Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature

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Definitions

The definition of the title in literature raises several problems, more perhaps than any other element of the paratext, and requires an effort of analysis. The title, or rather the “title apparatus,” as it has been known to us since the Renaissance (I will return later to its prehistory), is in fact quite often not so much a true element as a fairly complex system whose complexity is not due necessarily to its length. Some very long titles of the classical period, such as the original one of Robinson Crusoe, which we will examine later, were of a relatively simple nature. A much shorter word group, like Zadig ou la Destinée, Histoire orientale, forms, as we shall see, a more complex compound.

One of the founders of modern title science (“titrologie”), Leo Hoek, writes correctly that the title as we understand it today is in fact, at least
with respect to ancient and classical intitulations, a construct, an artifact created for reception or commentary. It is arbitrarily carved—by the readers, the public, the critics, the booksellers, the bibliographers, . . . and the title specialists ("titrologues") that we are, or that we may happen to be—on the graphic and iconographic material of a "title page" or a book cover. That material may contain much additional information that the author, the editor, and the public would not have distinguished as clearly as we do now. Once the author's name, the dedicatee's, the editor's, the publisher's name and address, the date of printing, and other preliminary information have been set aside, the convention has been gradually established to retain as title a more restricted set of words, but one that remains to be analyzed if we truly wish to identify its constituent elements. The terms of this analysis have raised a discussion between Leo Hoek and Claude Duchet, which I will summarize simply as follows.

Let us consider the title already mentioned, known today as *Zadig*. Hoek proposed (using other examples) to consider the first part—before the comma—as the "title," and the rest as the "subtitle." Duchet judged rightly that such an analysis was too simple and proposed to distinguish three elements in this set: "the title" *Zadig*; the "second title," marked here by the conjunction *ou* (and elsewhere by a comma, a new line, or some other typographic means), *ou la Destinee*; and the "subtitle," generally introduced by a term of generic definition, here of course *Histoire orientale*. Hoek took this suggestion into account, but, dissatisfied with the rather

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2. The original title was, in 1747, *Memmon, Histoire orientale*. The present title appeared in 1748.

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awkward term “second title” (borrowed from the early nineteenth-century terminology), he counterproposed a new categorization for the same analysis: “title” (Zadig), “secondary title” (ou la Destinée), and “subtitle” (Histoire orientale).

Wishing to contribute to the brief history of title science, I would argue that the difference in terminology between “secondary title” and “subtitle” is too weak for the mind to grasp; and since, as Duchet has noted, the principal feature of his “subtitle” is to contain a more or less explicit generic indication, it would be simpler and more evocative to rebaptize it as such, thereby freeing the term “subtitle” to resume its usual present meaning. Hence these three terms: “title” (Zadig), “subtitle” (ou la Destinée), “generic indication” (Histoire orientale). This is the most complete state of a de facto system in which the only mandatory element, in our present culture, is the first one. Nowadays, we find most frequently incomplete combinations, such as title plus subtitle (Madame Bovary, Moeurs de province) or title plus generic indication (La Nausée, roman)—without counting the really simple titles that are reduced to the single “title” element, without subtitle or generic indication, such as Les Mots or, a little differently, statements such as the following, clearly parodic: Victor Shklovskii, Zoo / Letters not about Love / or The Third Heloise.

Complete or not, most titles do not always distinguish their elements so formally, particularly the third, which can easily be incorporated into the second: L’Education sentimentale, Histoire d’un jeune homme; or even into the first: Le Roman de la rose, The Life of Samuel Johnson, Essai sur les moeurs. (The third element can even be the sole component, as in Satires, Elegies, Writings, and others.) When a title is at the same time integrated and of a more or less deviant or original formation (Chroniques du XIXe siècle, subtitle of Le Rouge et le noir,3 Méditations poétiques, Divagations) the generic indications can give rise to uncertainty or controversy: in Ariel ou la vie de Shelley, is “la vie” a disguised indication of genre, a periphrasis for biographie? Is Moeurs de Province in Bovary a simple subtitle or a variation on the generic (Balzacian) formula, Études de moeurs? Depending on one’s answer, this element will be labeled “subtitle” or “generic indication.” But contrary to what it may seem, our concern here is not to label but to identify constituent elements, the role of which—in their constituted groups can be infinitely diversified or nuanced. However, we shall not follow them that far.

In fact, the generic index, with respect to the elements henceforth baptized title and subtitle, is a somewhat heterogeneous ingredient, since the first two are defined formally, and the last one functionally. Despite the inconvenience, it is therefore better to put the last aside for a special study. Let us just keep in mind for the time being that it can either be

3. It was, at least, the one appearing on the general title page. But in the beginning of the first book a recall of the title is accompanied by a new subtitle, Chronique de 1830, inexplicable especially since it contradicts the fiction of the introduction according to which the novel would have been written in 1827. Of course, no comment from the specialists.
the object of a relatively autonomous paratextual element (such as the term "novel" on today's book covers), or it can invest, more or less strongly, the title or subtitle. For the moment, I shall also set aside, along with the study of title functions, the analysis of simple intitulations corresponding to generic indicators, like Satires or Meditations.

Moreover, let us note that as far as the structure of a title reduced to title plus subtitle is concerned, the two elements can be more or less closely incorporated. It can be seen, I suppose, that Ariel ou la vie de Shelley is a more unified double title than Madame Bovary, Moeurs de province, perhaps at least because the conjunction joins more than it separates, whatever the graphic layout of the page adopted by the author and editor. The same is true for Pierre; or, The Ambiguities, Anicet ou le panorama, Blanche ou l'oubli, and some others. Anicet presents an additional peculiarity because Aragon specified that the generic indicator roman was to be integrated into the title (with its original comma). This apparently highly disjunctive group: Anicet / ou le panorama, / roman, must by the author's own choice, function as a whole: Anicet-ou-le-panorama,-roman.

A highly paradoxical case is the one of Le Soulier de satin, whose only subtitle is the remarks the Announcer is to make at each performance. In contrast with customary theatrical practice, the (complete) title exists, I dare say, only orally. But this orality is at once denied or subverted by the typical graphic layout of the text of the prologue: LE SOULIER DE SATIN / OU / LE PIRE N'EST PAS TOUJOURS SUR / ACTION ESPAGNOLE EN QUATRE JOURNÉES, which the Announcer is surely supposed to render with gestures or various vocal modulations.

Our modern era has multiplied the subtleties of the title apparatus. The free play of typography, impossible to transcribe accurately, must certainly reduce bibliographers to despair. The titles of Maurice Roche draw on such a repertory of typeface that I can only evoke them here by description: Circus in illuminated characters; and Codex in a sort of capital Roman script, with the x enlarged as a Greek kappa. I would have even more difficulty saying this title, although no one would notice the absence of the graphic particularity. Conversely the following title by Doubrovsky, Fils, so easy to transcribe, is unpronounceable without the distortion required to force semantic clarification. (Doubrovsky's title can be understood as "Son" and/or "Threads.") Here, one can only manage by means of mouth contortions. We can also see that original arrangements of titles with superimposed elements are too often distorted (started sometimes by the editor on a page that we may well call false title). Consider these examples:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Sade,} & \quad \text{Où,} & \quad \text{Donnant,} & \quad \text{Le soupçon,} \\
\text{Fourier,} & \quad \text{Dire,} & \quad \text{Donnant,} & \quad \text{Le désert,} \\
\text{Loyola,} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

and others.
Simple or complex, the title apparatus mentioned thus far pertains to simple works, or those presented as simple ones, like novels, (Madame Bovary) or collections of works (Satires). These are obviously the most frequent cases, since most collections (of poems, short stories, or essays) are presented as a unified corpus. But it can become more complex when a book is presented as a factitious and purely material collection of works previously published individually or, conversely, when a work published in separate volumes is presented as a part of a larger work. These groupings should not abolish nor even reduce the book’s original specificity or unity.

