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**The Poetics of Titles:
Further Discriminations**

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One of the chief virtues of Anglo-American formalism is to have institutionalized criticism as a discipline based on argument and intensive textual analysis, rather than on opinionated Judgement and authoritative impressionism. As a classroom methodology, however, practical criticism has evolved elaborate strategies for dealing with the text itself, but none for scrutinizing the element which identifies such texts and, from a prospective standpoint, stands at the threshold of literary appreciation. Such a lacuna may indeed have to do with the entire debate concerning intentionality, and will not be entered upon here. It is nevertheless worth noting that this insufficiency is now on the way to being remedied through the conceptualisations of what has come to be termed "titology", the overall aim of which is to establish a poetics of titles.¹

I should like to start this study of the titular unit by recalling the very example Gérard Genette uses in his study on the structure and functions of literary titles.² Genette samples the title of a philosophic tale by Voltaire – *Zadig, ou la destinée, histoire orientale* – and he identifies in this entitling unit three basic constituents:

Title: Zadig (hereafter abbreviated T)

Sub-Title: ou la destinée (hereafter abbreviated S)

Generic Indicator: histoire orientale (hereafter abbreviated G)

These paradigmatic categories have actually been evolved by Genette in the-wake of earlier formulations made by Claude Duchet and Leo Hoek. I should like to supplement Genette's categories and discriminate further the structure and functions of literary titles by proposing a basic taxonomy of entitling patterns. To begin with I should like to chart the combinatory dynamics of those constituents identified by Genette. The interplay of these generates six potential entitling patterns which may be formulated as follows:

1 T: Title

2 TS: Title + Subtitle

- Indicator
- 3 TG: Title + Generic Indicator
 - 4 TSG: Title + Subtitle + Generic
 - 5 GS: Generic Indicator + Subtitle
 - 6 G: Generic Indicator Title

Now, it goes without saying that not all of these patterns are equally exploited, although it would seem that the patterns most frequently used are 1 and 2. In the light of the above taxonomy, it becomes also evident that two of the entitling components -- namely T and G -- can operate as autonomous units, whereas the 'subtitling' constituent is a dependent and subservient category. In section 1 of the appendix -- with the exception of the all too frequent pattern no. 1 -- I have attempted to provide examples of literary titles for each of these patterns:

1.1 = TS

1.2 = TG

1.3 = TSG

1.4 = GS

1.5 = G

This would then seem to be the range of combinatory possibilities available for literary entitling, on the basis of Genette's contribution. There are however a number of reservations one could formulate concerning the latter, chiefly on account of its rather vague and heterogeneous nature. For instance, it is somehow perplexing to find that a study specifically concerned with evolving a theory of *literary* titles should again and anon call upon titles from other discourses -- particularly criticism, philosophy and music -- whenever its argument fails to cohere. Furthermore, the categories of title and generic indicator are, in Genette's system in need of further discrimination. Thus if we consider section 1.1, we would find that as subtitles perform the function of glossing over the main titular unit, they tend usually to be signalled by specific markers, either typographical (a colon and a semi-colon, in this instance) or lexical ('or' in this case). This distinction can by itself allow us to introduce a further distinction in the category of subtitles. Those subtitles which are introduced by a typographical marker can be designated as **explanatory subtitles**, whereas those which are introduced by a lexical particle may be labelled **alternative titles**. In actual fact, the presence of markers may not always be necessary for the sequencing of the entitling constituents on the titular chain. One need only think, for example, of that long succession of Romantic

odes entitled 'Ode on...', or 'Ode to...', in order to realise how redundant the subtitling marker can sometimes be. In this occurrence, what seems to call for scrutiny is chiefly the meaningful order of the entitling components on the titular chain; for the prioritising of either the generic indication or the subjectal component has interpretative implications which cannot be ignored in a close reading context. If we were to consider the examples of Coleridge's and Keats's odes, in sections 1.2. and 1.4 , then it seems quite pertinent that each of the two poets should have chosen to identify the generic component of his title either by relegating it to the status of 'sub-titular' generic indicator, or by foregrounding it to the extent of fusing title and subtitle all into one single unit. The notion of generic indicator, as used by Genette, needs for its part, to be genre and period specified. Thus, if we take the examples of 'Hyperion' and 'Kubla Khan', it needs little disputation to maintain that my own categorisation of 'fragment' as a generic indicator, is actually a post-Romantic conceptualisation, given the fact that Romantic poetics did not include any generic category specifically known as 'the fragment'. Rather, in the context of a poetics dominated by the notion of organicity and marked by a daring spirit of formal experimentation, the term seems to have been used to signal a state of textual unresolvedness, rather than any generic indication.

