Prague Journal of English Studies
Volume 14, No. 1–2, 2025
ISSN: 1804-8722 (print)
ISSN: 2336-2685 (online)

The Title Not Taken...

Ian Butcher
Independent Scholar, Belgium and Denmark

The evolution of a literary title, from its working inception to its final form, often offers profound insights into an author's creative journey and intent. A function of a title is to guide the interpretation of a text. The direction of the work may have changed by the time a final title is decided upon and working titles have been discarded. T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land *originally began life as* He Do the Police in Different Voices*, thus indicating that it is indeed a poem of several, often competing, voices. Exploring the "back story" frequently sheds light on the finished work. It is sometimes the publisher who overrules the author and decides on a move away from a working title to make the work more saleable and attractive. Some authors opt for secondary or sub-titles to make their intentions clearer. Titologists agree on the critical importance of a title to label, seduce, and provide information on the content of the work. Critically a working title changed to a final title can affect the way in which the reader will approach the work and how differently the work is received. Most titological analysis focuses on the final, given title, usually well-known to readers. The objective of this paper is to emphasise the significance of the focus-shift from provisional working titles to final titles, and explore the altered perceptions that this might trigger.*

Keywords
Working title; literary works; insights; subtitle; title; Titology

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would still smell as sweet.
(*Romeo and Juliet*)

Historical Evolution of Titles

The word *title* stems from the Old English *titul* and the Old French *title,* both from the Latin *titulus,* meaning inscription, label, title, ticket or heading. The

first books – often scriptures – did not have titles and were usually named after the first word in the text. Ancient Greek titles usually used a single word title, though not the first word of the text. Before the invention of printing in the Middle Ages, books were mainly hand-written, one-off, custom-made objects and titles were not considered a necessary feature. When printing came in, books started to have *label-title* pages, or title pages. These were called an *incipit,* meaning "the first part, the opening, the opening words". Scholars estimate that the first English title page was printed in London in 1485 by the Flemish printer William de Machlinea, *Regimen contra pestilenciam* by Johannes Jacobi. Before the advent of printing, the significance or need of a title for a literary work was not great. Printing changed society's attitude and allowed the author to earn money by selling multiple printed copies. Thus the concept of authorship and ownership, became much more important with the title and author's name displayed on the title page.

Titology: The Theoretical Perspective on Titles

The study of titles – Titology – is a term coined in 1977 by literary critic Harry Levin. Some celebrated proponents include Leo H. Hoek, Gerard Genette, Colin Symes and Jerrold Levinson. Most academic focus has traditionally been on the final, published titles of works. The focus of this paper will be the unpublished, frequently unknown, original working titles.

These temporary titles emphasise the innate provisional nature and unfinished condition of the text at that stage. Genette – who tends to name working titles "pre-titles" – agrees that "a temporary title…is never entirely insignificant" (*Structure and Function of the Tîtle in Literature* 701). A working title emphasises "the unfinished and provisional condition of a work… indeed, a completed work without a title seems unfinished and devoid of an essential element" (Symes 19). The choice of final title, which differs from the pre-title, frequently signals a shift of focus and – importantly – a modified point of entry into the text.

Symes posits that "titles are a crucial adjunct in the aesthetic process. They are more than mere labels". Critically, "the title affects the way a particular area of aesthetic is experienced and interpreted, thus constituting a major element of a conceptual scheme" (24–25). Fisher sees titles as "a set of initial directions to guide us in our appreciation and interpretation of the work" (288). If a title is a guide, an orientation, an indication of how the work is to

be taken, then a different title might mean that a work should be differently understood. In fact, Levinson opines that titles are "aesthetically relevant features of a work of art" and that "a work differently titled will invariably be aesthetically different" (33).

Consider Shakespeare's *Othello*, where Iago has actually more lines (1097) than the titular hero (860). If the play had been entitled *Iago,* or maybe something like Leavis's *Diabolic Intellect,* the whole focus of our perceptions of the play would be transformed (Leavis). Indeed, Fisher argues that "titling permits discourse about artworks" (289) and that "the title points…and, in pointing, forces and limits a range of interpretations" (293), indicating to the reader how a work should be accepted, and how other interpretations should be excluded. Levinson proposes that some titles have "semantic weight" in that the title's semantic content has significant bearing upon its artistic content" (38).

Thus, a work with a final title as opposed to a working title is likely to be importantly different to what it was before, as the focus will have necessarily shifted. The title – working or final – determines the angle at which a text is approached. Levinson opines that "different titles can result in the same prose elements being apprehended dissimilarly, thus indicating the power of a title in the formation of meaning and sense" (22–23).

When searching for clues about meaning in a play, poem or novel, a good source of assistance can often be these provisional, working titles. The working title may have been later rejected by the author, sometimes at the request of a publisher wishing to make the work more attractive and saleable. However, it can frequently provide insights into the author's original inspiration, intentions and direction. Similarly, the final title chosen over the working title can often indicate how a work has moved away from the original intention and developed into the finished work. Wilsmore posits that a literary work "possesses its title essentially in that it could not be the same work without it" (408). Thus, a literary work with a final title is essentially different from a work with a working title.

Titological Categories

Levinson proposes that titles have various "functions or forces" and attempts to group them into seven categories. It is useful to examine these, as they can provide clues as to the intention of the author and how the title functions.

