

The Meaning or Nihilism of Chapter Titles in The Peripheral

What are the meaning of the chapter titles of *The Peripheral* (2015) by William Gibson? My fellow English students hypothesized theories of exposure where The Haptics, Death Cookie and Double Dickage, were like a mystic premonition of events that followed. Other students saw no meaning: The God Club and Double Dickage, being catchy headlines. Yet, some headings were nondescript words which punched holes in theories, serving an unspecific purpose: Dragonflies, Up There, Double Dickage. The fundamental theories of *The Peripheral* chapter title meanings (English class theories in **rubricated text**, **Class 2023**), summarized:

1. **Preemptive exposure**: The titles both foreshadow and familiarize the reader to the concepts that occur in the chapter. **"Death Cookie is relevant to the chapter because that is how Rainey describes Daedra's poisoned skin and connects to the way Daedra kills the Boss Patcher in chapter eight."**
2. **Alternating viewpoint**: Each title tells the viewpoint of either Flynn Fisher or Wilf Netherton regarding their setting. **"...make sense only in their respective time and space. For instance, a Tarantula, the trike Conner drives, would not necessarily be something Wilf would know..."**.
3. **No meaning**: Titles capture the reader's attention but they do not have a deeper meaning in relation to the plot. **"They function to capture the reader's interest by frequently using unfamiliar terms or unfamiliar phrases, and then to different degrees the chapter will than provide the terms or phrases in context"**.
4. **Sorting exercise**: The titles are all interconnected, its initial meaning revised depending on the place in the novel. **"The title is the keyword in a sorting exercise, and the book requires you to keep thinking about how it relates to the chapters, modifying the definition as you go; the novel undermines its initial linkage between the chapter title and a semblance of clarity regarding its meaning"**.

The Preemptive exposure theory works because the titles convey a visceral expression in the cases of Double Dickage which prepare us like an appetizer of what is coming. It works best proactively, titles like Patchers (Gibson 16) and The House of Love (Gibson 116) setting the tone and location for the rest of the chapter. It would not be a hasty generalization to state that the action of most chapters are visually summarized by their title, but there are some instances where the theory is not applicable. In Easy Ice (Gibson 49), although the title summarizes Flynn's story, the true context of the title is not understood until the action unfolds

later with the murder of Aelita in *Anything Nice* (Gibson 56). Another example is *Aquamarine Duct Tape* (Gibson 71) where although we understand that Leon and Burton like to tag their drones with the tape, it isn't until *Red Green Blue* (Gibson 302), that we feel relief when we see Macon's bug with Aquamarine colors saving Flynn.

Alternating viewpoint works because of circular reasoning. Because we only experience the novel through the perspectives of Flynn Fisher and Wilf Netherton, therefore the chapter titles alternate in time in place in relation to the two main characters. The theory works because initially the story lines of Flynn and Netherton are separated until converging in *Grifter* (Gibson 81). However in *Anathema* and *Hermès*, Wilf lacks knowledge of the chapter title, "anathema" which is a disliked object, being Ash's middle name (Gibson 92) and asking Ash what is *Hermès* (Gibson 128), titles neither known by him or Flynn. Similarly, as Flynn gains more knowledge of Netherton's world, the theory falls apart in *Wheelie Boy* (Gibson 316) as both characters worlds are brought together and also in *The Jackpot* (Gibson 79) where Flynn discuss the apocalyptic event where Flynn's world ended and Netherton's began.

No meaning is another theory that lacks depth, mainly because of an appeal to lack of evidence and a hasty generalization. It works in some capacity because *Cottonwood* (Gibson 65), *Grifter* (Gibson 81) have an aura of random mystique and the action in the titles being better summarized by "Gravely, Trike" to describe Flynn's bar encounter with Connor or "First Contact" in describing Flynn's first meeting with Netherton. We later discover the significance in these titles in *Soho Square* (Gibson 344) as Flynn walks along the Greenway, the artificial and young trees of the future contrasting with the ancient Cottonwoods of the past. The other being *Bullshit Artist* (Gibson 171), *Imposter Syndrome* (Gibson 230) and eventually *Apollinaris Water* (Gibson 383), showing Wilf Netherton's character development from an initially sketch looking individual and bullshit artist who habitually lies and drinks to deal with his depression to opening up to Flynn about *The Jackpot*, becoming an altruistic character who tries his best not to deal with his demons through alcohol.

Sorting exercise has the meaning of organizing unstructured data, "...effective, finite, and deterministic problem solving methods or can be described as procedures for solving problems..." (Yohannis and Prabowo). This theory is applicable with a second read, when analyzing titles retroactively rather than proactively and in the moment. The deeper meaning which the Preemptive exposure theory couldn't address in *Tarantula* (Gibson 37) and *Static In Your Bones* (Gibson 431) isn't felt much later until respectively *Dead Old Boys* (Gibson 115) with the investigated vehicle being Connor's trike (Gibson 115) and *Celebration of Life* (Gibson 454) when Lowbeer's secret bone static communication is revealed. However, like

the No meaning theory, this one appeals to a lack of evidence and assumes the opposite that everything has a meaning. The theory struggles with titles that are adjectives: Headless (Gibson 143) and Perversely Difficulty (Gibson 189) because these are descriptions of one-off events that are better explained in the moment by either the Preemptive exposure or No meaning theories.

Works Cited

Gibson, William. *The Peripheral: Now a Major New TV Series With Amazon Prime*. Penguin UK, 2014.

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