I said “can become” more complex. It is not inevitable, however, and most collections of more or less complete Poetic Works are presented under a simple title or its equivalent. This is the case, for example, with the First Forty-Nine Stories of Hemingway, which gather three previous collections (In Our Time, Men Without Women, Winner Take Nothing) without indication elsewhere than in the table of contents. But the author may also want to mention in the title the individual works constituting the new collection. One sees then a bi-level title emerging: one of them constitutes the new title of the collection, for example, The Laws of Hospitality, or First Tome, or Poems; the other the list of the collected titles: La Revocation de l’edit de Nantes, Roberte ce soir, Le Souffleur; Douze petits écrits, Le Parti pris des choses, Proèmes, and so on; Du mouvement et de l’immobilité de Douve, Hier régnant désert, and so on.

One could also refuse to unite works in this way, under a common title, when one prefers to retain autonomy. It is rather a confederative process, and one dear, for example, to Michaux: Plume, précédé de lointain intérieur; and to Char: Le Marteau sans maître, suivi de Moulin premier. But these choices do not keep the first title from appearing as the main one—which may not be the desired goal. It is therefore not easy to make several works cohabit in the same book without confusion.

I do not know if general titles imposed afterwards (of the type Tome premier) are currently called “over-title.” But it seems to me that this term should be reserved inversely for sets with several volumes each one having a separate title. This is especially the case for fictional series such as Les Rougon-Macquart, Recherche du temps perdu, Hommes de bonne volonté, and so on. La Comédie humaine, of later grouping and of looser unity, is another isolated case. Until 1834, in fact, each novel or short story of this future group was published individually, as a serial and/or in a volume, and this type of presentation was maintained until the end, concurrently with the publication of smaller subcollections: Scènes de la vie privée (1830), Romans et contes philosophiques (1831), Études de moeurs au XIXe siècle (1835) (already subdivided into Scènes de la vie privée, de la vie de province, de la vie parisienne), Études philosophiques (1835), and finally La Comédie humaine (1842), in which those divisions, and some others, are found in a multi-level construction. For instance, La Cousine Bette is the first episode of Les Parents pauvres, which belongs to the Scènes de la vie parisienne, which belongs to
Études moeurs, which ultimately belongs to La Comédie humaine. This structure appears only in the collective editions of La Comédie humaine, and the innumerable separate editions very often do not even indicate the existence of such a collection. There are, incidentally, other possible ways of collecting works, ways sometimes frankly opposed to the author's intent: for example, according to the chronological order of publication, or to the chronological order of the action. (In one edition of Balzac's works, this was done without taking into account the facsimile reprint of the 1842 Furne edition of the version filled with Balzac's written corrections.) All these variants are made possible by the fact that the order of La Comédie humaine, if it is somehow loosely thematic (witness the hesitation of the author himself), is in any case not chronological.

The collection of Les Rougon-Macquart is of a stronger or more obvious unity, essentially conceived from the beginning. Therefore, the first volume of the series, La Fortune des Rougon, had on its title page, and its cover, the over-title Les Rougon-Macquart, and thus for each volume published during Zola's life. To tell the truth, the situation was even more complex, since the over-title here has its own subtitle (sub-over-title): Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire. One can imagine that the posthumous editions, so numerous and sometimes so cheap (accuracy is generally expensive), of such a popular work, have not always scrupulously respected the layout of the title desired by the author. In order to avoid an exhaustive retrospective inquiry, here is briefly what the present situation is in France: the over-title appears neither in the "Livre de poche," nor in Garnier-Flammarion (GF), nor even, horribile dictu, in the scholarly Garnier edition of Germinal. The only modern collections where it is present are Folio, and of course the Pléiade—which actually is very punctilious the other way, showing on the jacket only the over-title and its subtitle; the list of the novels collected in each volume appears only on the inside of the jacket and on the title page. The diegetic integration is even stronger in La Recherche, since the succession of its parts is regulated only by the chronological thread of the narrator-hero's life, and we know that Proust hoped at the outset to publish his work in a single large volume entitled either À la recherche du temps perdu or Les Intermittences du coeur. Soon resigned to an inevitable division, the author proposed to Eugène Fasquelle, in October 1912, a new book entitled Les Intermittences du coeur and divided into two volumes: Le Temps perdu and Le Temps retrouvé. The Grasset edition was originally to follow this bipartition of Du Côté de chez Swann, Le Côté de Guermantes (note the varied use of the


article which, as we know, Proust especially cared for), and *Le Temps retrouvé*. Those volumes would ideally have been printed without paragraph indentation, even for the dialogues: "Such a procedure retains the flow of the speech much more in the continuity of the text." According to Maurois, it was Louis de Robert who could have convinced him to accept paragraphs, as in the more traditional presentation of the Grasset and Gallimard editions. The division into volumes and paragraphs was obviously accepted as a concession to editorial convention and needs, as Proust attested in two confidences to René Blum: "In order to make a concession to current practice, I shall give a different title to each volume. . . . However, I may put at the top of the cover page a general title such as France did for Histoire contemporaine," and "I give the impression that the first volume is by itself a complete work, like *L'Orme du Mail* in Histoire contemporaine or *Les Déracinés* in *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale." In this way Proust gradually gave up the initial unitary structure for a binary division, then a ternary one, which would later become (in 1918, always under the pressure of circumstances) a division into five "volumes" (*Swann, Jeunes filles, Guermantes, Sodome, Temps retrouvé*), and finally into seven volumes, with the subdivision of *Sodome et Gomorrhe III* into *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive*.

The editorial rendering of this structure (as early as 1913 with Grasset's *Swann*) thus imposed an over-title, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, above the volume title *Du côté de chez Swann*, an arrangement which evidently favored the perception of the volume title to the detriment of the general title. Gallimard preserved this arrangement for the series of fourteen, then fifteen, volumes which constitute the current edition of the "collection blanche," but with a great increase in the body of the general title, which this time gave it the advantage. In 1954, the Pléiade presentation stressed the general title even more, and in recent years, according to the new norms of the collection, the section titles have (as for *Les Rougon-Macquart*) completely vanished from the jacket and the back cover and were relegated to the fourth page. This paratextual development is evidently, even if fortuitously, consonant with Proust's original intent, but perhaps not with his final one. Thus two generations of readers since 1913 have had differing perceptions of Proust's work and thereby differing readings, depending upon whether they perceived it as a series of autonomous works or as a unified group of three volumes under a single title. Of course, as early as the 1960s, the pocket editions inevitably returned to the fragmentation, with a more compact presentation of eight volumes, but aggravated by the book covers which reduced the role of the general

8. Written entirely in capital letters, which avoided a choice in the beginning of *Temps*.
title to a greater and greater extent: in very small characters, under the section title in the Livre de poche; relegated to the back cover in Folio. The highest degree of fragmentation has been reached with the new GF edition. Although directed by an eminent specialist of Proust studies, the three volumes published thus far (La Prisonnière, La Fugitive, and Le Temps retrouvé) make no mention of the entire work except in the text of the “prière d’insérer.” In all cases, of course, the title page, a place which remains from the bibliographic standpoint the most official and perhaps the only responsible placement, makes up for this deficiency. But for the general public such a making-up is a little late, and a bit too discreet. I cannot tell what will be presented to us in editions to come, once the text of La Recherche is totally denationalized. But in a way, the diversity, or even the inconsistency, that can be foreseen will at least have the happy effect of liberating the text from today’s too-canonical presentation, and therefore from a paratext a bit too imperial by virtue of its monopoly.

*Place, Time*

For centuries the title, like the author’s name, had no specific location except, occasionally, in the antique volumnia, where it functions as a sort of label (titulus) more or less attached to the “umbilicus” of the roll, such as in the shops of the Sentier.9 If the first or last lines of the text itself did not mention it in such a way as to make it inseparable from the work’s destiny, as we have seen for the author’s name, its designation was rather a matter of oral transmission, of knowledge from hearsay or the competence of the literate. The invention of the codex between the second and third centuries did not significantly improve the material situation: the text used to begin at the very first page (or its verso after a blank first recto), in the same conditions as in antiquity. The first printed books, which imitated to perfection the appearance of the manuscripts they reproduced, did not yet have what we call a title page. One had to search for the title at the end of the book, the colophon, with the name of the printer and the date of printing: the colophon is indeed in many respects the ancestor, or the embryo, of our editorial paratext. The title page appeared only during the period 1475–1480, and would remain for a long time (until the invention of the printed cover, toward the beginning of the nineteenth century) the sole location of the title, often loaded with some other information, for us, tangential. This page was therefore called simply the title page, and this not by metonymy; our present ideal notion of title gradually emerged from this initial magma, first textual, then paratextual, in which it was embedded without specific status: as when He-

9. The rue du Sentier, next to the Porte St. Denis, is famous as the center of the passementerie (garment trimmings) district in Paris.
rodotus began his work with “Herodotus of Tourioi here presents his research”; or Clari with “Here begins [this is the literal translation of the latin word *incipit*] the story of those who conquered Constantinople.”

