BIONYMS

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The famous are fond of inventing catchy titles for their biographies often based on an associated nickname or signature tune. A classical ‘bionym’ is one in which the subject’s identity is cleverly hidden in the title itself and can be guessed without knowing the author – like ‘Citizen Jane’ (Jane Fonda) or ‘Acts of Faith’ (Adam Faith). Bionyms are at the opposite end of the originality spectrum from such solipsistic titles as ‘Dear Me’ (Peter Ustinov), ‘Being Myself’ (Martina Navratilova) ‘By Myself’ (Lauren Bacall) or just plain old ‘Me’ (Kathryn Hepburn). The feminist literary scholar and biographer of Simone de Beauvoir, Toril Moi, should have no trouble in finding a bionym for her own memoirs.

I offer a baker’s dozen of my favourite bionyms. The subjects have been separated from their titles so you may match them up -

APPLE SAUCE
THE BURIED DAY
COURTING TRIUMPH
THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE
BUBBLY
JACK OF ALL TRADES
LIFE IS TOO SHORT

MORE OR LESS
ODD MAN OUT
ON THE OTHER HAND
STRAIGHT SHOOTING
TAKE IT LIKE A MAN
TALL DARK AND GRUESOME
A YOUNG MAN’S PASSAGE

Ronald Biggs    George Best    Julian Clary    Boy George    Christopher Lee
Cecil Day     Lewis Kenneth More    Mickey Rooney    Robert Stack    Virginia Wade    Jack
Warner    Michael Wilding    Fay Wray

BOGUS BIOGS

Bogus biogs are imaginary bionyms which could have provided the celebs concerned with a Bogus more flamboyant title for their life story than history has assigned to them. I must confess that in my naïve youth I assumed Brecht’s play ‘Mann Ist Mann’ was a theatrical homage to Thomas Mann and ‘Merry Christmas, Mister Lawrence’ was a jolly yuletide biopic about the author of ‘Lady Chatterley’. Here is another baker’s dozen with book reviews from equally fictitious publications – readers are encouraged to cook up their own.

AMAZING GRACE – A Hymn to Grace Kelly

‘A cover version of the John Newton classic recorded by the female vocalist Kelly Grace. ‘
Hymns for Her – the Magazine of New Age Hymnody

KNICKS ON, KNICKS OFF - The Story of Gypsy Rose Lee

‘Gypsy’s cunning stunt would have delighted the Reverend William Spooner.’
Table Top Gazette

NICKS ON, NICKS OFF – A Political Melodrama about Richard M Nixon

‘Dick carried a spear, looked wooden and tried not to bump into the tape recorder.’
Republican Drama Review
LEAVES OF GRASS – The unpublished letters of Gunther Grass

‘A herbarium overgrown with weed. Don’t read them, smoke them, dudes.’

*Germanic Counterculture Volksblatt*

SO WHERE’S THE HARMONICA? The True Confessions of Bill Clinton

‘There was no harmonica in that hot arrangement for squeezebox organ and fiddle.’

*Washington Jazz Review*

SKINFLINT OR BRIGHT SPARK? PROS AND CONS - The career of Larry Flynt

‘The Immortal Beard says it all –

Here comes the lady : – O, so light a foot
Will ne’er wear out the everlasting flint.’

*Romeo and Juliet Act ii Scene vi.*

*Shakespeare for Adults*

A MAN SHOULD REJOICE – The Life and Works of James Joyce

‘To be sure, a man should read Joyce, well, at least the first paragraph of ‘Finnegan’s Wake’ then dump that pile of steaming shít straight down the dunnigan.’

*Irish Literary World*

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST – A Comedy of Bad Manners based on the life of Ernest Hemingway

‘The story begins in an East Chicago tavern. Over a Bud and a stack of flapjacks Ernie tells Lane the bartender how, as a baby, he was left inside a Bears kitbag in the men’s washroom at Union Station. In the second act we discover that his fake brother, Jack Kerouac, has a crush on a beat poetess called Cecily while Ernie confesses he’s got the hots for a gal by the name of Sweet Gwendoline. This bedroom farce about a couple of good ole boys has a happy ending. They finally get the chicks in the sack then Jack dies of an alcohol-induced haemorrhage of the liver after a bar fight in St. Petersburg and Ernie blows his brains out in Ketchum Iowa with a shotgun purchased at Abercrombie & Fitch. Way to go, you all. Two thumbs up.’

*Rednecks Illustrated*

EASIER SAID THAN DONE - A Donne Retrospective on CD

‘John Donne’s lyrics have been set to music by the sixties group The Essex. This three-box set also contains their moving tribute to the grand old man of Elizabethan Rock -

My friends all tell me
Go to him, run to him,
Say sweet lovely things to him,
And tell him - he’s the one.

Deep in my heart I know it,
But it’s so hard to show it
‘Cause it’s easier - easier said than done.’

*Elizabethan Pop Music Today*
LETTERS ON MY BISHOPRIC OR DON'T SHOOT THE BISHOP – HE'S DOING HIS BEST
The Personal Correspondence of Jacques Bossuet, the Bishop of Condéon, 1669-70

‘An inspiring account of the French Bishop’s work for sexual reform in regularly testing out the contraceptive use of animal intestines with a little help from his parishioners.’
Newsletter of the Calvin Institute For Sexual Enlightenment

OLIVER TWIST - The Whirlwind Times of Oliver Reed

‘Ollie drank life with a twist and was always asking for more – till that final gruelling night in The Pub in Valetta when, Oliver sudden, he was gone.’
Hellraisers’ Chronicle

GONE WITH THE WIND – The Passing of the de Witts

‘Johan de Witt was one of Holland’s greatest statesmen. Described as a ‘boring old borborygmus’ when he brought out his dyspeptic epic The Worth of Life Aemulties Compared to Redemption Bonds, Johan later redeemed himself with his international diplomacy and constitutional reforms. He finally lost popularity and was lynched in The Hague along with his brother Cornelius in 1672 thereby bequeathing to English the verb DEWITT, to lynch. The twisted de Witts were left blowing in the wind as dogs fed off their entrails but they had discovered a remedy for gastric acidity which is still used today.’
The Netherlands Digest for Constitutional Disorders

THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS – The Memoirs of Fast Bowler Michael Holding

‘This Windies pacemaker could put the wind up windy willow wavers and give them the willies – especially when the bowler’s Holding, the batsman’s Willey.’
Publisher’s Blurb