Neutral or *referential* titles feature names of characters, objects, places which are prominent in the work. Dickens's *David Copperfield,* Melville's *Moby Dick,* or Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* would be three examples, probably the simplest, most common type of title; *underlining/reinforcing*: those which add additional weight to stress some theme which is the leading part of the core content. Frost's "Mending Wall" focuses the reader's attention on the key physical object and image of the wall; *focusing* selects one theme to stand out as the leading one, indicating which theme(s) should be given central place. Dickens's *Great Expectations* focuses the reader on the twists and turns of fate, or *The Slap* by Christos Tsiolkas is another case in point, as all revolves around this one event; *undermining* or *opposing*, these titles run counter to what is being discussed. They could be ironic, humorous, anxiety-provoking and may signify the opposite of what is meant. Eric Newby's *A Short Walk in the Hindu Cush* may be a case in point as it is ironically humorous. Obviously the "short walk" is in reality a lengthy and strenuous climb in challenging mountains (Newby); *mystifying/disorienting* titles corroborate or confound something in the body of the work and may seem tangential. These titles, for example, are favoured by surrealists, and sci-fi authors as pure whimsy or fantasy and frequently cause "conceptual dislocation" (36). Think Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano,* or Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *disambiguating* or *specifying*, a title could be the key which unlocks the work. Joyce's *Ulysses* may be a good example as it is directly inspired by and parallels Homer's epic; *allusive* titles refer indirectly to other works outside of it. The author wishes the work to resonate with the work cited. For example, Hemingway's reference to John Donne in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* or Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. Although illuminating, the demarcations between these categorisations are frequently somewhat hazy.

Market Influences on Title Selection

When an author gives a title to his/her work, it is not a trivial act. It comprises a more complex process than simply naming or labelling. The title is the first element that the potential reader encounters and therefore "has considerable power to attract and condition the readers' attention" (Lodge 193). Lodge, an academic and novelist, continues, "[f]or the novelist, choosing a title may be an important part of the creative process, bringing into sharper focus what the novel is supposed to be about" (194). Titling is a process in which "artists

and authors individualize their productions as a way of asserting ownership over them" (Symes 19). Authors often struggle with the vexed decision of which title to give to their work. It is this entitling that might attract the publisher to accept it, the buying customer in a bookshop to purchase it, or the theatre-going public to buy a ticket to it from among all the other choices available. As Lodge reminds us "[n]ovels have always been commodities as well as works of art and commercial considerations can affect titles, or cause them to be changed" (195).

A title's role "is to inform but also to create interest". It is the "initial point of contact…standard bearer…raising the curtain on a work". Writers generally aspire to success with their work, so a title "looks inward to the artifact…but it also looks out to the marketplace" (Levinson 19). Symes agrees and calls the title part of the "forming of expectations" and an "aesthetic arousal mechanism" (18–19). Shaper opines that "one of the crucial functions of the title…is to advertise the book" (107). Titles have "the capacity to encapsulate authorial intentions as well as other features of overriding import in the decipherment of meaning" (Symes 17).

An example of how a commercially-focused publisher finally overruled the follies of an author's contemplated working titles is F. Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald toyed with a number of working titles on many of his novels before deciding on the ones we know. His debut novel *This Side of Paradise,* published in 1920, started life as *The Romantic Egotist.* He worked on another manuscript with titles that included *Among Ash Heaps and Millionaires*; *Trimalchio*; *Trimalchio in West Egg*; *On the Road to West Egg; Under the Red, White, and Blue; The Gold-Hatted Gatsby*; and *The High-Bouncing Lover*. *Trimalchio in West Egg* became *Incident at West Egg*. Trimalchio is a character who appears in Petronius' *Satyricon,* believed to have been written in the late first century AD. Fitzgerald's publisher believed, rightly, that the reference was too obscure to be understood by the general reader, hence the title-change to *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925 (Johnson). The final title is believed to have been inspired by *Le Grand Meaulnes (The Lost Estate)* by Alain Fournier, about the search for the unobtainable, mysterious world between childhood and adulthood. Fitzgerald had to agree, reluctantly, though even up to a month before publication, he was still trying to get the publisher to change the title to *Under the Red, White, and Blue*. Fitzgerald grumbled that the imposed title "is only fair, rather bad than good".

Publishers frequently latch onto trends and specific demographics in order to boost sales, using buzz words in the titles as bait. A surge in interest in the lives of young women as potential purchasers of books has led to a flurry of

titles with publishers insisting on the inclusion of the word "girl" : *The Girl on the Train*, *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*, *Girl Through Glass*, *Girls on Fire*, *Girl at War*, *Gone Girl*, *Good Girl*, *Girl in the Dark*, *The Girls*... Publishers claim to like catchy titles grouped around specific words such as "all" and "last", and titles which revel in the individuality of the author, his/her personal sympathies and preferences.

The Titling Process

Titles may be created at a number of points in the creative process. Some authors think of a title before or when creating the work. Giono, a French writer, claimed "[i]f I write a story without having found the title, it generally aborts...a title is needed, because the title is a sort of flag toward which one directs oneself. The goal is then to explain the title" (Genette 701). Symes echoes the flag metaphor when he posits, "[t]he title, after all, is a work's standard-bearer, the point at which initial impressions are created and interest aroused or dashed" and he warms to his case that the title "acts like an overture, raising the curtain on a work and providing signposts to its possible directions and thematic orientations" (20). Frank McCourt, the memoirist, reinforces this idea when he claims about *Angela's Ashes* "I think I settled on the title before I ever wrote the book" (McCourt).