In the present order of things, the title almost mandatorily has four locations, somehow redundant: the front cover, the back cover, the title page, and the page of false title which in principle only shows the title in an abbreviated form. But it can still be frequently found on the back cover, and/or in running titles, that is, the ones that appear at the top of each page, a place that the title eventually shares with the chapter titles, current practice being to reserve the upper part of the left page for it. When the cover is obscured by a book jacket, it is inevitably recalled, or better still, announced. I do not know in (modern) literature any equivalent for the end titles, such as those of Debussy’s *Préludes*, which are in fact titles of the parts, the general title appearing in the title of the partition. The most genial exploitation of this multiplicity of location is the one invented by Ricardou for *La Prise de Constantinople* (his own), the title of which changes its form and meaning with his *La Prose de Constantinople*. It may be the only example which shows that the avant-garde have barely experimented with this type of possibility, or rather that the constraints of technical and commercial norms have discouraged them from doing so.

Books with leather bindings (or simili) often omit the title on the cover page, but for obvious reasons retain it on the spine, the only visible part in libraries and often in bookstores, and which today may be, after the title page, the second required location. Required, but not at all insignificant, since it forces revealing abbreviations. (Some old bindings show some provocative ones due to the carelessness of the classical period in this domain or to a choice, sometimes painful, between a horizontal or vertical printing.)

The moment of the title’s appearance does not present any theoretical difficulty: it is the date of publication of the original edition, or occasionally pre-original. To this we find few exceptions or nuances.

Since its knowledge often turns up as the paratext of the scholarly editions, let us not discount the genetic prehistory, or prenatal life, of the title; that is, the author’s own hesitations about his choice, which can be strong and well-nourished: *Les Fleurs du mal* was first entitled *Les Lesbennes* or *Les Limbes*; *Lucien Leuwen*, unfinished though it may be, and the title of which is a posthumous choice, was a hesitation between *L’Orange de Malte*, *Le Télégraphe*, *L’Amarrante et le noir*, *Les Bois de Prémol*, *Le Chasseur vert*, and *Le Rouge et le blanc*. Duchet has counted, in the pre-text (or pre-paratext) of *La Bête humaine* no less than 133 projected possibilities. Zola

10. But the collection “Le Chemin,” in Gallimard, does not have any false title, and this exception may certainly not be unique.
may here hold a kind of record, and his lists are not insignificant at all for the reader, nor for the critic, since they underscore several thematic aspects inevitably sacrificed by the final title. This pre-paratext is very legitimately part of the posthumous paratext.

No well-informed specialist of Proust (not to mention professional Proustologists) today ignores that La Recherche was almost entitled Les Intermittences du coeur or Les Colombes poignardées(!). This is of importance to our reading, as it is to know that Un roi sans divertissement was earlier Charge d'âme. There are thousands of examples, even if some of these pre-titles may not have been for the authors much more than working titles, temporary titles, and manipulated as such, as were (according to Brod) The Trial and The Castle; Work in Progress may have been before it became Finnegans Wake. Even, or especially, as a temporary title, a formula is never entirely insignificant, unless the author relies on a simple call number.

We also know that some authors, inclined in all things to pseudonyms, give their works, even after publication, certain intimate or private nicknames: Stendhal preferred to call Le Rouge et le noir by the name of its hero, Julien, and Les Vies de Haydn . . . by one of the author's pseudonyms, Bombet. And I am not talking about simple abbreviations, or perhaps, in a way, I am: the first work by Chateaubriand is officially entitled Essai historique, politique et moral sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes considérées dans leurs rapports avec la révolution française. We have reduced this title to the form Essai sur les révolutions, but the author himself always abbreviated it as Essai historique. The nuance is not a minor one.

The reverse case, of the title discovered all at once, and often well before the work's subject, is not at all exceptional, and even less indifferent since a preexisting title has every opportunity to act as incipit (see Aragon, or the famous "premier vers" given to Valéry by the gods), that is to say as an inciting mechanism: once the title is present, it remains only for the author to produce a text to justify it, . . . or not. "If I write a story without having found the title, it generally aborts," asserts Giono about Deux cavaliers de l'orage. "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."12

11. Mitterand, in the Pléiade edition (Paris, 1978), specifies that the one of La Bête humaine is the most abundant. He quotes fifty-four other pre-titles for L'Oeuvre, and Colette Becker counted twenty-three for Germinal (Paris, 1980), p. lv. La Curée, L'Argent, and Au bonheur des dames, on the contrary, came to Zola's mind at once. As far as Ventre de Paris is concerned, it was to be first entitled Le Ventre, "which I found broader and more energetic. I yielded to my editor's desires" (Zola to J. Van Santen Kolff, 9 July 1890, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Mitterand, 15 vols. [Paris, 1962–67], 14:1475).

12. See Robert Ricatte, "Les deux cavaliers de l'orage," Travaux de linguistique et de littérature 7, no. 2 (1969): 223. We already know that this is not true for all his works. It remains that one can be inspired by a title, and once the text has been produced, find another one.
But hesitation about the title can continue beyond the submission of the manuscript, and even beyond the first publication. Here, the author is no longer alone (assuming he has been so far); he has to deal with his editor, the public, and sometimes the law. Everyone knows now that without Gallimard, La Nausée was to be entitled Melancholia, and that Proust had to renounce La Fugitive, already used by Tagore, to the temporary advantage of Albertine disparue. Le Cousin Pons had previously been announced to the readers of the Constitutionnel under the title Les Deux musiciens. (I will return later to the reasons given by Balzac for this change.) Innumerable substitutions of this kind, proposed or imposed by editors, will remain forever unknown, but it may happen that the author complains officially, by way of preface, interview, confidence, or private note, and by way of these semidenials that also belong to the paratext. A marginal note in the manuscript of Armance indicates that the title desired by Stendhal was Armance, anecdote du dix-neuvième siècle. The second title was invented by the bookseller. “Without emphasis, without charlatanism, nothing can be sold,” M. Canel [the editor/bookseller] used to say. (What would he say today?) But an author can also insist on a title, and regret it afterwards. This is obviously the case with Flaubert who, having irrevocably imposed L’Éducation sentimentale upon Michel Lévy (“it is the only title that can render the idea of the book”), retreated in his dedication to Henry Meilhac: “The true title should have been Les Fruits secs.” We also know that Proust, in 1920, liked to complain about his title, and regretted the initial choice of Le Temps perdu.

I have said “beyond the first publication,” meaning, however, during the author’s life and with his approval. Thus, Albert Savarus, published under this serial name in 1842, and soon again under this same title in the first tome of La Comédie humaine, which constituted its original edition, reappeared in 1843 in a complete collection under the new heading Rosalie. In the same collection La Muse du département reappeared, under the new title Dinah. The specialists, to my knowledge, do not offer any explanation for these title changes that did not accompany any significant textual changes. It is not the same for the change from Le Dernier Chouan ou la Bretagne en 1800 (1829) to Les Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799 (1834), which actually presented a new text (but the first, as we know, was initially to be entitled Le Gars). The most economical process certainly is the one chosen by Senancour, who published in 1804 an Oberman, then in 1833

13. Temporary, because the Pléiade edition, after 1955, restored La Fugitive. But the paperback editions have kept Albertine disparue, and Jean Milly for GF gives La Fugitive followed in parentheses by Albertine disparue. It seems that we are moving toward a case of synonymy of the type Spleen de Paris / Petits poèmes en prose.

14. That is, the complete present title: Armance ou quelques scènes d’un salon de Paris en 1827.

a modified version under the new title Obermann. Unfortunately, he did not continue in this direction for the third edition, further modified, of 1840, which did not receive a third “n.” But since the 1833 recast is negligible, the (all too rare) lovers of Senancour therefore have a practical means of distinguishing the two great versions of this text, at least in written form: by telephone, one would have to insist.