Again, if we were to adhere strictly to Genette's typology, we would find that our framework fails to account, for example, for such an extensively-compound title as Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* which heads section 2.1. Therefore, if those subtitles introduced by 'or' were to be taxonomised as something more than mere sub-units; we could then have an additional entitling pattern which may tentatively be called the pattern of potentially **reversible titles**. Section 2.1 provides further examples of this category.

If we return to the three minimal constituents we have identified at the beginning of this paper, namely the **title**, the **subtitle**, the **generic indicator**, we may see that different functions tend to be attached to them. The title and the subtitle generally specify what is talked about, the subject of the text so to speak. The generic indicator, on the other hand, addresses the manner or form in which the text is being articulated and in terms of which conventions it is to be scrutinised and appreciated. The distinctive attributions attached to the titular categories were initially formulated by Leo Hoek who discriminates actually between what he calls the subjectal and the objectal function of titles, with the first being the domain of titles and sub-titles, and the second that of generic indicators.³ Gérard Genette has not innovated much in this respect: as he openly acknowledges his own distinctions derive from Hoek, with the difference that he introduces a slightly confusing terminology. Objectal and subjectal are, for him, equated with the thematic and thematic functions of literary titles.⁴

At the beginning of this paper, I referred to the institutionalised discipline of practical criticism as a classroom methodology, and if I have chosen to recall these terms in this context, it is in order to highlight the immediate relevance of a poetics of titles for pedagogical purposes. I should therefore like to suggest that the subjectal function of titles is still too broad a category, and that for considerations, at once theoretical and practical, it calls for further distinctions. The taxonomising of the subjectal function I am about to offer is based on the classical divisions of literary discourse into the narrative, the dramatic, and the lyric. Now, it is hardly contentious to claim that underlying these minimal, and by no means exclusive, distinctions is the element of fiction, or make-belief.⁵ Accordingly, one could identify the subjectal sub-functions of titles with reference to the basic components of fiction-making, and by correlation with the element of fiction literary titles tend to foreground. As a reminder, these elements include: the plot; characterisation; setting; point of view; theme; atmosphere; use of language, etc. Sections 3 to 7 list titles under these different headings, although each category deserves to be commented on separately.

Section 3.1. lists texts which are identified by the name of their protagonists; these we may call **eponymous** titles. What is interesting about these however is the mode of address and the interpretative implications it has. We may thus compare *Jude the Obscure* and *The Great Gatsby*, or again *Hoed Gabber*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *Miss Julie*. In each case there are obvious differences with corollary implications attached to each of them. Sometimes however, characters are not named as such, but are anonymously referred to according to the position they are assigned in the entitled text so that the position tends to encapsulate the character and have precedence over her/him, as section 3.2. indicates.

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 lists titles which foreground the element of the setting. Section 4.1 identifies examples which highlight the temporal element, and 4.2 examples which give prominence to the locale of the conflict. These functions may be labelled respectively, **temporal** and **topographical**, and as the 'Delta Autumn' and *Burmese Days* show, they are not exclusive. One may furthermore note, that the afore-cited examples are indicative of atmosphere as much as they denote time and place.

Section 5 lists titles which are meant to focus the attention of the reader on some major incident in the plot. The function of such titles may be called **incidental**.