Unsurprisingly, other artists might take the opposite tack and wait until the work is completed to give the work a fitting title. Mary Wesley admits "I never really know the title of a book until it is finished" (Patterson 154). Picasso claimed: "I start with an idea, and then it becomes something completely different...All the interest of art lies in the beginning. After the beginning, it's already the end" (Livermore 154). Few writers have a complete idea of a title or indeed the development of their characters before sitting down to write. Harold Pinter confesses:

> I have usually begun... in quite a simple manner; found a couple of characters in a particular context, thrown them together and listened to what they said, keeping my nose to the ground...The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression (ix).

The work thus grows and develops during the creative process in ways that the author could not be conscious of at the start.

True versus Interpretative Titles

There are titles which are not given by the author at all. Levinson makes a distinction between "true titles", usually given by the creator roughly around the time of their creation, and titles given by others, for example, editors, cataloguers, or academics. These latter Levinson calls "interpretations" or "reappropriations" (33). Shakespeare's 154 sonnets have no titles, and were allocated numbers later by scholars. Another example might be T.S. Eliot who wrote a series of bawdy verses over a number of years as a young man about a character called Columbo, or King Bolo. These were never formally collected or entitled until Christopher Ricks collated them into *The Inventions of the March Hare* where all forty-nine stanzas are published and given the "interpretive" title of *The Columbiad* (Eliot *Inventions*).

Some works develop "colloquial" titles. Xhignesse recounts the case of the artist, Whistler, who painted *Arrangement in Grey and Black No 1* in 1971. It happened to be a portrait of his mother when the awaited model failed to show up. The painting is universally known as *Whistler's Mother*, a "reappropriation" which irked Whistler (Xhignesse 9).

The Argument for No Titles

Fine artists can often get away with entitling their paintings and sculptures *Untitled*, *Untitled II,* etc. This might be interpreted as an abdication from focusing, or an attempt to mystify, a refusal to assist in unlocking the key to the work. Symes sees a usefulness in this untitling so as "to neutralize these epistemological contributions, to allow the artefact to be appreciated without any semantic and schematic interference and mediation" (23).

Scholars remind us that literary titles have not always been seen as necessary. Levin states "[i]t would be quite mistaken if we took it for granted that all books must have had titles" (xxiv). Whereas the non-title is not a usual option for a literary work, not all authors rack their brains to find a title. In the sixteenth century, Rabelais simply numbered his books: *le Quart Livre, le Cinquiesme et dernier.* Geoffrey Hill's 2006 book was entitled *Without Title* presumably not to be pinned down to a subject.

Alexander Pope, James Baldwin and many others wrote poetry without titles. As for Emily Dickinson, only around two dozen of her nearly 1,800 poems were given a title and are generally known by their first line or numbers

assigned to them by posthumous editors. The reason is perhaps that none of her poems were intended for publication in her lifetime. Indeed, in her letters to friends – where many of her poems first saw the light of day – she seems virulently opposed to publication and only ten were published in her lifetime. When she died in 1886, she was a virtually unknown poet except for among a small circle of family and friends. It was her sister, Lavinia, who discovered Emily's poems after her death and resolved that the poetry must be published. Therefore Dickinson did not have to struggle with editors and publishers who might have demanded titles. Any titles given were seen as afterthoughts, and were the anomalies in her body of work. The editors of the works – Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd – tried to put the poems in chronological order and "improved" and "regularized" them by altering rhymes, grammar, and punctuation, and adding titles. They tried to iron out the riddles and enigmas in the poems when they published the first edition in 1890. Their work was admirable, but the meaning of Dickinson's poems – often in multiple versions – was frequently badly tampered with.

Working Titles

Some examples follow of working or pre-titles which illustrate how looking at the original naming can provide keys to understanding the final work. In dramatic works, Arthur Miller's classic play *Death of a Salesman* was originally called *The Inside of His Head*. Miller explains:

> The first image that occurred to me…was of an enormous face, the height of the proscenium arch, which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title. It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions.

He elaborates:

> I thought of staging it where the curtain would go up, and you'd see the interior of his skull. And they would be walking around inside of him. All these people. But it seemed so mechanical that I gave it up (Miller).

The skull image emphasises the play's focus on Willy Loman's tortured

imaginings, and the centrality of Willy's mind, where some of the most important action takes place. A number of stage directors have embraced this head metaphor to underline the importance of this interior monologue, Willy's memories of the past, his perception of reality and his conflicts with the other characters and internally with himself.

Tennessee Williams's plays have intriguing, memorable titles – for example, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Glass Menagerie*. Several drafts of one play Williams was working on had various working titles: *The Passion of a Moth*, *Interior: Panic, The Moth, The Primary Colors, Blanche's Chair in the Moon* and *Go, Said the Bird*. Around 1947, Williams was referring to the manuscript as *The Poker Night*. There are two poker scenes in the play which are important dramatically and symbolically. They are where Stanley reveals his crude treatment of Stella to his male friends, and where Stanley can influence Mitch's feelings for Blanche. When Williams sent the manuscript to his agent, Audrey Wood, she crossed out the title and wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This poetic and more memorable title refers to lines in the play by Blanche: "They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields!" (Williams). Blanche uses the streetcar as a metaphor to make the point to Stella that sexual desire is not a way to shape a life, even though Blanche herself has ridden Desire – or lust – to arrive in her current situation. The final title is thus more intriguing, poetical, and saleable.