A last mode of official transformation is the shock of feedback from a successful adaptation done under a new title that one finds advantageous to reuse. Simenon’s novel L’Horloger d’Everton (1954) was reprinted in 1974 with an illustrated cover, naturally after the film by Bertrand Tavernier, and displaying this strange title: Georges Simenon / L’Horloger de Saint Paul / from the novel / L’Horloger d’Everton. The title page mentions only the original title, which proves that this is not just a re-dressing. In the same manner, Pierre Bost’s novel, Monsieur Ladmiral va bientôt mourir, published in 1945, became in 1984 a film (also by Tavernier) entitled Un dimanche à la campagne. Meanwhile, Bost died, but the editor rushed to put a new edition on the market; the title remained Monsieur Ladmiral . . . , but the jacket, illustrated with a still photo from the film, was over-titled, in much larger letters, Un dimanche à la campagne. These are economical and ambiguous processes, but which could only be transitions toward definite changes. A lasting success of the new, coyly proposed title would be enough for that,16 for the main agent of title drift is probably neither the author, nor even the editor, but actually the public, and more precisely the posthumous public, also and quite adequately named posterity. Its action—or rather, in this case, its passivity—heads toward a shortening, or a real erosion of the title.

The simplest form of this erosion is usually the oblivion of the subtitle. Selective oblivion, and of variable strength: the cultivated public still knows Candide ou l’optimiste, Emile ou de l’éducation, and perhaps also Les Caractères ou les Moeurs de ce siècle17 (for Julie, quite exceptionally, posterity has promoted as title the original subtitle: la Nouvelle Héloïse),18 but who can provide without hesitating the subtitles for Le Rouge et le noir, already discussed, or for L’Education sentimentale (Histoire d’un jeune homme), not to mention Eugénie Grandet, to which only the serial version

16. I should also mention, on the other hand, the very common habit of modifying the title during a translation of a work.

17. In fact, constantly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du Grec avec les Caractères ou les moeurs de ce siècle. It is only with the sixth edition (1691) that the text of La Bruyère will be printed in characters larger than Theophrastes’. This practice, which is not without paratextual effects, would certainly require a whole study. Let me just give an example, randomly—the English translations of La Condition humaine and L’Espoir are, respectively, Man’s Fate and Man’s Hope, which suggest a somewhat apocryphal symmetry between the two works. But I do not know if the author was consulted on this point.

18. It is true that the autographed copy given to the Maréchal de Luxembourg had on its first page La Nouvelle Héloïse, and on the second Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse, sign of the author’s hesitation.
referred as *Histoire de province*, or *Le Père Goriot*, whose initial 1835 subtitle (*Histoire de parisienne*) disappeared during the publication of the first collection? Editors sometimes contribute to this oblivion, for in many modern editions, even for scholarly use, the subtitles disappear from the cover, and even from the title page. Such is the case of the subtitle of *Bovary*, whose thematic importance is obvious. It is still present in all the editions revised by Flaubert, but it disappeared from the Dumesnil editions of 1945, Masson of 1964, Bardèche 1971.¹⁹

More legitimate, in theory, and quite inevitable, was the abbreviation of the long summary titles characteristic of the neoclassical period, and perhaps especially of the eighteenth century. One could not imagine these titles quoted in extenso in a conversation or even in a library request, and their shortening was undoubtedly planned, if not intended, by the authors. To tell the truth, some of those original titles lend themselves easily to analysis into elements of differing status and various importance. *L'Astrée* had on the title page of its first volume, in 1607, *L'Astrée de Messire Honoré d'Urfé, Gentilhomme de la Chambre du Roy, Capitaine de cinquante hommes d'armes de ses Ordonnances, comte de Chasteauneuf et baron de Chasteaumorant . . ., où par plusieurs histoires et sous personnes de Bergers et d'autres, sont déduits les divers effets de l'honneste amitié*. One can easily recognize a short title (but without really knowing whether the initial article is part of it), the author's name, followed by his titles and functions, and finally something like a subtitle.

But similar analysis is more difficult, and certainly less authorized, for the original title of what we call today *Robinson Crusoe*, which was, in 1719: *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, from York, mariner, who lived eight and twenty years alone in an unhabited Island of the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by a Ship-Wreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last strangely delivered by Pyrates*.

The fashion of narrative titles seems to have disappeared in the beginning of the nineteenth century, with Walter Scott and Jane Austen, but it reappears from time to time, during the nineteenth century and even the twentieth century, as an ironical or compassionate pastiche, at least among the authors marked by the tradition or inclined to irony, like Balzac (*Histoire de la grandeur et de la décadence de César Birotteau, chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, . . .*), Dickens (*The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, & Observation of David Copperfield, the Younger, of Blunderstone Rookery [Which He never meant to be Published on any Account]*), Thackeray (*The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esquire, of the Kingdom of Ireland, containing an account of his extraordinary adventures; misfortunes; his sufferings in the service of his late Prussian Majesty; his visits to many of the courts of Europe; his marriage and splendid establishments in England and Ireland; and the many

¹⁹. Claudine Gothot-Mersch's edition for Garnier, which did not have it in 1971, has restituted it on the title page since 1980.
cruel persecutions, conspiracies, and slanders of which he has been a victim), or Erica Jong (The True History of the Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones, In Three Books, Comprising her Life at Lymeworth, her Initiation as a Witch, her Travels with the Merry Men, her Life in a Brothel, her London High Life, her Slaving Voyage, her Life as a Female Pyrate, her Eventual Unravelling of her Destiny, etc.). But in those last two cases, the pastiche of the title is inevitably called upon by the pastiche of the text.

In all these cases, and numerous others, an irresistible tendency towards shortening appears. If one excepts La Nouvelle Héloïse, the process of which, as we saw, was different, the only counterexample (but what an example!) is to my knowledge Dante's Comedy, which became the Divine Comedy more than two centuries (1551) after the author's death (1321) and almost one century after the first printed edition (1472).

Finally, with regard to the date of the title: a work can integrate its publication date into its title. It is enough for this purpose that the author regard this date as particularly relevant, and that he desire to indicate it with this highlighting. It is what Hugo does for Les Châtiments, or rather Châtiments, an original collection published in 1853. The title of the collection is, in large letters and in the middle of the page: Châtiments / 1853. With the Hetzel edition of 1870, which contains five new pieces, the article appears, and the date, legitimately or not, disappears. Both elements are joined in the first critical edition (Berret Hachette, 1932), which may be inconsistent. In principle, the editors have the choice between the text and the title (without date) of 1870, or the text and the title (with the date) of 1853: it is this last position that Jacques Seebacher adopts in his GF edition of 1979, putting the date, however, in parentheses. This process is not to be confused with that, far more frequent, of the title comprising, or even being reduced to, the date of the moment when its action takes place: Quatre-vingt-treize; 1984; 1985 by Anthony Burgess; 1572 / Chronique du règne de Charles IX; Notre-Dame de Paris / 1482 (this one is not on the original edition of 1831, but on the manuscript, and modern editors were right to restitute it); Les Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799, and so on. These last dates are evidently thematic. The date of Les Châtiments is more complex: at once thematic (the collection deals with the situation in France in 1853) and, since I have no term for the time being, let us say temporarily “editorial”: it appeared in 1853.

“Destinateur”

As in the case of any instance of communication, the title at the least is composed of a message (the title itself), a “destinateur,” and an intended
recipient. Although the situation here is simpler than for other elements of the paratext, it is suitable to say a few words about those last two.

The "destinateur" of the title (by right) is not necessarily in fact the producer. We have already seen one or two cases of titles found by the editor. Many other members of the author's milieu can play this role, which, in principle, does not concern us here, unless the author actually reveals a piece of information (then paratextual), which later no one will be allowed to neglect entirely. But this is only secondary data, which by no means can exempt the author from bearing juridical and pragmatical responsibility for the title.

Let us not infer too hastily that the "destinateur" of the title is always and necessarily the author, and the author alone. Dante, as I have said, never entitled his masterpiece *The Divine Comedy*, and no retroactive process can attribute this intitulation to him. The inventor by fact is unknown (to me), and the one responsible for it was the first editor, who adopted it posthumously.

