



The Unsaid in Titles: A Critical Look at Bernard Nanga's "Les Chauves-Souris" [Bats]

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ABSTRACT

Having in mind the basic pragmalinguistic principle which argues that traces of the unsaid are always present in our communication and guided by Jacob L. Mey's assertion that titles can be tricky, this study seeks to explore the elements that influence authors' choice of titles and the opaque meanings of such titles. This research adopted a pragmatic approach to discourse analysis with the aid of the notions of presuppositions, inferences, argumentative orientations, argumentative scales and the theory of possible worlds. Results indicate that the setting of a literary work, the cultural origin, beliefs and philosophies of its author, the era within which the work is written, and the use of figures of speech, among others, are elements that influence an author's choice of a title of a literary piece. This study has further revealed that careful consideration of these factors could play a critical role in helping a reader unravel the deeper meaning of the title of a piece of work as well as the entire text. This study is a scholarly contribution to titology, pragmatics, and discourse analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Excuse my long letter because I did not have enough time to compose a short one.

J. J. Rousseau

The above quotation from Rousseau gives credence to the fact that the task of giving titles to literary works is arduous and time-consuming. Titles are generally the shorter version of an entire message, yet, may not be the easiest compositions of the message.¹ Almost every written document within the different fields of science (knowledge), be it mathematics, medicine, arts, social science, et cetera, has a title for the basic purpose of identification and summary. Undoubtedly, with the tremendous growth in science, language use has also seen enormous growth and transformation. Language choice in discourse has, arguably, become more and more complex in terms of structure and meaning. The level of complexity of language choice in titles is even higher as titles aim at creating suspense and seducing readers into wanting to discover the content of a text.²

¹ Karel Rakusan, "The Importance of Titles," *Curr Res Cardiol* 3, no. 3 (2016): 58–59.

² Maribel Peñalver Vicea, "Le Titre Est-Il Un Désignateur Rigide?," in *El Texto Como Encrucijada: Estudios Franceses y Francófonos* (Universidad de La Rioja, 2003), 251–58.

Definition and Typology of Titles

The word 'title' could be misleading without recourse to its contextual meaning. Socioculturally, the position an individual occupies in their family could earn them a title as father, mother, uncle, aunt, son, and daughter, just to name a few. Within the world of work, people answer to titles such as manager, engineer, doctor, professor, barrister, justice, sergeant, and major, among others, depending on their professional rank or position. However, within the area of writing and publishing, a title could simply be regarded as a brief text normally placed at the top of a written text or on the cover of a book to identify its content. Petkov opines that "titles are doors of the works."³ The aforementioned view constitutes the framework of this current study.⁴

Titrology, as the study of titles is presently called, is a new discipline compared to other areas of language science. Its novelty made it quite unlikely for one to find a definition attributed to it in a dictionary, as Petkov (2014) rightly puts it. It is Hoek who, in the 1980s, elaborated on the area of titrology and rendered it more specific. Consequently, dictionaries like '*Le Trésor de la [langue] française*' attempt to explain 'title' as an inscription placed on the cover of a book to indicate the subject matter, or the name given by an author to a literary work to identify its content. In effect, titrology is generally concerned with the study of titles, the different ways of naming texts, films, televised series, et cetera. Duchet views titles as a fore-statement of the content of a book.⁵ Barthes on the other hand considers a title as an aperitif/appetizer; that is to say, that which gives appetite to discover or read the content of a book.⁶ Similarly, Hoek defines a title as 'one which defines, names or identifies a text'.⁷ Gerard Genette on the other hand sees the title as that aspect of the paratext which is the first indicator and guide to the reader.⁸

