup>8</sup>

Other examples are: *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke* (1603) and *True Chronicle Historie of the life and deth of King Lear and his three Daughters. With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam* (1608).

The word *Historie* referring to *Hamlet* assumes the modern meaning of *story*. This process is to be observed elsewhere. In the Renaissance Polish *historiya* was used in non-historical context. Calling Lear's tragedy *Chronicle Historie* seems far-fetched in our times when Shakespearean studies have limited the use of these two words and even have distinguished chronicle plays from history plays. But we should not forget that once that silly and wronged character was thought to be a historic ruler in a historical chronicle – *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1135), that inexhaustible fountain of the most imaginative range of literary works of England down to T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1958).

I should not like to leave the ancient and the medieval writers without mentioning their ability to create original individual titles. A Greek tragedy *Seven against Thebes* and Aristophanes' comedy titles – *Clouds*, *Frogs*, *A Parliament of Women* – belong to these. The medieval *Ormulum* (*Orm's Little Book*, 1200) and *Luv Ron* (*Love Rune*, 1270) are rather unexpected and Marie de France seems to have anticipated sophisticated modern short-story writers with the titles of her lays like *Chievrfueil* (*The Honeysuckle*) and *Laustic* (*The Nightingale*). Those titles have some symbolic quality besides referring to a material thing which belongs to the story.

They anticipate such unexpected titles as T. Dekker's *The Honest Whore* (1604), T. Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1607), F. Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) and such modern titles as *The Moon and Sixpence*, *Cakes and Ale*, and *The Painted Veil* by Somerset Maugham.

These are intriguing and puzzling titles. Their function is not so much to inform what the work is about as to make the prospective reader wonder what they cover. There is a touch of sensational fiction about them as in the titles of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

<sup>8</sup> A convenient access to many long, complete titles of English literary works is to be found in *An Outline-History of English Literature*, vol. I and II by William B. Otis and Morris H. Needleman (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960). F. E. Halliday's *A Shakespeare Companion 1564–1964* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), gives detailed information about the bibliographical features of the early printed Shakespearean texts of plays.

## ENGLISH DESCRIPTIVE TITLES

But when we look at the long history of English literature (and of other literatures) we shall find that most titles were descriptive. They have been made to describe the contents of the works they label. The titles of the Shakespearean quartos of *Henry IV* and *King Lear*, quoted above, show how awkward descriptive titles may be.

On the other hand, intelligent authors, who have complete mastery over their matter, are able to devise their titles very well.

The descriptive titles probably developed under the influence of Humanist Latin and flourished in the Renaissance and in the seventeenth century.

One of the earliest long and complex English titles of an allegorical poem by Stephen Hawes runs like this:

*The Passetyme of Pleasure, or the Historie of Grande Amour and la bel Pucel, conteining the knowledge of the Seven Sciences and the Course of Man's Life in this Worlde* (1506)

Though so early, the title sounds a mixture of Gothic and Baroque, almost as strange as the title of a Polish encyclopedia compiled about the middle of the eighteenth century by Father Benedykt Chmielowski and called *Nowe Ateny*, the complete title of which, in English, is: *New Athens, or an Academy full of all Science, divided into sundry titles as if into classes as a Memorial for the Wise, Instruction for Idiots, Practice for Politicians, Enjoyment for the Melancholic.*

An example of an early title, very exact in its description, is Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. Written in Latin and published in 1515-1516, it had the following title:

*Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova Insula Utopia.*

This translated into English would be:

*A Booklet truly Golden and no less useful than pleasant about the Best State of Commonweal and about the newly discovered Island of Utopia.*

The title contains three bits of information. The first, about the playful seriousness of the book; the second, about the discussion on the best system of government; the third, about Utopia.

It is a masterpiece of exactitude, for the book was a learned joke and it treated separately about the foundation of a perfect State and about Utopia as a possible realization of the principles discussed in the first book.

The subsequent reduction of the title to the one-word title *Utopia* introduced misunderstanding. Utopia became equated with the idea of ideal state, in spite of the author's reservations expressed toward the end of his book.

I am enlarging on this subject, because similar fate affected the reading of many other important books. When we want to understand them properly, we always should go to their original full titles.