T.S. Eliot, a playwright and poet, (see below) was working on a serious, verse play which – by the author's own admission – owed a debt to Euripedes' *Alcestis* and classical Greek drama. Curiously, then, Eliot's working title for this work was *One-Eyed Riley*, a reference to a bawdy song of the same name. Eliot was always interested in music-hall and popular songs. Good sense prevailed, and the play which was staged in 1949 was finally entitled *The Cocktail Party*.

There is much speculation of the meaning of the name *Godot* and who he might be in Samuel Beckett's 1955 English production, *Waiting for Godot*. Perloff shifts the focus when she reminds us that an abandoned early title for the 1953 French original: "*Waiting (En Attendant)* [was] the original title of *Waiting for Godot*", underlining that the act of waiting is the "central activity" and the key focus of the play (82). In fact, *en attendant* might be more accurately translated as *while waiting*, suggesting that the action is focused on what happened while waiting. Beckett, always mildly irritated by the question about who Godot is, insisted "[i]f by Godot I had meant God I would have said God

and not Godot" (Brater 75). As a member of the Resistance in the Vaucluse in France during the Second World War, Beckett "used his waiting for the war to end as the starting point for the exploration of waiting in human life in general" (Esslin). The awareness of the original titling facilitates the shift of the thematic focus of the play away from the elusive character Godot to the activity of waiting itself.

Edward Albee originally worked on a play called *The Exorcism*. The play was renamed *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,* and first produced in 1962. The title is a word-play on the song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" (from the Disney cartoon *The Three Little Pigs*) and the author Virginia Woolf. However, the play is an exorcism of George and Martha who cannot deal with reality and who play unsafe games, one in particular about having a son. George exorcises the fictional son to the great pain of both characters.

Grammatical precision is critical in titling. J.M. Barrie had created Peter Pan as a character both in his 1902 novel *The Little White Bird*, and in his later, highly successful, 1904 play, *Peter Pan*. Original titles for the play included *The Great White Father and Peter Pan* and, rather darkly, *The Boy Who Hated Mothers*. Theatrical producer, Charles Frohman, objected to his sub-title *The Boy Who Could Not Grow Up,* perhaps thinking that it sounded as if Peter had an infirmity which prevented him turning into an adult. Instead, he insisted on the subtle but critical modification to *The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (Foster). The play deals with the natural transition between childhood and growing up. Peter is determined to remain a child forever.

Working titles in poetry can also give insights into the meaning of the work. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* published in 1922, is a notoriously dense and difficult work. Eliot's working title *He Do the Police in Different Voices* is taken from Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend:* "You mightn't think it, but Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the Police in different voices" (Dickens ch.16). This is useful information, for it indicates that the poem is made up of a multitude of various kinds of voices and accents, high and low, including voices in German, French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Sanskrit. Scholars have identified around twelve different voices in the poem. One of the voices cites "that Shakespeherian Rag" (ll.128–130). Ragtime songs, or rags, were composed by piecing together scraps of different songs and styles. *The Waste Land* does something very similar. Eliot put the poem together using previously written fragments. The result is several polyvocal, multi-layered conversations which seem to be happening at the same time. There is a dramatic quality to the poem, somewhat like a radio play – a dramatic genre which

was not prevalent until later. The poem would have been approached very differently had Eliot stuck to the working title, or entitled it more blandly.

Similarly, an earlier Eliot poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* published in 1915, was originally entitled *Prufrock Among the Women*. Among the women is exactly where the narrator is. It is an interior monologue of an urbane, intellectual man incapable of decisive action, especially when among women. The "overwhelming question" of the poem is the narrator trying to disclose his romantic interest to a woman without spoiling the moment. Prufrock – a comically gauche name – is a reference to a store in St Louis, the home-town of Eliot's youth; the "J. Alfred" is perhaps an autobiographical reference to Eliot's own habit of signing himself "T. Stearns Eliot". The "love song" is ironic, and references Kipling's *The Love Song of Har Dyal* of 1888 (Kipling). Eliot was fond of using references to the native Mississippi river boats of his youth or even music hall songs as (working) titles. With a nod to his St Louis roots, he first considered the title *All Aboard for Natchez Cairo and St Louis*, which eventually became the first part of his more soberly titled 1930 poem *Ash Wednesday*. The original name of his *Four Quartets* (1935–1942) was supposed to be *The Kensington Quartets*, a reference to Eliot's time in that district of London.

Robert Frost's original title for "The Road Not Taken" (1915) – and the source for the title of this paper – was "Two Roads". The road is a metaphor for the journey of life, the fork in the road a decision about which choices to be taken. Both titles are reasonable, but the road NOT taken is the nub of the poem and illustrates the subtle change in focus. The critical point is not what the narrator did, but what he did not do, the road that he did not take, and the regret that this decision occasions when looking back. With each choice you might gain something, but you lose something too.

The rejected, working titles of novels are legion, and similarly provide a myriad of insights into the authors' original thoughts. The history of literature and our perspective of it might have looked very differently had first working titles become the final ones.

First Impressions was completed in 1796, but Jane Austen could not find a publisher until the success of *Sense & Sensibility,* published in 1811. *First Impressions* was significantly revised and refocused, and published as *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, reflecting the societal changes and the aftershocks of the French Revolution felt by Austen's class at the time. An advantageous marriage was seen as a means of ensuring that daughters would maintain their social status. Austen's character refuses to become a mere passive and

decorative marriage object and initially refuses Mr. Darcy's clumsy proposal. Mr. Wickham is nothing like a gentleman, but is a seducer, thus the first impressions of both men are love and dislike. The working title is a valuable lesson about not judging someone at first sight and the benefits of looking within oneself to affect change. *Sense & Sensibility* was worked on as *Elinor and Marianne*; *Northanger Abbey* was formerly *Susan,* then *Catherine*; and, after her death, it was probably Austen's family who chose *Persuasion* over the working title of *The Elliots*.