The growing research interest in titrology has led to the study of its typology. Prochostova defines two types: lyrical titles and Romanesque titles.⁹ The first kind is instructive and direct and gives the reader an understanding of the piece right from the beginning. The second is retroactive, making the reader discover the real meaning rather later (sometimes at the end of the book). Hoek also distinguishes between two types of titles namely: the objective title, where the title denotes the objective of the book, (e.g., *The history of...*) and the subjective title, which denotes the principal character or subject of the work (e.g., *Le Père Griot...*).¹⁰ Furthermore, Bokobza identifies two types of titles.¹¹ The first is the onomastic title, which comprises a proper noun, further divided into two: toponyms (place names) and anthroponyms (human names). The second is the referential title, comprising a common noun.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Titles are not to be underestimated no matter how long or short, simple or complex they may be. As Mey puts it, 'titles are tricky – they may trick you into reading a book that you had no intention of reading, into doing things that you were not supposed to do, into wanting to say things that you didn't mean or want to say'¹². This explains why the area of titrology has received scholarly attention over the past few years. Much emphasis has also been placed on journalistic titles. Abdelhamid studies the functions of journalistic titles and concludes that titles perform communicative, informative and pragmatic functions beyond their basic function of identification.¹³ Other researchers have also examined newspaper titles in this regard (Moirand, Develotte and Rechniewski, Mouillaud; Mardh, De Bonville; Frandsen; Sullet-Nylander). Viezzi, Bobadilla-Perez, Violine, Malingret, Terahni, Awedyk, Nord, just to mention a few, have

³ Slav Petkov, "Traité Petit de Titrologie : Regard Critique Sur La Traduction de Titres," Conference: Semana do TradutorAt: São José do Rio Preto, UNESPVolume: "Tendências Contemporâneas dos Estudos da Tradução," 2014.

⁴ Petkov, "Traité Petit de Titrologie : Regard Critique Sur La Traduction de Titres."

⁵ Claude Duchet, "La Fille abandonnée et La Bête humaine, éléments de titrologie romanesque," *Littérature*, 1973, 49–73.

⁶ Roland Barthes, "Par Où Commencer?," *HELIKON*, no. 3–4 (1970): 363–69.

⁷ Leo H Hoek, *La Marque Du Titre: Dispositifs Sémiotiques d'une Pratique Textuelle*, vol. 60 (Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

⁸ Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Média Diffusion, 2014).

⁹ Стефанова С. Prochostova, *Записки От Преддверието : Теория и Практики На Заглавието* (Plovdiv: Presses Universitaires de Plovdiv, 2014).

¹⁰ Leo H Hoek, "Pour Une Sémiotique Du Titre," 1973.

¹¹ Serge Bokobza, *Contribution à La Titrologie Romanesque: Variations Sur Le Titre "Le Rouge et Le Noir"*, vol. 27 (Librairie Droz, 1986).

¹² Mey, Jacob L. "How to do good things with words: A social pragmatics for survival." *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)* 4, no. 2 (1994): 239-263.

¹³ Salah Eddine Abdelhamid, "Pour Une Approche Syntactico-Pragmatique de La Titrologie Des Journaux Algériens Francophon Es " (Université de Batna, 2016).

extensively covered the translation of titles and more particularly, the translation of literary and filmic titles.¹⁴

Expectations

Clearly, titles and literary titles communicate beyond what they seem to represent on the surface. Their implicitness can only be ascertained through a pragmatic approach. Communication occurs within a given context and it is only within this context that the true meaning of speech is evident. It is therefore important to consider certain factors that could influence the meaning of a given speech. This, by extension, culminates in studying the linguistic competence of the speaker, the origin of the speaker, the beliefs of the speaker, the setting of the given communication, and the time of the communication, among others. These factors have compelled language theorists to study the inference of speech/argumentation through the use of speech act theories,¹⁵ argumentative scales,¹⁶ argumentative orientations,¹⁷ presuppositions,¹⁸ and Possible Worlds' Theory,¹⁹ to name but a few.

Guided by these orientations, this current work critically examines Bernard Nanga's "*Les Chauves-souris*"²⁰ (Bats) in a pragmatic-descriptive way, in an attempt to answer the following questions:

- i. What is "unsaid" in "*Les Chauves-souris*"?
- ii. Does the origin of the author influence their title?
- iii. What beliefs and philosophies influence the author's choice of title?
- iv. How does the space-time framework of the book influence the meaning of the title?
- v. Does the title conform to the content of the book?