After Hawes and More the practice of descriptive or summarizing titles became general. The tendency to sum up the contents is obvious in Sir Walter's Raleigh's *A Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isle of Agores, this lat summer betwixt the Revenge, one of her Majesties Shippes, and an Armada of the King of Spaine* (1591), in his *The Discovery of the large, rich and beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1596). The same may be said about Richard Hakluyt's national exploration saga *Principall Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation mady by Sea or Over Land to the Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth, at any Time within the Compass of these 1500 Years* (1598-1599-1600).

The seventeenth century continued the practice of the descriptive titles. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in its complete form was: *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to that Which is To Come delivered under the similitude of a Dream wherein is discover'd, The Manner of his Setting Out, his Dangerous Journey and Safe Arrival at the Desired Country* (1678). Another book by Bunyan was: *The Holy War, Made by Shaddai Upon Diabolus, For the Regaining of the Metropolis of the World, Or, The Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul* (1682).

The presence of allegory in Bunyan's titles prevents them from revealing the factual accounts presented in his books, but the tendency to make the title a summary is obvious in some titles of the seventeenth century criminal pamphlets. One of them bears the following title:

*The Most Cruel and Bloody Murther committed by an Inkeeper's Wife called Annis Dell and her Sonne, George Dell, Foure yeeres since. On the bodie of a Childe, Called Anthony Iames in Bishops Hatfield in the Countie of Hartford, and how most miraculously reuealed by the Sister of the said Anthony, who at the time of the murther had her tongue cut out and foure years remayned dumme and speechlesse, and now perfectly speaketh, reueling the Murther, having no tonge to be seen. With the several Witchcrafts and most damnable practices of one Iohane Harrison and her Daughter vpon seueral persons, men and women at Royston, who were all executed at Hartford the 4 of August last past, 1606.*<sup>9</sup>

This title seems to defeat its own purpose. It contains such a lot of information about the pamphlet of 18 pages it advertises that the reader might have satisfied his curiosity about the booklet without buying it.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Joseph H. Marshburn and Alan R. Velie, *Blood and Knavery: A Collection of English Renaissance Pamphlets and Ballads Of Crime and Sin* (Rutherford-Madison-Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), p. 21.



But one cannot say this about another lengthy title of criminal records, a kind of monumental British *pitaval*:

*The New Newgate Calendar being interesting memoirs of Notorious Characters Who have been convicted of Outrageous on the Laws of England during the seventeenth century, brought down to the present time. Chronologically arranged. Comprising traitors, murderers, incendiaries, ravishers, pirates, mutineers, coiners, highwaymen, footpads, housebreakers, rioters, extortioners, sharpers, forgers, pickpockets, fraudulent bankrupts, moneydroppers, impostors, and thieves of every description. Containing also a numer of interesting Cases never before published; with occasional Essays on Crimes and Punishments, Original Anecdotes, and observations on particular cases; explanations of the criminal laws, the speeches, confessions, and Last Exclamations of Sufferers, to which is added A correct Account of the various Modes of Punishment of Criminals in different Parts of the World.*<sup>10</sup>

The long descriptive titles continued in the fiction of the eighteenth century. *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World by Lemuel Gulliver* (1726), *The Life and Strange surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* (1719) and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760–1767) testify to the fact.

But even then a process of reducing them to possibly short labels began. What we have got as a result, are: *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tristram Shandy*.<sup>11</sup>

In the nineteenth century even some great writers had difficulties in formulating satisfactory titles and in emancipating themselves from the tradition of the long descriptive headlines. Who remembers now that *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–1839) evolved from *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, Containing A Faithful Account of the Fortunes, Misfortunes, Uprising, Down-fallings and Complete Career of the Nickleby Family*?

And who knows that the real title of *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) was: *The Personal History, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone*?<sup>12</sup>

We know that Dickens strove for his titles with difficulty and even when he finally chose one, it was not always fully satisfactory. Of the great

<sup>10</sup> The title and edition was prepared by "Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin, Attornies of Law." The book was published in five volumes in London and Liverpool in the years 1808–1813(?).

<sup>11</sup> The lengthy late Victorian title of R. L. Stevenson's *Kidnapped being memoirs of the adventures of David Balfour in the Year 1751* (1889), including in its following lines a summary of the novel, is a literary a pastiche like *Treasure Island*.