Leo Tolstoy's iconic *War and Peace* (1869) was first serialised in the journal *Russian Messenger* in 1865 as *The Year 1805*. Oddly, it started life as *All's Well That Ends Well*, in a nod to Shakespeare. The final title is an undoubted refocusing on the major bellicose issues of the book.

D.H Lawrence became infamous world-wide for his watershed, landmark *Lady Chatterley's Lover* published privately in a limited edition in Florence in 1928, and in Paris in 1929, and in an expurgated edition in England in 1932. The book's publisher was the subject of a trial for obscenity, which the publisher won. The objections were largely focused on the story-line of an explicit sexual relationship between a working-class gamekeeper and an upper-class woman, replete with then unprintable four-letter words. The original title was *John Thomas and Lady Jane*, hardly a safer choice, as these were current slang terms for male and female genitalia. He had also considered the more neutral *My Lady's Keeper* and *Tenderness*.

Margaret Mitchell played with a number of possibilities, including *Tomorrow is Another Day, Not in Our Stars, Tote the Weary Load, Bugles Sang True, Pansy, Mules in Horses' Harness* before arriving at the memorable *Gone with the Wind*, her first novel, published in 1936. "Gone with the wind" is part of the first line of the third stanza of the poem "Non Sum Qualis Eram Bonae sub Regno Cynarae" by Ernest Dowson. The final title is believed to refer to the destruction of the South's infrastructure and the demise of the way of life in the American South following the surrender of the Confederacy to the Union in the Civil War.

John Steinbeck had the working title *The Salinas Valley* in mind as he wrote *East of Eden*. He had second thoughts about another manuscript that had the admittedly boringly neutral title *Something that Happened*. He decided to be inspired by an allusion to Robert Burns's 1785 poem *To a Mouse* when he changed the title to *Of Mice and Men* in 1937. Obviously the "best laid plans" of his characters, Lennie and George, do not go as planned. Steinbeck may have been forced to reevaluate his whole work when in 1936 his dog, Toby, famously ate – or "made confetti" – of about half of the only copy of the first

draft of *Of Mice and Men*. While shocked and angry, Steinbeck found the time to joke that his dog must have been "acting critically" (Creamer).

J. D. Salinger also turned to Burns with his 1951 *The Catcher in the Rye* ["Gin a body meet a body/Comin thro' the rye"]. His working title was *The Last and Best of the Peter Pans*, a nod to the J. M. Barrie stories as the hero, Holden Caulfield, caught in a world of banality and conformity, appears to be disgusted with the "phony" adult world and seems afraid of growing up into it. He imagines himself as a kind of saviour who protects younger children from the pains of growing up, standing on "the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff…That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all" (Salinger).

Orwell's *The Last Man in Europe* (he was living on the isolated island of Jura at the time and may have felt that he truly was the last man) became *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when published in 1949. The title *Nineteen Eighty- Four* came from inverting the figure 48 from 1948, the year he was writing the novel. Looking 36 years into the future is the key theme in this dystopian novel.

Ray Bradbury's 1953 dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* rather logically started life as *The Fireman* (Bradbury), a short-story published in 1951, as the plot, set-in the near future, is about an oppressive society where books are seen as promoting contradictory ideas, thus perturbing the uncomplicated happiness of the society's citizens. Books and buildings housing them are burned by a special task-force of firemen. 451 degrees Fahrenheit is apparently the temperature at which paper burns.

Strangers From Within was the first title of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* published in 1954. The real Lord of the Flies is the rotting, fly-blown head of a pig placed on a stick by the boys. Beelzebub, is a fallen angel and another name for Satan. Folklore describes Beelzebub as capable of flying, and translated as "Lord of the Flyers" or "Lord of the Flies". The original working title shows us that evil lurks within all of us and is only ever just beneath the surface of "ordinary", civilised people. When the veneer of civilisation is stripped away, this evil, or "devil" comes out among the boys.

Nabokov's *Lolita*, published in 1955, was first entitled *The Kingdom By the Sea*, a reference to Edgar Allen Poe's 1849 poem "Annabel Lee". Critically, the main character, Humbert Humbert, is very aware of having lived in his father's luxurious hotel on the French Riviera, in a sort of kingdom by the Mediterranean Sea. *Lolita* is certainly a more memorable title, and the term has strayed from the original reference to define certain young girls who are "precociously seductive" (Merriam-Webster). Actually, the eponymous twelve-

year-old girl in the novel is called Delores; it is the narrator who nicknames her Lolita.

"Catch 22" has entered into the language as a dilemma where you are damned if you do, and equally damned if you don't. Joseph Heller used *Catch 22* as the title of his 1961 novel, in preference to his working title of *Catch 18* (rejected as too similar to Leon Uris's *Mila 18)* and *Catch 11* as too like *Ocean's Eleven* of 1960. He simply doubled *Catch 11* to *Catch 22*.

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) originally saw the light of day as *Atticus*, referencing the principal character. The final title's meaning is debated, but is believed to refer to that to kill a mockingbird is to destroy innocence, an important focus-shift. An earlier version of the book was presented to the publisher as *Go Set a Watchman*, but this was rejected. The *Watchman* draft is set some twenty years after the plot of *Mockingbird* and features several earlier versions of the characters of *Mockingbird*. It was controversially released in 2015 after the manuscript was believed to have been lost: a claim widely discredited.