This holds true for any intitulation, or posthumous reintitulation. But I would like to add that the responsibility for the title is always shared by the author and the editor. Practically, of course, except under circumstances beyond one's control; juridically, strictly speaking, because at least today the contract, jointly signed by both parties, mentions the title (and not the text!); practically, in a larger sense, it seems to me, because the position of the title and its social function give the editor, as far as he is concerned, rights and duties stronger than the author in respect to the body of the text. There may be laws, rules, customs, and legally binding decisions of which I myself am unaware, but which I suppose, and also—and this is what matters—which everybody supposes. This particular relation between the title and the editor has its own manifestation and emblem in an object—a book—the catalog. A catalog is a collection of titles, attributed, as is suitable, not to an author, but to an editor. He, and not the author, can say "this book is," or "is not," or, disappointingly, "no longer is in my catalog."

A catalog, like any book (or almost any book) has readers. A reader of catalogs is a reader who, for better or worse, reads titles only. The catalog is therefore the preeminent (symbolic) place for title communication.

**Intended Recipient**

The intended recipient of the title is clearly the public, but this evidence is a bit base because the very notion of public is base—which
may not be simply a defect. The public, in fact, is not the total or the sum of the readers. The audience, in the case of a theater performance, of a concert, or a cinematic show, is actually the sum of the people who attend and thus, in principle, of the spectators and/or the listeners—in principle, because some people, although present, may be so only physically, and for various reasons may fail to see or to hear. Let us not take that into account; it is a practical, not juridical, matter. But the audience for a book is, I believe, an entity potentially greater than the sum of its readers because it encompasses people, sometimes very active, who do not necessarily read the book, or who do not read it in its entirety, but who contribute to its diffusion, and therefore its reception. Without attempting to list them exhaustively, these are, for example, the editor, his press attachés, his sales agents, the booksellers, the critics and echoers, and even (and perhaps especially) those benevolent or involuntary conveyors of fame that we all are at one moment or another: to all those, the text of the book is not necessarily, constitutively addressed. Their role is rather, in a large (but strong) sense, mediatic: to cause to read without reading oneself. We have already discovered here, or we shall soon discover, companion texts, such as the “prière d’insérer,” whose function is almost officially to provide a summary for those whose professional duties might preclude a complete reading, without making such an exemption troublesome or offensive to anyone. No one can reasonably ask an edition agent to read all the books he promotes. The audience consists also of another very large category: the customers who do not read, or who only partially read the book they buy. The reader targeted by the author (who may not always buy) is, on the contrary, and constitutively by the deepest economy of the text, a person who makes of it a complete reading—unless certain preliminary arrangements authorize him expressly, as we will see, to use some sort of selectivity. So defined, the audience, as we can see, goes, sometimes actively, far beyond the total amount of the readers.21

It is easy to understand what my point will be. If the recipient of the text is actually the reader, the recipient of the title is the public in the sense I have just specified or extended. The title addresses itself to many more people than does the text, people who in one way or another receive and transmit it, and thereby contribute to its circulation. For, if the text is an object of reading, the title, like the author’s name, is an object of circulation—or if one wishes, the object of communication.

21. One could undoubtedly say the same thing for the audience, in a broad sense, of a theater play or of a film, but it remains that for the performing arts the term “audience” in a strict sense designates the totality of the receivers in a more active manner than in literature, where it is more relevant to distinguish audience and readers.
Functions

On the function, or rather the functions, of the title, a sort of theoretical vulgate now seems established. Charles Grivel formulates it approximately as follows: first, identify the work; second, designate its content; third, highlight it. And Hoek integrates this into his definition of the title: “A series of linguistic signs which can appear at the head of a text to designate it, to indicate its general content and to appeal to the public aimed at.”

This functional vulgate seems to me an acceptable starting point, but it requires several remarks, complements, or amendments. First, the three functions mentioned (designation, indication of the content, seduction of the public) are not necessarily all present at the same time. Only the first is mandatory, the next two are optional and additional; for the first one can be fulfilled by a semantically empty title, not at all “indicative of the content” (and even less “appealing”), nothing more than a mere call number. Second, these functions are not arranged here in order of dependence, since the first and third could quite well do without the second, when, for example, one considers L’Automne à Pékin as seductive, although it has no relation to the content, “general” or not, of the novel it entitles, or perhaps precisely for that reason. Third, however demanding it may seem, the first function is not always rigorously fulfilled, since many books share the same homonymous title, which is not sufficient in itself to distinguish works better than some person or place names which, outside of any specifying context, remain largely ambiguous. Ask a bookseller if he has the Satires; you will obtain from him in return, quite logically, only a question. Fourth, if the function of designation is sometimes deficient, the other two are more or less open to discussion, since the relation between a title and a “global content” is eminently variable, from the most direct factual designation (Madame Bovary) to the most uncertain symbolic relations (Le Rouge et le noir), and are always dependent upon the hermeneutic complaisance of the receiver. One can deny Goriot the role of main protagonist of the novel to which he gives its title, and one can inversely claim that the text of L’Automne à Pékin is a subtly metaphorical evocation of such a season in such a place. As far as the function of seduction, or valorization, is concerned, its subjective character is quite obvious.

Finally, our list is undoubtedly in some way incomplete, since the title can “indicate,” about its text, something more than its “content,” factual or symbolic. It may well also indicate its form, whether in a

23. “The titles most respectful to the reader are those which are reduced to the name of the eponymous hero . . . and even, the reference to eponymy may constitute an abusive interference of the author. Le Père Goriot calls attention to the figure of the old man, while the novel is also the epic of Rastignac and Vautrin” (Umberto Eco, Apostille au nom de la rose [Paris, 1985], p. 510).
traditional and generic manner (Odes, Elegies, Short Stories, Sonnets), or in an original and intentionally singular way: Mosaique, Tel Quel, Répertoire.

It would therefore be suitable to make some room for a type of more formal indication beside the indication of content, or maybe concurrently (alternatively) with it. This type, therefore, would be a new function to be squeezed between the second and third, or at least variant of the second, which will need to be redefined as an indication either of content or of form, or sometimes (Elegies) of both simultaneously.

This variant, let us say more emphatically, this particular type of semantic relation between the title and the text, which no longer appears in Hoek's book (1982), had been well noted by this author in his article of 1973, and I admit I cannot see the reason for this silent abandonment. Hoek used to distinguish, on the plane he rightly calls semantic, between two classes of titles: the "subjectal" ones designating the topic of the text like Madame Bovary, and the "objectal" ones, "referring to the text itself," or "designating the text as an object," like Poèmes saturniens. The terms seem to me poorly chosen, especially because they may create confusion: Emma could as well (or as badly) be called the "object" rather than the "topic" of the novel to which she gives her name. But the idea seems right to me, and I will propose here only a (new) terminological reform: the titles indicating the "content" of the text, in whatever way it may be, will be called, as simply as possible, thematic (this simplicity is not without nuance, which we will find again later); the other ones could without much damage be qualified as formal, and very often as generic, which in fact they almost always are, especially during the classical period. But it seems to me necessary to do justice to the correct observation of Hoek, that such titles refer to the work itself, the mention of its form or generic category being only a means for this reference—perhaps the only possible one in literature. But in music there is at least one other available: the opus number, and nothing prevents a writer from using this procedure. The most important thing for us is to mark that in principle the choice is not exactly between giving a title by reference to content (Le Spleen de Paris) or form (Petits Poèmes en prose), but more exactly between aiming at the thematic content and at the text itself considered as a work and as an object. To designate this choice in all its latitude, without reducing the second term to a formal designation, I will borrow from some linguists the opposition they mark between "theme" (what is talked about) and "rheme" (what is said about it). The borrowing, I am well aware, is not without distortion, but I assume the sin for the efficiency and economy

24. John Barth proposes with other terms an equivalent distinction between "ordinary titles," which he does not qualify (except as "straight-forward," or literal), and those he calls, a little abusively, "self-referential," "which refer not to the subject or to the contents of the work but to the work itself" (Barth, The Friday Book, p. x).