<sup>12</sup> Prof. Edward Chauncey Baldwin's *Introduction* to an old American edition of *David Copperfield* by Scott, Foreman and Co. (Chicago–New York, 1910, p. 29), quotes six tentative, rather awkward, titles invented by Dickens, of which the last satisfied the novelist at last. A recent publication of *Bleak House* by Penguin Books shows another painful process of choice.

Dickensian titles – *Dombey and Son*, *Great Expectations* – *Bleak House* strikes one with an ambiguity, because it symbolizes, according to Dickens, a fallen England, and, at the same time, denotes the refuge of all good things that had been England – Mr Jarndyce's house and home.

We shall yet return to the process of abbreviating titles to a minimum. Now let me discuss a shorter type of descriptive titles which might be called double or dual. It consists of two segments of which each complements the other.

#### DOUBLE TITLES

Cicero used this kind of title at least twice – when he wrote *Brutus, sive de claris oratoribus* and *Orator, sive de optimo genere dicendi*.

In the Middle Ages the great French contributor to the Arthurian cycle, Chretien de Troyes, liked titles of this kind. *Lancelot ou le Chevalier à la charette*, *Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion* and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* are examples.

In English literature we find exact copies of this form of title in *The Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civill* (1651) by Thomas Hobbes, in *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (1688) by Mrs Aphra Behn, in *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) and in *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) with this difference that Fanny Burney's title is much more informative than Richardson's.

One of the earliest and best-remembered double titles is *The Unfortunate Traveller, or The Life of Jack Wilson* (1594) by Thomas Nashe – a pseudo-historical picaresque novel falling into a story of horror.

The double title was used for all kinds of genres. We find them among plays and novels.

Thomas Otway's tragedy *Venice Preserv'd or A Plot Discover'd* (1682), *The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub* (1664), a comedy of manners by Sir George Etherege, John Dryden's version of *Antony and Cleopatra – All For Love, or the World Well Lost* (1677) all carry on this type of the title to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), to William Godwin's novel of politics and crime: *Things as they Are, or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), and to Mrs Radcliffe's *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797).

Among Victorian novelists Charles Kingsley was almost an addict to double titles: *Yeast, Or The Thoughts, Sayings, and Doings of Lancelot Smith, Gentleman* (1848), *Hypatia Or New Foes With An Old Face* (1853),

*Westward Ho! Or, The Voyages And Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight* (1855), *The Heroes, Or Greek Fairy Tales For My Children* (1856) – one might prolong this list.

Double titles ask for a special study. It is difficult to explain motivation behind them. They function like two legs supporting and balancing each other. But do they express an intention to show the theme under two aspects or simply show hesitation in choice? They also may be an effect of a tendency to one-word titles, but explained – lest the reader put a book aside which concealed its contents under bare, unknown name or suchlike word.

Some double titles stand on the verge of turning into a title and subtitle as may be seen in the two satires by J. Dryden. In *Mac Flecknoe, or a Satyre upon the True-Blew-Protestant Poet* (1682) he used a double title, but when he wrote *The Medall. A Satyre against Sedition* (1682), by omitting or he divided the title into the main part and the subordinate one which partly functions as information about the genre and partly about the theme.<sup>13</sup>

We may observe similar ambiguity in the revolutionary title of W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair, A Novel Without a Hero*. The subtitle does not merely define the genre of the book, but also signals a new type of a novel that results from a new outlook.

#### SUBTITLES AND SUPERTITLES

Most subtitles seem to have been invented in the times when an innocent reader or theatre-goer had to be prepared by an act of anticipatory interpretation, to assimilate a book or a performance properly.

To avoid misunderstanding let me explain what I mean. Throughout the Middle Ages and later two styles were recognized: the high and the low. The high style was proper for tragedies, the low – for comedies. But at a rather primitive performance the audience had to be warned what they were going to see and to react accordingly.<sup>14</sup> Thence the subtitles

<sup>13</sup> Charles Kingsley also uses double titles which turn into a title a subtitle: *The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land-Baby* (1863).

<sup>14</sup> I remember two schoolgirls reacting to quite a good performance of *Romeo and Juliet* as if it were a comedy. They laughed all the time though without disturbing the audience, silently wriggling on their seats. Their frame of mind at that time forced them to see in the tragedy a chain of jokes. Out of such point of view burlesques of most serious themes generate. I myself remember an amateur performance of an unknown play about a spendthrift son of a miser, which was acted with such exaggeration that the audience roared with laughter. Shakespeare knew something about it when he produced the tragedy of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

*tragedy* and *comedy* were needed. Or, they may have been directed to inform the stage managers and actors in what style the play was to be staged. This guess should be substantiated or rejected.