It could be argued that some titles outlive the actual works they name. Huxley's titles are taken from several works of literature *The Doors of Perception* is taken from William Blake; *Brave New World* from Miranda's utterance in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Eyeless in Gaza* from Milton. Clive James, the critic, rather cattily observed "[n]owadays, the titles of his books are more alive than his books" (n.p.).

Unforeseen Entitling Accidents

Titles sometimes "happen" for unforeseen reasons. Some titles are not initially given by the author but are formed accidently. The original title of Ionesco's original 1950 "pseudo-play", *English Made Easy* (probably named after his English school textbook in Romania), and later *The English Hour*, was changed to *The Bald Soprano*, or *La Cantatrice Chauve*, due to when the actor playing The Fire Captain stumbled with his lines by saying "une cantatrice chauve" (a bald soprano) rather than "une institutrice blonde" (a blond schoolteacher). Ionesco kept this blunder as the final title. This surrealist touch is an example of a disambiguating title.

Maurice Sendak's highly successful children's book *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak) was originally to be entitled *Where the Wild Horses Are,* but Sendak had to admit "I couldn't draw horses". His publisher asked him what he could

draw, and he replied that he could draw "things" (Grant), so the book became about those monster-things, and sold 19 million copies.

An unforeseen event happened to Don DeLillo when he attempted to publish his *Panasonic*. Matsushita Electrical Industrial Co., Ltd. controlled the trademark and insisted that he change it. He changed it to *White Noise* (1985).

Camouflage

A working title can be used as a mechanism to hide a playwright's intentions from the outside world. At the height of his fame, Oscar Wilde knew that his fans and critics would be insatiably curious to know the subject of his next play. His working title was *Lady Lancing*, which changed into *The Importance of Being Earnest – A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*, first performed in 1895. There is no Lady Lancing character in the play, so the working title was total camouflage.

Taking an idea from his Irish compatriot who influenced him greatly, James Joyce used the neutral, smoke-screen working title of *Work in Progress* (leaving out the all-important article "a") over many of the seventeen years he worked on it. He believed that the title of the work should not precede the work itself, and that the work was constantly "in progress" as it was an entirely new way of writing. In the twenties and thirties, he published fragments of the work with various titles for the snippets, as an ongoing, accretive process of entitling, the fragments gradually building up to a finished work. In 1939, he came to use the final title *Finnegans Wake*, taken from "Finnegan's Wake" an Irish-American folk song. A large section of the first chapter of the book is a retelling of the story from the song.

J.K. Rowling planned to publish *Harry Potter and the Doomspell Tournament*, but the working title was leaked to the press, so she changed *Doomspell* to *Triwizard*. Then, to completely foil the paparazzi, the working title was changed to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.

Sub-Titles

Sub-titles or alternative titles to the main one have been popular even since Shakespeare's time. Consider the first (quarto) edition of *Romeo and Juliet* in

1597: "An EXCELLENT conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely, by the right Honourable the L. of Hunsdon his Servants" (Xhignesse 5). The first folio of 1623 simply refers to it as the *Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet,* and just *Romeo and Juliet* in the table of contents. The sub-title certainly acts as an advertisement.

Authors sometimes opt for a secondary or sub-title, perhaps in an attempt to draw readers in, to explain what a book is about, or to amplify the original title. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is sub-titled *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World.* Defoe appears keen to convince the reader of the verity of his 1719 *Robinson Crusoe*. Its title in-full is:

> *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who Lived Eight and Twenty Years, All Alone in an Un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, Near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having Been Cast on Shore by Shipwreck, Wherein All the Men Perished but himself.*

It was in fact based on the experiences of Alexander Selkirk, who lived as a castaway on a Pacific island for four years.

Dickens's working title for *David Copperfield* was *Mag's Diversion*. He particularly excelled himself as he finally entitled it *David Copperfield: The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Intended To Publish on Any Account)*. In fact, Dickens toyed with at least fourteen working titles for *David Copperfield*. Working under the pseudonym Boz, Dickens sub-titled *Oliver Twist* with *The Parish Boy's Progress* when it was serialised in 1837 to 1839, and when it was published in a three-volume book in 1838. Dickens enjoyed toying with titles. His *Bleak House* (1852) went through a number of iterations as *Tom-All-Alone's*, a London slum*, The Solitary House (That Never Knew Happiness)*, *The East Wind*, and, very aptly, *The Ruined House That Got Into Chancery and Never Got Out*. Dickens originally worked with *Little Dorritt* (1857) as *Nobody's Fault*. These subtitles were as descriptive as publishers' advertising blurbs.

Some authors like to use chapter titles to add another layer to the reading experience, and (re)orient the reader at distinct parts of the book. For example, in Annie Proulx's 1994 *The Shipping News* each chapter is titled with a mariner's term along with a definition or description. The third chapter begins with the title *Strangle Knot* which somehow reflects the complicated situation in the chapter and adds an air of historical authenticity to the novel. Chapter titles, if used, should best be in harmony with the book's settings and direction.

Empirical Studies

Can potential readers' reactions to working or final titles be empirically measured? A search of the literature failed to identify any empirical studies which attempt to monitor readers' preferential responses about whether either working or final titles hold more weight, or that the impact of working titles might be under or overstated. However, there have been a few studies looking at the effectiveness of book titles and why potential readers might be drawn to certain buzz words in working or final titles as more appealing than neutral titles.