25. I substitute this double example for Hoek's, which seems to me less pure ("saturniens" is obviously a thematic indication).
of this terminological pair. If the theme of *Le Spleen de Paris* is actually, let us admit it by hypothesis, what is designed by this title, its rheme is what Baudelaire says (or writes) about it, and therefore what he does with it, that is, a collection of short poems in prose. If Baudelaire, instead of entitling it by its theme had entituled it by its rheme, he would have named it, for example, *Petits Poèmes en prose*. But he entituled it by theme, hesitating therefore for the same work, and for our greater theoretical pleasure, between a thematic title and a rhematic one. I thus propose to rebaptize as thematic the heretofore “subjectal” titles of Hoek and as rhematic his “objectal” ones. I do not yet know if these two types of semantic relation (between the title and the text) must be considered as two separate functions, or as two species of the same one, but we will ask this incidentally secondary question again a little later. Let us return for the time being, and in order to finish with it, to the first function of Hoek and Grivel, the designation function.

**Designation**

The title, as is well known, is the name of the book, and as such, is used to name it, that is, to designate it as precisely as possible and without too much risk of confusion. But the verb to name, when applied for example to a person (one is not careful enough about it), covers two fundamentally distinct acts, which ought to be differentiated more carefully than the current language normally allows. One consists of choosing a noun for that person; that is, let us say, the act of baptizing—one of the rare opportunities we really have to impose a noun, here a nickname, to something (the age of the onomaturgists having long since passed), and this act, surely, is almost always motivated by a preference, a compromise, a tradition. It is extremely rare that a child's first name is randomly left to throwing a dart at a calendar (Vetday, Indepday, Xmas). But once that name has been adopted, imposed, and duly recorded, it will be used by everybody in a spirit and for purposes which have no connection whatsoever with the reasons which presided over its choice. These ends

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26. On the linguistic use of the term and its potential for extension, I refer to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Qu’est-ce qu’un thème?*, *Poétique* 64 (Nov. 1985): 395–406, and the whole special issue ("Du thème en littérature") for the relations between the theme and the whole "content."

27. This hesitation came to an end only in 1869 with Asselineau and Banville’s Michel Lévy posthumous edition, to the advantage of *Petits poèmes en prose*; but some later editions returned to “Spleen de Paris,” or refused to choose: H. Lemaitre, in Garnier, gave, as Jean Milly did for *La Fugitive*, “le Spleen de Paris” in parentheses.

28. This distinction is not applicable to titles only, and we shall see it again. Let us say, retroactively, and to fill a lacuna on page 705, that the date of 1482 of *Notre Dame de Paris* is thematic and that the one of *Châtiments* is both thematic and rhematic. The publication dates normally carried by the title pages are evidently rhematic, as is everything concerning the book as such, and not its object.
are purely for identification purposes, and with respect to them the motive of the initial nomination is entirely indifferent, and generally ignored without any damage: nomination as usage of a noun is without relation to nomination as act of baptizing, or choosing of a noun, and the most suggestive ones are by no means the most efficient ones, that is, the most identifying ones.

It is the same with book titles. When I ask a bookseller, “Do you have Le Rouge et le noir?” or a student, “Have you read Le Rouge et le noir?,” the significance attached to this title (its semantic relation to the book it entitles) counts for nothing in my sentence, neither in my mind, nor in my interlocutor’s. It becomes active again only if I name it explicitly, for example in a sentence such as “Do you know why this book is entitled Le Rouge et le noir?” It is clear that propositions of the first type are infinitely more frequent than those of the second. The relationship, now merely conventional, which presides over it, is one of pure and rigid designation or identification. We have already observed that this function is not always fulfilled without confusion by the title alone, since there are cases of homonymy.29 Supposing it is, it is then achieved neither better nor worse than by any other designation process, such as library call numbers or ISBN numbers of modern editions, which also have their initial motivation (one of classification), quite useful for research purposes, but indifferent for identification as such.

The function of identification is in practice the most important function of the title, which could eventually do without all others. Let us return to our “baptismal act,” and suppose that my friend Theodore was named randomly, by the method of throwing a dart at a calendar. This initial lack of motivation would not change the practical usage I myself make of his name, and in fact I ignore everything about the reasons which gave him that name. Similarly, if Stendhal had entitled Le Rouge et le noir by means of lots, that would not change anything in its identification function and the practical usage I make of it. I believe that many of the surrealist titles were pulled from a hat. Nevertheless, they do not identify their texts less well than the most motivated titles. The reader, if he likes, will later find a reason, that is a meaning, for each.

**Thematic Titles**

The adjective *thematic* used to qualify the titles relative to the “content” of the text is not irreplaceable because it supposes an extension of the

29. And also of synonymy, since some books, as we have already seen, hesitate between two titles: The Golden Ass/Metamorphoses, Ethiopics/Theagenes and Chlariclea, Poetic Art/Epistle to the Pisons, Contr’un/De la servitude volontaire, Dorval et moi/Entretiens sur le fils naturel, Juliet/ La Nouvelle Héloïse, Le Spleen de Paris/Petits poèmes en prose, Albertine disparue/La Fugitive. It would really be arbitrary, with respect to standard convention, to distinguish in these cases between title and subtitle.
very notion of theme that we may judge abusive. If “la République,” “la Révolution française,” “le culte du moi,” or “le Temps retrouvé” actually are, in varying degrees, the essential themes of the works which owe them their titles, we could not say the same thing in the same way for “la Chartreuse de Parme,” “la Place royale,” “le soulier de satin,” “la Marche de Radetzky,” not even of “Mme Bovary”: a place, tardy or not, an object (symbolic or not), a leitmotiv, a character, even central, are not so to speak themes, but elements of the diegetic universe of the works they are used to entitle. However, I would qualify as thematic all the titles evoked in that way, with a generalizing synecdoche which will be, if we wish, a homage to the importance of the theme in the “content” of a work, be it of a narrative type, dramatic, or discursive. From this viewpoint, undoubtedly, everything that is “content” but is not the theme, or one of the themes, is in an empirical or symbolic relation with it or with them.

There are many ways for a thematic title to be so, and each requires a particular semantic analysis, in which the role played by interpretation of the text is not insignificant. But it seems to me that good old rhetoric provides us with a rough principle, quite efficient for a general classification of titles. There are literal titles, which designate, without diversion or figure, the central theme or the central object of the work: Phèdre, Paul et Virginie, Les Liaisons dangereuses, The Earth, War and Peace—to the extent of indicating in advance the denouement: Jerusalem Delivered, The Death of Ivan Ilich, proleptic titles. Others, by synecdoche or metonymy, are linked to a less obviously central object (Le Père Goriot), sometimes deliberately marginal: Le Chasseur vert, Le Rideau cramoisi, Le Soulier de satin. Lessing praised Plautus for having often drawn titles “from the least important circumstances that could be,” and concluded, maybe hastily: “The title is very little indeed.” Hastily, since the detail promoted in this way is invested ipso facto with a sort of symbolic value, therefore of a thematic importance. A third type is of a constitutively symbolic order, that is, the metaphoric type: Sodome et Gomorrhe for a work the central theme of which is homosexuality (even if that symbolic evocation was in the beginning, that is well before Proust, a metonymy of place), Le Rouge et le noir may be, Le Rouge et le blanc certainly (since Stendhal affirms it), Le Lys dans la vallée, La Curée, Germinal, Sanctuary. A fourth type

30. G. E. Lessing, Hamburg Dramaturgy, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York, 1962), p. 53. Another formation by synecdoche, but of a rather rhematic function, consists of giving a collection the title of one of its parts: a common practice for collections of short stories, such as “La Chambre des enfants” or “Le Rire et la poussière.”

31. This title is evoked in the text, despite the narrative convention which would require this text, an epistolary novel, to ignore its literary character and consequently the existence of its paratext: “She was, as you already know, LE LYS DE CETTE VALLEE . . . .” One does feel, in this contradictory or denying expression, the author’s embarrassment at having his title quoted by the epistolary hero.