Meanwhile, we can try to examine some subtitles. When Charlotte Bronte adds to her title *Jane Eyre* the subtitle *An Autobiography* (1847), the subtitle prepares the reader for a personal story. But when she puts *A Tale* after her *Shirley* (1849) there is no explanation why, just as there is no explanation why George Meredith's *Rhoda Fleming* (1866) has been called *A Story* in the subtitle, but his *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) – *A Novel*. But the same author makes an important point when after *The Tragic Comedians* (1880) he puts *A Study in a Well-known Story*, for the subtitle is a key to the novel which presents the real story of Ferdinand Lassalle, the German socialist, in love with a girl belonging to a different social class and creed.

There was little need for Thomas Hardy to call his *Desperate Remedies* (1871) *A Novel*, but when he entitled *Under the Greenwood Tree* or *The Mellstock Quire* (1872) – *A Rural Painting of the Dutch School* – he perfectly defined the genre of the novel in the sense of the colour and atmosphere.

When George Eliot explained that *Middlemarch* (1871) was a *Story of Provincial Life*, she pointed to the limitations of the social background of her characters' lives. When Charles Reade added to the title of his *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) – *A Tale of the Middle Ages*, he informed the reader that this was a historical novel.

Sometimes the authors imply a mood or atmosphere in their subtitles. Stevenson called *The Master of Ballantrae* *A Winter's Tale* (1889). Maurice Hewlett made his *Forest Lovers* (1898) *A Romance*.

One of the most original and inventive makers of subtitles was G. B. Shaw. *Superman* (1903) was subtitled *A Comedy and a Philosophy*, *Heartbreak House* (1919), *A Fantasie in the Russian Manner on English Themes* (alluding to Chekhov), *Saint Joan* (1923) in the subtitle is called *A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*. *The Apple Cart* (1929) is meant to be *A Political Extravaganza*.

All Shavian subtitles tend to signal a new dramatic variety in which a known literary genre acquires fresh meaning by infusion of a new message (cf. *comedy* plus *philosophy*). This is also to be seen in the extraordinary subtitle of *Back To Methuselah* (1920) – *A Metabiological Pentateuch*.

With G. B. Shaw and his contemporaries we find ourselves not only among inventive subtitles, but also among supertitles.

They were used in Antiquity. The Biblical scholars tell us that in the fifth century B.C. the Hebrew *Tora* or *Pentateuch* became the supertitle of

the five books ascribed to Moses which, as I mentioned in the beginning of this paper, had their own separate titles. In the same century, exactly speaking in 458 B.C., Aeschylus was awarded a prize for three plays: *Agamemnon*, *Choefori*, and *Eumenides* which were given the supertitle *Oresteia*.<sup>15</sup>

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period only frame-work stories were given supertitles like *Decamerone* (1348–1356), *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400) and *Heptameron* (1558) by Margaret of Navarre. This also happened to the stories retold by William Morris under the supertitle of *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870).

In the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott, who wrote his novels anonymously, felt the need to ascribe them to different fictitious authors and therefore grouped them under a kind of supertitles. *Tales of My Landlord*, told by Jedediah Cleishbotham, comprised *The Black Dwarf* and *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Legend of Montrose*. *The Tales of Crusaders* covered *The Betrothed* and *The Talisman*. *Chronicles of Canongate* compiled by another fictitious character – Mr Chrystal Croftangry, residing at Canongate in Edinburgh, include Scott's two best short-stories: *Two Drovers* and *The Highland Widow* besides *The Surgeon's Daughter*, a novel about India and other novels of declining value – *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *Anne of Geierstein*, *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous*.

Supertitles abound with G. B. Shaw. For publishing purposes he grouped his plays under the headings: *Plays Unpleasant* (*Widowers' Houses*, *The Philanderer*, *Mrs Warren's Profession*), *The Four Pleasant Plays* (*Arms and the Man*, *Candida*, *The Man of Destiny*, *You Never Can Tell*) and three *Plays for Puritans* (*The Devil's Disciple*, *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*).

As with Scott, the grouping of those plays is as arbitrary as in *The Canterbury Tales*. But it is a different matter with *Back To Methuselah* which is the Shavian gospel teaching longevity as the way to maturity and wisdom.

