**Titles**

He settled on *Aaron* for the title. He toyed with others, trying to hint at the magician theme. *Aaron's Wand* was too much like D. H. Lawrence's *Aaron's Rod*. What about *The Rod*? Or *The Wand*? Was that too much like *The Crucible*? *The Five Books of Aaron*? Cute, but irrelevant.

*The Golden Calf* sounded good but wasn't what the play was about. The play was about Aaron's mastery of magic, of sorcery. Not wizardry: there was too much Harry Potter kicking around these days anyway. And anything with the word Magic would invoke David Blaine or Penn and Teller or even Houdini.

Titles are difficult, and poorly understood. Many of the best were one word, even on syllable -- *Rent*, *Fame*, *Hamlet* (although that was actually just a popular truncation). Others told a story on their own -- *Death of a Salesman*, *Waiting for Godot*. The title wasn't part of the work, it couldn't change the work, but some were easier to work with than others. And producers might want a say, as well. It would be easier if you presented them with something that really grabbed them.

Sometimes he led writing workshops at colleges, which were a source of easy money and a chance to get out of town. It was like a master class. The structure was the same, all the creative writing instructors having learned from the same workshops, repeating the way their instructors had learned. He read an excerpt. The students discussed it, probed, asking questions. Then the students read. These were advanced students, and some of them really had something to say. And some of them would make a lifetime out of the time they took a creative writing class with someone who became famous while they became lawyers and accountants. The MBA replaced the MFA. "I'll write when I retire," they'd say, but few ever did.

The thing with the workshops is that they exposed him to a lot of bad writing. At one a student suggested that the title wasn't "snappy" enough, and suggested an 11 word alternative. This led to an interesting discussion of the practicality of book covers and marquees and full page ads in the Arts and Leisure section.

For a while he toyed with *Sinai!*, channeling *Oklahoma!* That led to a wasted day of singing "The scarab with the fringe on top." That went "The Semites are the Jews and the Arabs / Only the former worship the scarabs / Still the former worship the scarabs / With the friiiiiinge on top." Singing it at the top of his lungs convinced him that the whole concept was off. "It's not a musical," he told himself.

Aaron was the play's ambiguous hero, not a bad guy but sly, deceptive, maybe Machiavellian. He manipulated reality to achieve an admirable end, but got a little carried away with the rewards. Moses, the traditional hero, was big and strong. He had murdered with his bare hands. But he was slow of speech. In early drafts Aaron had been a Iago-like character, but with each new draft Aaron became more and more like Ariel, light of foot, light of hand, quick of wit. And he had done something good, no, something amazing, getting the Israelites freed. So what if that meant a permanent legacy for his descendants? Freedom begets freedom.

Through all of the revisions the play never stopped shadowing the Biblical sequence of events. But Aaron showed up in new places, performing magic not mentioned in Exodus or the other books. The burning bush. Atop Sinai with Moses. Every decision Moses makes benefits Aaron, and the play explains how that came to be.

In one early version the script drew parallels between Aaron and Moses and the twins Jacob and Esau. One smart, one plodding. Once using his mental gifts to secure a birthright, Jacob for himself, Aaron for his descendants. But the parallel was too weak. "It's not Jacob and Esau in what would have been modern dress then," someone said. It wasn't. However you divied up the responsibility, however you played up the rivalry, Aaron and Moses had done something unheard of before or again until the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., emulated them. Or one of them. Or both. King spoke of Moses, forgetting his violent past. King never spoke about Aaron's miracles. It might have been the same story but it wasn't the same story.

Another problem with the title was slugger Henry Aaron. This play had nothing in common with *42*, the film about Jackie Robinson. But some people might hear the name and imagine a copycat script, one of those bottom feeders that poaches someone else's success to make a quick buck. Another black ballplayer overcoming the odds and prejudice to achieve something. Yawn.

Even *42* was a title with problems, invoking Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*, at least among those in the know. How about *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Sinai*? Or *So Long, and Thanks For All the Manna*?

If he had wanted a number then 40 was the best roll of those dice, that number occuring so often in the Biblical version. But 40 doesn't seem to roll off the tongue, it being too round to catch anyone's eye. And of course round numbers had been co-opted by Bo Derek and Dudley Moore with 10.

For a while his leading contender actually was *40 Years*. He liked the impersonal nature, making the play not just about Aaron. Other titles that spanned time had been successful, too, *Seven Days in May*, *The Longest Day*, *Six Days and Seven Nights*, all had done well as movies.

But *40 Years* was fodder for the sarcastic headline writer or cynical reviewer. "They promised two acts but the pace was so bad it felt like 40 years," someone with a Dennis Miller affect would quip.

There were also the two number contrasts, like *Seven Days and Forty Years*. Even Shakespeare used two-number titles, like *Henry IV, Part 1*. But that's where his Physics background got in the way. "It's impossible to measure on such widely different scales," he told himself, "the seven days might just as well not be there, for all the effect they had. They're not even a rounding error."

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