Section 6, the one for which I have the shortest number of examples, includes titles the function of which is to specify the viewpoint adopted. Yet, this section seems of particular interest, insofar that it reveals the limitations of the subjectal/objectal distinctions. For the titles in this section combine both functions, with no need for a generic signaling for that matter. Thus *A View from the Bridge* highlights the authorized theme of Arthur Miller's play as much as the dramatic perspective (i.e., the objectal strategies) involved in enacting that theme. Those generic indicators which carry implications beyond those of structural form also exemplify the limitations of the subjectal/objectal dichotomy. Thus if 'sonnet,' 'novella,' and 'short story,' generate chiefly generic expectations and hence clearly fulfil an objectal function, other indicators such as 'ballad,' 'elegy,' and even 'ode' enact at once objectal and subjectal functions. For instance the subtitle of Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad' excites formal as well as subjectal expectations in terms of atmosphere, characterisation, theme, etc. The same type of analysis could likewise apply to 'The Rape of the Lock' or 'Liquids' or 'Thirsts'.

Section 7, finally, catalogues items which have for a common denominator a focus on the theme of the texts proposed. In this section, more perhaps than in any of the preceding ones, the extent to which titles read as straightforward statements of literary intention appears most clearly. One could, for instance, speculate whether the reception of *Heart of Darkness* (1902) would have been different had it been entitled, say, *The Intended*, or *Marlow*, or *The Nellie*, or *The Jungle*.

The remaining three sections 8, 9, and 10 supplement each of the above distinctions and specify the textual nature of the entitled texts either with reference to other texts, or with reference to painting and music. In section 8, it appears evident that identification of the allusion behind the title provides a necessary intertextuality, the ignorance of which would seriously undermine the interpretative range of any close reading. If we may take the case of Joyce's *Ulysses* for example, it seems clear enough that the title refers to no particular person in the narrative, yet identification of the Homeric prototype raises Leopold Bloom to the level of an Odyssean figure. Again, our understanding of Hopkins's "Heaven-Haven" becomes all the richer, once we realize that this title is itself a discrete echo from another meditative poem by another poet and priest. The poet is George Herbert, and the source of the echo in the last line of his poem entitled 'The Size'. Section 9 seems to be self-explaining and will allow me to move to the last section for a few comments. First, it would appear that Beethoven is the greatest inspirer of literary titles, just as it is seems clear that musical entitling can be playfully handled by poets and yield a witty title such as the one of

Edwin Morgan's latest collection, *Themes on a Variation* (1987).

As this analysis has implicitly been predicated on the authors' right to choose intentionally the structure and function of their titles, it is nonetheless necessary to point out the fallacy of allowing authorial entitling strategies to dictate and frame interpretative orientations. In other words, the analysis of literary titles should not be limited to the hypothesised authorial intentions (though these would surely have to be taken into account), since there may be a variety of unintended implications and connections that may arise out of the analysis of a titular structure and enhance its functions.⁶ Finally, if the

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pedagogical applications of a poetics of titles belong with the institutionalized discipline of practical criticism, it would not perhaps be pretentious to suggest that as a rising discipline, 'titology' could possibly develop through period and genre specific studies, and that such an investigation could likewise cover the works of individual authors and even the canon of national literatures, thereby paving the way to what could be a further development of a poetics of titles -- comparative 'titology'.⁷

NOTES

1. A poetics of titles, as Gerard Genette has observed, needs to be articulated within the larger context of the 'paratext', namely all those elements --aural and visual-- which stand at the periphery of the text and are constitutive of its ontology. See Gérard Genette (1988), *Seuils*, Paris, Seuil.
2. Gérard Genette (1988), 'The structure and functions of literary titles', trans. Bernard Cramp, in *Critical Inquiry* 14: pp. 692-720. I am also indebted in this study to Harry Levin's (1977) 'The title as a literary genre', in *Modern Language Review* 72: pp. xxii-xxxvi.
3. Leo Hoek (1981), *La marque du titre: dispositifs sémiotiques d'une pratique textuelle*. The Hague, Mouton, pp. 99-142.
4. Note also Brown and Yule's distinction between 'topic' and 'theme' and their description of the thematising function of titles, in: (1983) *Discourse Analysis* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 139-40.
5. Even in the most autobiographical types of lyrical poetry, the speaker has still recourse to the fictional mode by casting her/himself into the guise of poet and creating an audience before whom s/he pours forth her/his artful effusion.
6. Among such considerations, especially in the present age, would be the market constraints which make some titles more saleable than others. Hemingway, for instance, altered the American title of *The Sun Also Rises* to *Fiesta* when the novel came to be scheduled for distribution to the British and European market. These constraints help also account for the vogue of titles with Biblical echoes that were characteristic of the American novel in the early decades of this century. These include such canonical items as *The Sound and the Fury*, *East of Eden*, *The House of Mourning*.
7. This orientation seems already to have been pointed to by Helen Gardner's 'The titles of Donne's poems', in Vittorio Gabriele (ed.), (1966), *Friendship's Garland: Essays Presented to Maio Praz*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, vol. 1, pp. 189-207. See also John Hollander's study of entitling in 17th century poetry, "'Haddock's eyes': A note on the theory of titles", in (1975) *Vision and Resonance*, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, pp. 212-26; as well as E A Levenston (1978), 'The significance of the title in lyric poetry', *Hebrew University Studies in Literature* 6: 63-87.