*Back to Methuselah*, *A Metabiological Pentateuch* is a cycle of five plays alluding mainly to the Old Testament, but also to the New Testament in its flight into the far-off future. The supertitle covers the following titles: 1. *In the Beginning: B.C. (In the Garden of Eden)*, 2. *The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas: Present Day*, 3. *The Thing Happens: A.D. 2170*, 4. *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman: A.D. 3000*, 5. *As Far as Thought Can Reach: A.D. 31.929*.

<sup>15</sup> Aeschylus got prizes for his earlier dramatic trilogy and tetralogy which probably had their own supertitles.

The style of the plays varies from a mystery play to contemporary comedy and SF utopia, but the Shavian vision of how mankind should develop and his wit make the pentateuch of plays one whole.

Shaw's playwright colleague John Galsworthy, who is best known as the author of *The Forsyte Saga*, also used supertitles. As he himself stated, this title of his best known work, which was meant to label *The Man of Property*, gradually grew into a supertitle covering three novels: *The Man of Property*, *In Chancery*, and *To Let*, linked by two shorter and more microscopic "interludes" – *Indian Summer of a Forsyte* and *Awakening*.<sup>16</sup>

*The Forsyte Saga* (1921) continued as *A Modern Comedy* (1929) – a trilogy consisting of *The White Monkey*, *The Silver Spoon* and *Swan Song*, again linked by two "interludes".

The chain of trilogies under supertitles was prolonged by the great fairy epic of J. R. R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings* (1938–1939) which consists of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*.

Laurence Durrell continued the custom with *The Alexandria Quartet* (*Justine*, *Balthazar*, *Clea*, *Mountolive*, 1957–1960), and Stephen Lawhead has maintained the tradition of Tolkien by writing the *Pendragon* cycle of historicised Arthurian legend in four parts: *Taliesin*, *Merlin*, *Arthur* and *Pendragon* (1987–1990).

#### SHORT IDEOPHORIC, SYMBOLIC AND QUOTATION TITLES

Within the area and in the history of the Mediterranean Civilization short one-word or two-word titles seem to have passed the test of time best. They are short, simple, easy to remember and functional for the purposes of readers, literary critics and librarians. Some of them are primeval, some have come into existence by a reduction of long, descriptive titles, some others have been coined by present-day writers. All of them show interesting varieties and differences.

Many of them, including the oldest ones, are eponymous: *Gilgamesh*, *Jonah*, *Ruth*, *Eneid*, *Beowulf*, *Erec et Enide*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Rob Roy*, *Don Juan*, *Mrs Dalloway*...

Some eponymous titles, either because of their form or a generic adjunct, signify a genre: *Odyssey*, *Eneid*, *The Book of Job*, *Chanson de Roland*, *Nibelungenlied*, *Poema del Cid*. Some others concentrate on a special

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Author's Preface* to the one-volume edition of *The Forsyte Saga* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961).

aspect of the hero by adding an adjective to his name: *Orlando Furioso*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Prometheus Unbound*.

In the ancient Greek literature one-word titles are equally distributed among various genres: *Ilias* and *Odysseia* are epics; *Oresteia*, *Electra*, *Persai* – dramas; *Kriton*, *Phaidon* and *Phaidros* belong to philosophical dialogues. Some other titles, like Hesiod's *Theogonia* and Aristotle's *Physika* and *Politika*, belong to one-word ideophoric titles.<sup>17</sup>

Ideophoric titles are vehicles for conveying ideas or signalling certain realms of ideas. The title *Theogony* suggests birth and genealogy of gods just as the *Gospel* suggests the message of Christ. It is worth mentioning here that the term *Euaggelion* i.e. *Good News*, chosen by Jesus for his teaching became in the second century a synonym of a book written about Christ's teaching. In this way the message or set of ideas became the title of four canonical and some apocryphal works on this subject.

The short titles, prevalent in the twentieth century, present exciting and very complex semantic problems. Let us first look at them in the perspective of history.<sup>18</sup>

When we have a title like *The Life and . . . Adventures . . . of Robinson Crusoe*, the attention of the reader is naturally focussed on the story or action in the book. When the title has been reduced to *Robinson Crusoe*, the focus shifts to the character. Thus the shortening of the title inclines the reader to think much more about the hero of the story than about anything else. The fact that the general practice has simplified the titles of the majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction has had an important psychological effect on their reception. It has stressed the personal and psychological element of the fictional biographies which most novels of these two centuries were. The movement was towards psychology: towards *Lord Jim*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Ulysses*.