32. Zola does mention, in a letter to Van Santen Kolff of 6 October 1889, the semantic power of this title, discovered later:
functions by antiphrasis, or irony, either because the title is antithetic to the work or because it displays a provocative absence of thematic relevance. (For example, *La Joie de vivre* was chosen for the most somber of Zola's novels, who himself underlined the antiphrastic character: "I wanted first a direct [literal] title like *Le Mal de vivre*, and the irony of *La Joie de vivre* made me prefer this last"—or consider *La Joie* about which Bernanos himself used to say: everything can be found in it, except happiness.) This is (according to Boris Vian himself) the case of the already mentioned *Automne à Pékin* or *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*. This is the case with most of the surrealist titles; this is the case with *La Cantatrice chauve* and with many other titles today, like the *Histoire de la peinture* in three volumes of Mathieu Bénézet, a thin booklet which does not talk about painting. The antiphrasis may take the form of a formal denial, like the famous *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*—which, to tell the truth, is not exactly a title. The irrelevance can also be only apparent and reveal a metaphorical intention. This is obviously the role of *Ulysses*, which functions according to the figural mechanism, well described by Jean Cohen. Since no one in that novel is called Ulysses, it must be that the title, literally irrelevant, has symbolic value—and, for example, that the hero Leopold Bloom is an Odyssean figure.\(^{33}\) It may also, in a rather crafty way, argue a literal truth: In a film by Truffaut someone asks an embarrassed author: Is there in your book a drum or a trumpet? No? Then the title imposes itself: *Without Drum or Trumpet*. We could rebaptize in this way many classical titles: *Ulysses* as *Far from Melbourne*; or *Le Roman de la rose* as *L’Absence de d’Artagnan*.

Of course, the thematic relation can be ambiguous, and open to interpretation. We have encountered two or three instances of overlapping between metaphor and metonymy, and no one can prevent a smart critic (they all are today) from giving a symbolic meaning, for example, to the erasers in *Les Gommes* (it has already been done). Conversely, Proust believed that, when reading, the apparently symbolic titles of Balzac should be reduced to a literal significance: *Illusions perdues*, for example, to Lucien’s illusions, “all particular, all contingent . . . which give the book a powerful mark of reality, but which decrease a little the philosophic poetry of the title. Each title must therefore be taken at the letter: *Un*
Titles

grand homme de province à Paris, Splendeur et misère des courtisanes, À combien l'amour revient aux vieillards, and so on. In La Recherche de l'absolu, the absolute is rather a formula, an alchemical thing rather than a philosophic one.34 The ambiguity can also be targeted by the title formula itself, by the presence of one or several words with double meaning: Fils, L'Iris de Suse, Passage de Milan; less obvious (and perhaps discovered afterwards), the one of Les Communistes, which Aragon declared one day to be of feminine gender (which was rather literally a semantic clarification, since it had so far been believed bisexual). Another factor of ambiguity is the presence, within a work, of another work from which it borrows its title, so that one cannot tell if that title refers thematically to the diegesis, or in a purely designative way, to the work reflected therein (“en abyme”). See, among many others, Le Roman de la momie, Les Faux-Monnayeurs, Doctor Faustus,35 Les Fruits d'or, or Pale Fire.

I have considered so far only simple titles, without subtitles. But in the case of a double title (thematic in a double sense), each element can play its role. In general, classical titles organized this division of the work according to a clear principle: for the title, the name of the hero (or in Plato’s work, of Socrates’ interlocutor);36 for the subtitle, the thematic indication: Theaetetus or On Science, Candide ou de l'optimisme, Le Barbier de Séville ou la précaution inutile—and, in the twentieth century, by archaic allusion: Geneviève ou la confidence inachevée. In a more flexible and extensive manner, the subtitle is often used today to indicate more literally the theme evoked symbolically or cryptically by the title. This is a fairly current practice, and almost ritual now in the titles of works with intellectual content: Les Sandales d'Empédocle, Essai sur les limites de la littérature, Miroir d'encre, Rhétorique de l'autoparait, and so on. American editors have a special term to distinguish the first title: they call it catchy, or even sexy, which is quite significative. They have not felt the need to qualify the subtitle, which often sounds like a medicine against love. But the relation can also be reversed, according to taste. If Paludes is not bad, Traité de la contingence is wonderful.

This distribution is evidently not ignored by fictitious literature. The most typical case is certainly the obviously symbolic title of Doctor Faustus (since the hero of it is no more Faust than Bloom is Ulysses, but only a sort of modern avatar of Faust’s image) corrected at once by the literal subtitle: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn told by a friend. In its entirety, it constitutes a generic contract (of hypertext with transposition) of perfect accuracy. It is as if Ulysses had had as subtitle: Twenty-

35. Here, I cheat a little bit, in order to include in this list a glorious title: the work “en abyme” in fact is entitled Cahant de douleur du Dr Faustus (Dr Fausti Wehklag).
36. I do not know if Plato’s titles are “authentic,” that is, chosen by the author. I would rather believe them of later choice, but in any event prior to Diogenes Laertius, who quotes them.
four hours of Leopold Bloom's life, Irish trademan, told according to various narrative processes more or less new.

Rhematic Titles

Ambiguous or not, thematic titles dominate the picture widely today, but one must not forget that the classical usage was quite different, if not the reverse. Rhematic titles rather dominated in poetry (with the exception of epic poetry and of long didactic poems with thematic titles) by collections with officially generic titles: Odes, Epigrams, Hymns, Elegies, Satires, Idylls, Epistles, Fables, Poems, and so on. This practice goes far beyond lyric poetry and classicism, with innumerable collections of Tales, Short Stories, Essays, Thoughts, Maxims, Sermons, Funeral Orations, Dialogs, Interviews, Miscellanea, and more unitary works called Histories, Annals, Memoirs, Confessions, Souvenirs, and so on. The plural undoubtedly dominates, but we still find in that zone titles in the singular form such as Journal, Autobiography, Dictionary, or Glossary. All these constitute titles in which rhematism is mediated by a generic designation, but other appellations, inevitably less classical, make use of a freer type of definition, displaying a sort of generic innovation, and that we could, for that reason, qualify as parageneric: Méditations, Harmonies, Recueillements, Divagations, Approximations, Variétés, Tel Quel, Pièces, Répertoire, Microlectures. If our era were not fonder of originality than of tradition, each of these titles, like Montaigne's (who innovated), could have given birth to a sort of generic formula, and a series of homonyms. This may be the case concerning Situations (Péguy, Sartre), which we might call "a collection of situations," as we say—which would have very much surprised Montaigne—"a collection of essays."

Other rhematic titles are even farther from any generic qualification, designating their work by a more purely formal trait, or one even more accidental: Decameron, Heptaméron, Enneads, Attic Nights, The Friday Book, En Français dans le texte, Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse—whence this closed series: Manuscript found in a bottle (Poe), dans une cervelle (Valéry), in a hat (Salmon). Or, in a vaguer manner, but which obviously targets the text itself, not its object: Pages, Écrits, Livres (Barnes: Un livre, Guyotat: Le Livre). Or this title, both interrogative and self-referential: What Is the Name of this Book? by Raymond M. Smullyan. The most depreciative

37. The exact titles of Lamartine's collected works are: Méditations poétiques, Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, and Recueillements poétiques. For the second one, the rhematic character is certified by this sentence of the preface: "These Harmonies, taken separately, seem to have no relation with one another." I dare not add to this list Hugo's Contemplations, with an indefinite article giving them a thematic dimension. As far as Recueillements poétiques is concerned, I wonder if it is not simply an elegant variation on the literal formula: recueil de poèmes.
(unless, as in Henry Green’s works, the text reveals some thematic anchoring) is certainly by Xavier Forneret: *Rien*.

This leads us to mixed titles, those containing a rhematic element (most often of a generic type) and a thematic element, clearly separated: *Treatise of Human Nature*, *Essay on Human Understanding*, *Study of Women*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *Introduction to Experimental Medicine*, *Contribution to Political Economy*, *Views on the Present World*, and so on. All titles of this type begin with a designation of the genre, and therefore of the text, and continue by a designation of the theme. This neat and eminently classical formula was extensively used for theoretical works. In fact, usage has truncated some, which have lost their rhematic element. For example, Copernicus’ work, *De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium Libri sex* (1543) is today reduced to its first four words, and therefore to its thematic aspect. This gives me the opportunity to mention that the Greek titles in *Peri . . .*, Latin in *De . . .*, French *De . . .* or *Sur . . .*, and so on, always are mixed titles with an understood rhematic part.