In one 2020 study, the highest-rated reactions from the 335 college students tested were titles containing one or more of five buzz words encapsulating four theories: *social stimulation* allowing us access to the *minds* of others, *gossip*, *inherent morality*, and *pre-existing themes* which are pleasurable, such as status and sex. Titles containing words related to any of these (Minds, Gossip, Morality, Pleasure) were rated higher than control group titles. These buzz words included such examples as: memories, perception, rumour, reputation, scandal, gossip, warmth, taboo, power and money. When asked to recall (short) titles after a delay, the gossip-related ones were preferential, especially to females. The titles related to minds and mental states were recalled less frequently than the others. Some buzz words, it might be argued, straddle multiple categories, but it is clear that certain words attract the reader's eye more than others. As Pinker argues "When we are absorbed in a book … we get to see breathtaking landscapes, hobnob with important people, fall in love with ravishing men and women, protect loved ones, attain impossible goals, and defeat wicked enemies". Thus "book titles should be particularly appealing when they advertise the pleasures they contain" (Barnes and Black 7-8) and where they "encourage participants to imagine what the story might be like" (20).

A Note of Caution

Genette cautions that frequently "the relation between the title and the subject matter as a whole is highly variable" (Genette *Paratexts* 76). For Maiorino, even though "'good' titles are as significant as 'good' texts", not all titles can be considered critical. He writes "the value of many titles is merely indexical" (Maiorino). Somewhat cynically, Lodge muses that "[p]erhaps titles always

mean more to authors than to readers, who, as every writer knows, frequently forget or garble the names of books they claim to admire" (Lodge 195–196). It is undoubtedly true that the title of a novel, however garbled, is known to more people than those who have read the text. Symes similarly warns that "titles can be duplicitous; their hermeneutic can, on occasions, be negative as well as positive" (23). Viezzi concurs, "titles should therefore be handled with care as they may be untrustworthy and deceptive" (376). He quotes Boris Vian's *Autumn in Peking* which has nothing to do with autumn nor Peking. *The Three Musketeers* is in reality a tale about the fourth musketeer and central character, d'Artagnan. Symes quotes Mozart's *Paris Symphony*, which is not about Paris, but where he composed it. For T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, he reused the title of an abandoned book about seven Middle Eastern cities, the published book having little to do with pillars of wisdom.

Symes cautions about "ill-conceived" titles (19) or careless titles which are "framed with no exegetical intentions at all, as afterthoughts, as mere necessary appendages, and their content is more one of accident than design" (24). Genette also sounds a warning that the title might outshine the actual literary work, "what one must necessarily fear and avoid is the possibility that [a title's] seductiveness will work too much in its own favour, at the expense of its text". He continues "let's not polish our titles too much – or, as Cocteau neatly put it, let's not spray too much perfume on our roses" (*Paratexts* 94).

Conclusion

A title – whether finally retained or not – provides a door into the author's thoughts. It is frequently illuminating and profitable to investigate any known working titles in order to obtain insights into the author's original intentions, how they might illuminate otherwise obscure references hidden in the work, highlight where publishers may have altered the title to make the work more marketable, and to monitor where the author might have changed emphasis in opting for a new, definitive title. The title change (re)guides our interpretation, alters our seeing, listening, and reading of the work in question. "The title inevitably affects the way in which users approach a cultural product…Any change in the title will therefore necessarily change the product itself and its perception and interpretation". Genette poses the question about "how Joyce's *Ulysses* would be read if it were not entitled *Ulysses*"; Maiorino parries by asking how *Ulysses* should be read *just because* it is entitled *Ulysses* (377).

Characteristically, Joyce was pre-emptively declaring the literary importance of *Ulysses* by deliberately identifying the title with an epic.

Lodge concludes "[t]o some extent, a novel…with a 'different' title is a 'different' novel" (Lodge 382). Symes agrees that:

> Different titles can result in the same prose elements being apprehended dissimilarly, thus indicating the power of the title in the formation of meaning and sense. The title, it seems, has the power to influence the direction of meaning and shifting interpretations in one direction rather than another, and modulating the reception of texts and artifacts (23).

Fisher could have included "working titles" when he writes that "attending to titles, even subtitles, is in some instances absolutely essential to understanding, evaluation and interpreting…titles are names which function as guides to interpretation" (288). Titles can act "dualistically, both identifying and interpreting at the same time" (Symes 19). Working titles and titles are "a critical element in the fixation of meaning" (22), and well worth the reader's attention as they are obviously "more than mere labels" (25).

Tracking the evolution of a literary title, from its working inception to its final form, often furnishes profound insights into an author's creative journey and intent. Readers and scholars would profit immensely by delving deeper into the study of working titles and their significant implications in the enhanced understanding of literary works. After all, the title is "the seed that contains the tree" (Maiorino).

Works Cited

Albee, Edward. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Penguin Vintage Classics, 2001.

Barnes, J. L., & Black, J. E. "What's in a Name? Book Title Salience and the Psychology of Fiction", *Psychology of Aesthetics and Creativity and the Arts,* 2020 16 (2).

Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

---. *The Little White Bird*. Dodo Press, 2005.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Simon & Schuster, 2012.

---. *The Fireman*. Galaxy Science Fiction, 1951.

Brater, Enoch. *The Essential Samuel Beckett*. Thames & Hudson, 2003.

Burns, Robert. *Selected Poems*. Penguin Classics, 1994.