Another movement, though not so easily exemplified, has been from the character to the problem, or message, or an idea.

Let me illustrate it by discussing the titles of Jane Austen. Even as a young girl, when she wrote *Love and Friendship*, she was interested in

<sup>17</sup> I am indebted for these and following titles to a collective book *Dzieje literatur europejskich I (A History of European Literature I)*, ed. by Władysław Floryan (Warszawa: PIW, 1977) which presents, besides the literatures of Greece and Rome, all literatures written in Romance languages. My other source was *Słownik pisarzy antycznych (A Dictionary of Ancient Writers)* ed. by Anna Świderkówna (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> I have used as my reference for authors, titles and dates: *Everyman's Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1960), *Annals of English Literature 1475–1950* (1961), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (1958), *The Concise Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature 600–1950* (1966), *The Present Age in British Literature* (1959) by D. Daiches and my own library.

human relationship. Her *Pride and Prejudice* (written in 1796) had as its first title *First Impressions*. When she was writing another novel, she thought naming it *Elinor and Marianne*, but changed it for *Sense and Sensibility* (1797). Her last novel was *Persuasion* (1815). One of her novels only is eponymous: *Emma* (1814) and two others point to a setting and everything that it means: *Northanger Abbey* (1797) and *Mansfield Park* (1811).<sup>19</sup>

Jane Austen's interest in interpersonal relations was later reflected in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and in Ivy Compton Barnett's *Pastors and Masters* (1924), *Men and Wives* (1931), *A Family and a Fortune* (1939), *Parents and Children* (1941), *Elders and Betters* (1944) and in all the rest of her novels.

The third movement in titles has been towards symbolic titles.

It is, perhaps, unexpected that titles referring to places tend towards symbolism. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) makes the castle in the Apennines symbolic of tyranny and crime. *Northanger Abbey* stands for ridiculous romantic associations with the Minerva Press fiction. *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) is very rich in its symbolism; it denotes the city prison in Edinburgh, the city itself as the heart of Scotland and its greatest heart – the heroine who was ready to walk all the way to London to ask for mercy for her guilty, misguided sister.

We easily realize how symbolic is the title *Wuthering Heights* (1847). *Bleak House* (1852–1853), in spite of its partial contradiction, is another title of this kind and so the titles go to *Howards End* (1910).

Symbolic become other titles referring to the author's message: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), *Victory* (1915) with its glorification of spiritual values in the situation of physical defeat and *Shadow Line* (1917) which signifies crossing the equator and the crisis of maturity; T. F. Powys's *Mr Weston's Good Wine* (1928) means death as God's good cheer; James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933) is a reminder of the lost moral and spiritual bearings.

John Galsworthy also used symbolic titles: *The White Monkey*, *The Silver Spoon*, *Swan Song*. These titles are allusive: to a picture of an animal, to a proverbial phrase about somebody's birth to prosperity, to a final achievement before death.

With these titles we face a new problem of their function. They do not so much explain what is the main subject of the literary work they label as rather vaguely allude to its general sense and meaning. One step more

<sup>19</sup> It is to be noted that Scott, her contemporary, almost always concentrates on the character, using eponymous titles. It would be interesting to find out why some Victorians, especially Dickens, went back for long descriptive titles when they had such neat Romantic models like the two novelists discussed.



away from them leads to titles, whose function is to intrigue and puzzle, and to ciphered titles.

The ability to read such titles with understanding presupposes widespread literary orientation. Most of them appeared in the twentieth century along with expanding extension of compulsory education and growing "high-brow" criticism of writers and critics. But some of the allusive titles occurred in the past. *The Pearl*, an anonymous poem of the fourteenth century alludes to the Scriptural parable of a pearl symbolizing the inner Kingdom of Heaven. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848) alludes to *The Pilgrim's Progress* and expresses the novelist's criticism of social life. As for Samuel Butler's satirical autobiographical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), there is no doubt that its title is a hebraicism. But it is difficult to trace it to the Bible. However, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* may give the idea of its sense: "All flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (I Peter 1,24). But the phrase "the way of all flesh" in its exact form appears outside the Bible: in J. Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623): "I saw him even now going the way of all flesh"; in Thomas Shadwell's comedy *Sullen Lovers* (1688): "'Tis the way of all flesh" and in another play - *Squire Bickerstaff Detected* - ascribed to William Congreve: "Alack, he's gone the way of all flesh". In all these texts the phrase implied death.