**Connotations**

The opposition of both thematic and rhematic types does not determine, it seems to me, a parallel opposition between two functions, one thematic, the other rhematic. Both processes fulfill rather differently and concurrently (excepting ambiguity and syncretism) the same function, which is to describe the text by one of its characteristics, thematic (this book talks about . . .) or rhematic (this book is . . .). I will therefore call this common function the descriptive function of the text. But we have so far neglected other types of semantic effects, secondary effects which can indifferently be added to the rhematic character of the primary description. These are effects that one can qualify as connotative because they are due to the manner in which the title, thematic or rhematic, exerts its denotation.

Let us consider a novel of adventure: *Diroute à Beyrouth, or Banco à Bangkok*. It is evidently thematic, and as such it announces an adventure located in one of those exotic places, famous (to varied extents) for being dangerous. But the manner in which it announces it, founded on an obvious homophony, adds to its denotative value another one: either for an ill-informed reader the author is playing with his title, or for a more competent reader, the author can only be Jean Bruce or someone who imitates his titles.

Let us consider a rhematic title: *Spicilège*. This denotes, if I follow Littré, a collection of texts or unpublished fragments, tardily “gleaned” (that is the etymological meaning of the word) from the author’s drawers, by himself or his heirs; but also and especially it

38. On this procedure, see Molino et al., “Sur les titres des romans de Jean Bruce.”
connotes an old mode of intitulation (Montesquieu), or, if employed today (Marcel Schwob), of intentional archaism. For the modern public, this stylistic connotation is probably stronger than any technique of origin, the value of which is entirely lost.

But the connotative capacities of the title are considerable and diverse. There are title procedures common to certain authors: the case of Jean Bruce is exemplary because he relies on a simple and almost mechanical process, but there are many others. A title such as *La Double Méprise* irresistibly evokes Marivaux (it is by Mérimée). The parageneric titles of Lamartine’s collective works have a family look, and the *Contemplations* may have looked like a pastiche. There are connotations of a historical kind: classical dignity of generic titles; romanticism (and postromanticism) of parageneric titles; eighteenth-century flavor of long narrative titles like Defoe’s; a nineteenth-century traditional look of the complete name of the hero or heroine (*Eugénie Grandet, Ursule Mirouet, Jane Eyre, Thérèse Raquin, Thérèse Desqueyroux, Adrienne Mesurat*); cliché titles of the surrealist collections (*Les Champs magnétiques, Le Mouvement perpétuel, Corps et bien*). There also are generic connotations: the name of the hero alone in tragedies (*Horace, Phèdre, Hernani, Caligula*); the name of a character in comedies (*The Liar, The Miser, The Misanthrope*); the suffix -ad in the classical epic titles (*Iliad, Franciade, Henriade*, and so on), which join in an efficient way a thematic indication (by the noun) and a rhematic one (by the suffix); the crudeness of the “série noire” titles, and so on. But other connotative values are too subtle to be defined individually and more difficult to classify into groups: see the cultural effects of quotation titles (*The Sound and the Fury, The Power and the Glory, Tender Is the Night, The Grapes of Wrath, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Bonjour Tristesse*); of pastiche titles as we have encountered in Balzac’s works, Dickens’, Thackeray’s, and others; or parodic titles: *La Comédie humaine, Le Génie du paganisme*, and so on. They act as many echoes which bring indirectly to the text as efficiently and more economically than an epigraph (which actually occurs to complete them; I will come back to this point) the guarantee of another text, and the prestige of cultural filiation.

These few glimpses into the connotative values do not attempt a taxonomy or an exhaustive typology. Further study would have to rely on historical and critical inquiries, for the study of titles and of their evolution may imply essentially one of the connotative features—the most loaded with intentions, but also perhaps the most swollen with involuntary effects, traces of an individual or collective unconscious.

39. Published only in 1944, but the title had been chosen by Montesquieu.
Seductions?

Simultaneously too obvious and too intangible, the function of seduction, incitement to buy and/or to read, does not inspire commentary. The canonical formula was given three centuries ago by Furetière: “A beautiful title is the real procurer of a book.” I am not even certain that the eventual appeal of a book is always due to its “beauty,” even supposing that such a value can objectively be defined. Proust admired the title L’Education sentimentale for its compact solidity, despite its grammatical “incorrectness.”

Another means of seduction is trivial, at least since Lessing: “A title must be no bill of fare. The less it betrays of the contents, the better it is.” Taken to the letter, this suggestion would put the seductive and the descriptive functions in a total opposition. The vulgate rather understands here a praise of the appetizing value of a dose of obscurity or ambiguity. A good title should say enough to excite curiosity, and little enough not to saturate it. “A title,” Eco says in a formula which may sound a little better in Italian, “should entangle, or embrolio, the ideas, not brigade them.” This depends upon a knack unique to each author, and to each object, and neither is indicated by any recipe nor guarantees any. Any editor will tell you: no one has ever been able to predict the success of a title, nor a fortiori to measure the part that the title plays in a success. I prefer rather to believe in a more indirect virtue, which we have already seen evoked by Giono, and confirmed more recently by Tournier about Goutte d’or: “I find it a beautiful title, it inspired me during the whole period of gestation of the book, and in general I can work enthusiastically only if I am supported by the perspective of a title which I like.” One could in this case judge otherwise about the result—the stimulating power of such a phantasm cannot seem dubious. Anticipating the finished product certainly is one of the (rare) means of conjuring the nausea of writing, and the gratification of the title undoubtedly contributes to it. But this function, as one can see, is no longer relevant to the paratext.

It is certainly suitable at this point to put some order into our list, elaborated somewhat gropingly, of the functions of the title. The first function, the only mandatory one in literary practice and institution, is

42. Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve, p. 588.
43. Lessing, Hamburg Dramaturgy, p. 53.
44. Eco, Apostille, p. 511.
45. “Apostrophes” [a T.V. broadcast], 10 January 1986. Let us note, incidentally, that the ambiguity of such a title, to which it owes most of its “beauty,” does not fit our mode of transcription. To preserve it, we should keep the original characters, all capital, avoiding thereby the choice between capital and lowercase for the first letter of GOUTTE. The oral quotation does not create any problem.
the function of designation or identification. It is the only one to be mandatory, but impossible to separate from the others, since under the semantic pressure of the environment, even a simple opus number can be invested with meaning. The second one is the descriptive function: thematic, rhematic, mixed, or ambiguous according to the choice made by the “destinateur” of the features conveying this description, which is always inevitably partial and therefore selective, and according to the destinatee’s interpretation, which most often appears as a hypothesis about the “destinateur”’s (that is for him the author’s) motives. Optional in principle, this function is inescapable in practice: “A title,” Eco rightly says, “already—and unfortunately—is a key for interpretation. One cannot avoid the suggestions generated by Le Rouge et le noir or by War and Peace.”46 The third one is the connotative function, attached to the second one, willingly or not, by the author. It also appears to me as inevitable, since any title, as with any statement, has its own manner of being, or if one prefers, its style—and even the most sober, the connotation of which will be soberness (at most, or at worst: affectation of soberness). But as it may be abusive to call function an effect which is not always intentional, it would be better perhaps to speak here of connotative value. The fourth one, of dubious efficacy, is the function called seductive. When it is present, it depends more upon the third one than the second. (And when it is missing, too.) Let us say instead that it is always present, but that it may reveal itself as positive, negative, or null, according to the actual recipients, who do not always correspond to the idea the “destinateur” may have of his recipient. But the main reason for this skepticism towards the seductive function would rather be this: if the title is actually the book’s procurer, and not part of the book itself, it is to be feared and avoided that its seductiveness does not play too much for itself, and to the detriment of the text. John Barth, in whom the “coquetterie” of presentation hardly conceals solid good sense, wisely asserts that a book more seductive than its title is better than a title more seductive than its book. Things in general, and of this kind in particular, always end up being known. The procurer should not overshadow too much the one he procures, and I know two or three books (I will not name them) whose too-beautiful titles always prevented me from an eventually disappointing reading.

46. Eco, Apostille, p. 510.

one of the ambiguities, paradoxes, or perverse effects of the paratext in general, which we will find again in the preface. Procurer or not, the paratext functions as a relay, and like any relay, it may, if the author insists too much, make a screen or an obstacle for the reception of the text. Moral: let us not be excessively careful with our titles; or, as Cocteau used to say, let us not overperfume our roses.