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APPENDIX

1.1: TS

The Prelude: The Growth of a Poet's Mind

Biographia Literaria: Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions.

'Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil'

Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude.

Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions

Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh

1.2: TG

"Dejection: An Ode"

La Nausée, roman

'Michael: A Pastoral Poem'

'La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad'

'Manfred: A Dramatic Poem'

Endymion: A Poetic Romance

'Hyperion: A Fragment'

'The Eagle: A Fragment'

1.3: TSG

'Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment'

1.4.: GS

'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood'

'Ode on Melancholy'

'Ode to the West Wind'

'Sonnet to the River Otter'

'Ode to Duty"

1.4:G

Cantos
Mu'alaqat
Elemental Odes (Neruda)
Poetical Sketches
Ruba'iyat
Journals
'Elegiac Stanzas'
Autobiography

2

Slaughterhouse-Five or the Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death
Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded
Candide ou l'optimisme
Twelfth Night, or What You Will

3.1

'Lycidas'
Lolita
The Great Gatsby
Hedda Gabler
Jude the Obscure
Don Juan
Mrs Dalloway
Anna Karenina
Miss Julie
'Ozymandias'
Madame Bovary
'Tithonus'

3.2

'The Daughters of the Late Colonel'
The Confidence Man
Awladu Ha-ratine (Naguib Mahfouz, *The Children of Gebelawi*)
The Caretaker
The Assistant
The Collector
The Secret Agent
Six Characters in Search of an Author (Pirandello)

4.1

1984
'England in 1819' (Shelley)
The Day it Rained For Ever
'Delta Autumn' (Faulkner)
'Easter, 1916' (Yeats)
'September 1, 1939' (Auden)
Burmese Days
'Sunday Morning' (Stevens)
Season of Migration to the North (Tayib Saleh)

4.2

District of Columbia (Dos Passos)
Winesburg Ohio
The House of the Seven Gables
In a German Pension (Mansfield)
The Heights of Macchu Picchu (Neruda)
'To Room No 19' (Lessing)
'Mont Blanc'
'Araby'
The Cherry Orchard

5

The Iceman Cometh
An Inspector Calls
The Return of the Native
One Day in the Life of Ivan D.
'The Garden Party'
The Caucasian Chalk Circle
'The Journey of the Magi'
The Fall of Hyperion

6

A View from the Bridge
La Jalousie (Robbe-G.)
'Twenty Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' (Stevens)
In the Labyrinth (Robbe-Orillet)
Labyrinths (Borges)

7

The Waste Land
Heart of Darkness
The Less Deceived (Larkin)
The Age of Anxiety
Le Rouge et le Noir
The Importance of Being Earnest
Hunger (Hamsun)
Bliss

8

For Whom the Bell Tolls
Ulysses
'Heaven-Haven'
A Dance to the Music of Time
The House of Mirth (Wharton)
'Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came'
Tender Is the Night
Brave New World
Things Fall Apart
Of Human Bondage
Hemlock and After (Wilson)

9

Group Portrait with Lady (Böll)
'The Bouquet' (Stevens)
The Picture of Dorian Gray
Human Landscapes (Hikmet)

10

Four Quartets
Moderato Cantabile (Duras)
'The Kreutzer Sonata' (Tolstoy)
'Variations on a Summer Day' (Stevens)
The Ghost Sonata (Strindberg)
Requiem (Akhmatova)
Themes on a Variation
La symphonie pastorale
Radetzky March (Roth)
Chamber Music (Joyce)
Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence (Brecht)

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