I wish to show here how difficult may it be to find reference to a title which is a quote.

The Bible, Shakespeare and other great poets are the most frequented sources of quotation titles. John Ruskin's *Unto the Last* (1860) refers to the words of the lord of the vineyard: "I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Mat. 20,14) - an idea which Ruskin applied to economy, arousing protests. The title of J. A. Cronin's *The Keys of the Kingdom* obviously refers to the priestly office of St. Peter in Mat. 16,19.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is quoted in *Precious Bane* (1924) by Mary Webb and implies condemnation of the riches that grow in hell, *Samson Agonistes* has suggested to Victoria Sackville-West the title *All Passion Spent* (1931), a novel about the calm of the old age, and to A. Huxley - the title of *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) which refers to Samson "at the mill with slaves" - the condition of man in modern times.

Macbeth's monologue beginning with "To-morrow and to-morrow" and ending with "Signifying nothing" became the source of Rose Macaulay's *Told by An Idiot* (1923), of W. H. Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and of A. Huxley's *Brief Candles* (1930) just as *Brave New World* (1932) ironically refers to Miranda's ignorance expressed in: "O brave new World That has such people in't" (*The Tempest*, V,1).

In James Barrie's *Dear Brutus* (1917) the title may be deciphered by reference to *Julius Caesar* (I,2) where we read: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars But in ourselves that we are underlings."

Another comedy by the same playwright – *The Admirable Crichton* (1903) symbolically alludes to a historic gallant Scotsman of many talents, James Crichton (1560–1585?).

S. Maugham's *The Painted Veil* (1925) derives from Shelley's first words of a sonnet: "Lift not the painted veil which those who live Call Life." *Cakes and Ale* (1930), another novel by the same writer, reveals its message when we trace its title to *Twelfth Night* (2,3): "Dost thou think, because thou are virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

Most quotation titles are torn out of their original context and therefore intrigue the reader. A phrase from Hamlet's best known monologue: "The undiscovered country from whose bourne No traveller returns" has been partitioned between Stephen Mc Kenna who wrote *The Undiscovered Country* and J. Auslander who wrote *No Traveller Returns*. Both refer to death and the otherworld.<sup>20</sup>

In the early twentieth century some writers used as titles quotations from their contemporaries, which shows how self-contained literary circles were. T. S. Eliot, who – by the way – is most prolific in using quotations as mottoes to his poems, took *The Waste Land* (1922) from Jessie L. Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) which, together with James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1915) excited the minds of English intellectuals with its mythical-antropological interpretation of religion and literature. Some years later Evelyn Waugh published *A Handful of Dust* (1934) which takes its title from T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust." Both titles are ideophoric in their meaning and function.

I am coming to the close of these notes. I hope that they will help my readers to become more conscious of the importance of the exact reading of the title of each literary work. It is important to read each title in its full form, as it was designed by the author. G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a catch title without its subtitle: *The Nightmare*, which is the key to understanding of the sense and the composition of the book.<sup>21</sup>

While complete understanding of a literary work is conditioned by the full understanding of its title, with the growing sophistication of the authors, it is not an easy task. Then putting together the contents and the

<sup>20</sup> *Outlines of Shakespeare's Plays* (College Outline Series) by H. A. Watt, K. J. Holzknicht and R. Ross (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1957) enumerates over 100 titles, American and British, being quotations from Shakespeare, but this is not a complete list.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. my "The Man Who Was Thursday, or Detection Without Crime," in: *Litterae et Lingua in honorem Premislai Mroczkowski* (Kraków: PAN, 1984).

title may help. This is the case with *The Five Red Herrings* (1931) by Dorothy L. Sayers the meaning of which is "five false clues" and with her *The Nine Tailors* (1934) – the title which refers to bells.

But these cryptic titles are simple riddles in comparison with, say, Iris Murdoch's *The Bell* (1958) or *A Severed Head* (1961) which presented difficulty even to Walter Allen.<sup>22</sup>

And we should not forget that sometimes the work slips, so to speak, out the author's hands after he fixed his title and does not follow either the original design of its title.