Creamer, Ella. "Of Mice and Men first-draft fragment torn up by Steinbeck's dog goes to auction". *The Guardian,* 29 September 2003.
Dickens, Charles. *Our Mutual Friend.* Penguin Classics, 1998.
Eliot, T.S. *Inventions of the March Hare.* Edited by Christopher Hicks. Harcourt Brace, 1996.
---. *Collected Poems.* Faber and Faber, 1974.
Esslin, Martin. http://www.Samuel-Beckett.net/Esslin.html, 1962. Accessed January 12, 2025.
Fisher, John. "Entitling", *Critical Enquiry* 1984 11.2, pp.286–289.
Foster, Tim. "10 Things You May Not Know About Peter Pan". Celebrations Press, 2018.
Frost, Robert. *Selected Poems.* Penguin Books, 1955.
Genette, Gerard. *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation.* Cambridge University Press, 1997.
---. "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature." Translated by Bernard Crampe. *Critical Inquiry,* 1988 vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 692–720.
Grant, Tracy. "Children See Themselves in late author Maurice Sendak's 'Wild Things' characters", *The Washington Post,* 8 May 2012.
Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies.* Faber and Faber, 1954.
Heller, Joseph. *Catch 22.* Simon & Schuster, 2011.
Hoek, Leo, K. *Le Marque du Titre: Dispositifs Semiotiques d'Une Pratique Textuelle.* Walter de Gruyter, 1980.
Ionesco, Eugene. *The Bald Soprano, and Other Plays, Trans. Donald M. Allen.* Grove Press, 1982.
James, Clive. "Aldous Huxley, Short of Sight", *The New Yorker,* 17 March 2003.
Johnson, Alex. "The Book List: The Alternative Titles F Scott Fitzgerald considered for 'The Great Gatsby'", *The Independent,*11 September 2018.
Kipling, Rudyard. *Plain Tales from the Hills.* Penguin Classics, 2011.
Leavis, F. R. *Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero: or The Sentimentalist's Othello.* Routledge, 1988.
Lee, Harper. *Go Set a Watchman.* Arrow/Penguin, 2016.
---. *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Arrow, 2010.
Levin, H. "The Title as a Literary Genre", *The Modern Language Review* 1977 vol. 72, no. 4, pp.xxiii–xxxvi.
Levinson, Jerrold. "Titles", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1985 vol. 44, no .1, pp.29–39.

Livermore, Ann. *Artists and Aesthetics in Spain*. Tamesis Books,1988.
Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*. Viking Penguin, 1992.
Maiorino, Giancarlo. *First Pages: A Poetics of Titles*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.
McCourt, Frank. https://quotefancy.com>top-100-frank-mccourt-quotes/, 2025. Accessed February 15 2025.
Merriam-Webster Dictionary Revised Edition. Merriam-Webster, 2022.
Miller, Arthur. "Walking with Arthur Miller", https://www.newyorker.com>culture>arthur-miller, March 1 2012. Accessed January 10 2025.
---. *Collected Plays*. Viking Press, 1957.
Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. Pan Macmillan, 2022.
Newby, Eric. *A Short Walk in the Hindu Cush*. Harper Press, 2010.
Patterson, Amanda. https://www.writerswrite.co.za>literary-birthday-24-June-Mary-Wesley, 2018. Accessed January 9 2025.
Perloff, Marjorie. "In Love with Hiding': Samuel Beckett's War". Iowa Review, 2005 35, no 2, pp. 76–103.
Petronius. *The Satyricon*. Penguin Classics, 2012.
Pinter, Harold. *Harold Pinter Plays: One*. Faber and Faber, 1991.
Proulx, E. Annie. *The Shipping News*. Simon & Schuster, 1994.
Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Penguin Books, 2013.
Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. Random House, 2001.
Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Penguin Classics, 2016 (Act II/Sc.II).
---. *Romeo and Juliet*. Penguin Books, 2015 (Act I, Scene.II).
Shaper, Benjamin. "The Importance of the Literary Title and Its Implications for Translation Theory." *Focus on German Studies,* University of Cincinnati Press, 2013 vol. 20, pp. 101–114.
Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. Penguin, 2014.
Symes, Colin. "You Can't Judge a Book by its Cover: The Aesthetics of Titles and Other Epitextual Devices." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1992 vol. 26, Number 3, Fall.
The Poe Encyclopedia. Edited by Frederick S. Frank and Anthony Magistrale. Greenwood Press, 1997.
Viezzi, Maurizio. "Titles and Translation." *Point of View as Challenge,* VAKKI Publications 2004 2, Vaasa (374–384).
Wilde, Oscar, https://www.oscarwilde.org.uk>chapter 7/ Accessed January 15 2024.
Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Penguin, 2009.

Wilsmore, S.J. "The Role of Titles in Identifying Literary Works." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 1987, 45.4, pp. 403–408.
Xhignesse, Michel-Antoine. "Entitled Art: what makes titles names?" *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 2018, 97 3, pp. 437–450.

IAN BUTCHER is an independent scholar with dual UK/Belgian citizenship. He has degrees from the University of Kent, the University of York, and the Open University in the UK. He worked as a *lecteur d'anglais* at the University of Nice in France. He has published a number of academic articles, including on T. S. Eliot, Annie Ernaux, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. His career includes teaching at school and university level, executive training establishments and at various institutions of the EU. He was Senior Vice President and Board member of an international management consulting company. He lives in Belgium and Denmark with his Danish wife.
ian.butcher@hotmail.com