One of the masterpieces of the Polish novel is *Lalka* (*The Doll*, 1887–1889) by Bolesław Prus, the composition of which reminds that of *Middlemarch*. The nucleus of the novel was a real incident – a trial of a poor young widow accused, on an unfounded suspicion, of having stolen a costly doll for her daughter. But the novel grew into something more than *Middlemarch* – into a great epic panorama of social life of a whole country, against which the central character wasted his energy and fortune in trying to win the love of a doll-like aristocratic girl. This conditioned the public reception of the book. Its title is referred to the girl, perhaps without full justification.

Similarly, the action of Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton, A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848) went slightly awry and the novel is much less a story about Mary Barton than a tale of industrial unrest.

It is also important to understand the function of the title, conditioned by its formulation and its period. It is important that we might classify titles according to their origin, form and function. That is why I have taken liberty to suggest a range of terms which point to distinctive aspects of the titles used in the course of European history. Further investigation, by other scholars I hope, should extend the material, correct my observations and justify or reject my conclusions.

#### SUGGESTED CLASSIFICATION OF TITLES

First-word titles, eponymous titles, generic titles, periphrastic titles, descriptive titles, double titles, ideophoric titles, symbolic titles, quotation titles, long titles, short titles, subtitles, supertitles.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 303–304.

Witold Ostrowski

**TYTUŁY I PODTYTUŁY;  
WSTĘPNE NOTATKI NA TEMAT ICH HISTORII I FUNKCJI**

Esej posługuje się przykładem powieści A. J. Cronina *Gwiazdy patrzą na nas*, której tytuł jest cytatem z mało znanego wiersza Matthew Arnolda, żeby udowodnić jak ważne jest zrozumienie sensu tytułu dla zrozumienia powieści. Odszyfrowany tytuł nadaje tej powieści o walce górników o chleb i bezpieczeństwo głębię chrześcijańskiego komentarza.

Autor stwierdza, że spośród paratekstów literackich takich jak dedykacje, motto, przedmowy i posłowania, przypisy, aneksy, glosariusze, kolofony i inne dodatki do głównego tekstu, tytuł jest najważniejszy.

W poszukiwaniu różnych rodzajów tytułów należy sięgnąć do przeszłości cywilizacji śródziemnomorskiej – do starożytnego Egiptu, Babilonu, Izraela, Grecji i Rzymu.

Trudno się zorientować co do formy tytułów egipskich tam, gdzie zachowały się raczej końcowe kolofony, czasem zawierające streszczenia księgi. Natomiast z całą pewnością można stwierdzić, że Babilończycy i Izraelczycy najpierw używali tytułów stanowiących pierwsze słowa tekstu. Później rozwinęły się tytuły eponimiczne czyli odimienne i gatunkowe – *pieśń, psalm, kronika*.

Grecy wymyślili tytuły peryfrastyczne, zaczynające się od *peri*, czego odpowiednikiem u Rzymian było *de*. Ten typ tytułów został przyjęty przez całą Europę używającą łaciny. Rzymianie dali językom europejskim wyraz *tytuł*, przekazali ponadto grecką *historię* i *kronikę*, których znaczenie wyszło daleko poza ich pierwotny zakres.

W następnej kolejności autor omawia długie tytuły opisowe, wykorzystując głównie materiał angielski, od renesansu do XIX w. Niektóre z nich są streszczeniami tekstów.

Zbliżone do nich są tytuły podwójne, widoczne już u Cyncerona i w średniowieczu, jak *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*. W literaturze angielskiej występują obficie w XVII, XVIII i XIX w. Od nich tylko krok do podtytułów i ich funkcji oraz do nadtytułów, takich jak *Pięcioksiąg, Oresteia, Saga rodu Forsytów*, nadtytułów G. B. Shawa i J. R. R. Tolkiena.

Omówiono tendencję XX w. do tytułów krótkich, ruch w kierunku przesunięcia uwagi z fabuły na główną postać, a z postaci na stosunki międzyosobowe, co widać już było u Jane Austen. Zmienia się funkcja informacyjna tytułu na intrygującą i powstaje chęć wyrażenia idei lub przesłania utworu, co widać w tytułach symbolicznych i cytatowych, zwłaszcza wziętych z Biblii lub z Szekspira.