For the purpose of the analysis, the original data in French from *Les Chauves-souris* has been translated into English by the authors of this paper, and both the French and the English are placed side by side in the course of the analysis.

DISCUSSION

Les chauves-souris was published in 1980 with Bernard Nanga as its author. With quite a deceptive title, as one may rightly assume, the book recounts events within the city of Eborzel and the village of Vémélé, somewhere in post-colonial Africa. The reader is struck by the expression "*les chauves-souris*" with possible different usages almost throughout the ten chapters of the book. This current critical study is borne out of the desire to explore the curious polysemy of "chauves-souris" to bring out possible hidden meanings in the title.

Bernard Nanga – History and Origin

Bernard Nanga was born on May 3, 1934, in a village called Mbankomo, about 30 kilometres from Yaoundé, Cameroun. When he turned 8 years old, he attended Mvaa Minor Seminary and later continued at Akono Minor Seminary. Upon completion, he joined the Otélé Major Seminary where he studied

¹⁴ Sophie Moirand, *Les Discours de La Presse Quotidienne. Observer, Analyser, Comprendre* (Puf, 2007); Christine Develotte and Elizabeth Rechniewski, "Discourse Analysis of Newspaper Headlines: A Methodological Framework for Research into National Representations," *The Web Journal of French Media Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 1–12; Maurice Mouillaud, "Grammaire et Idéologie Du Titre de Journal," *Mots. Les Langages Du Politique* 4, no. 1 (1982): 69–91; Jean de Bonville, "Le Titre Des Nouvelles Locales Dans La Presse Québécoise à La Fin Du XIXème Siècle," *Semen. Revue de Sémio-Linguistique Des Textes et Discours*, no. 25 (2008); Finn Frandsen, "Éléments Pour Une Théorie Du Paratexte Journalistique," in *Actes Du Onzième Congrès Des Romanistes Scandinaves*, 1990, s-159; Maurizio Viezzi, "Titles and Translation," *VAKKI-Symposiumi XXXIII*, 2013, https://www.vakki.net/publications/2013/VAKKI2013_Viezzi.pdf; Maria Bobadilla Pérez, "Relevance and Complexities of Translating Titles of Literary and Filmic Works," *HUARTE DE SAN JUAN. Filología y Didáctica de La Lengua N. 9/Filologia Eta Hizkuntzaren Didaktika 9 Z. Pamplona: Universidad Pública de Navarra/Nafarroako Unibertsitate Publikoa*, 2007. Págs. 117-124, 2007; Melody Violine, "Translating Titles of Novels: Why and How We (Don't) Translate Them," in *Translation Conference*, 2011; Laurence Malingret, "Les Titres En Traduction," in *Les Chemins Du Texte: VI Coloquio Da APFFUE (Santiago, 19, 20 e 21 de Fevereiro de 1997)* (Servicio de Publicaciones= Servicio de Publicacións, 1998), 396–407; Christiane Nord, "Text-Functions in Translation: Titles and Headings as a Case in Point," *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies* 7, no. 2 (1995): 261–84.

¹⁵ John Langshaw. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, vol. 88 (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁶ Oswald Ducrot, "Opérateurs Argumentatifs et Visée Argumentative," *Cahiers de Linguistique Française* 5 (1983): 7–36.

¹⁷ Ducrot, "Opérateurs Argumentatifs et Visée Argumentative."

¹⁸ Robert Martin, "Pour Une Logique Du Sens," 1983.

¹⁹ Jaakko Hintikka, *L'intentionnalité et Les Mondes Possibles* (Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2020).

²⁰ Bernard Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris: Roman*, (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1980).

Philosophy, Theology and Greek/Latin Civilization. In his seminary days, he learnt an austere and silent lifestyle full of devotion and mortification. He came out as a good priest but also, as he would say, cast out humanly and culturally. Some years after his priestly ordination, he resigned from the priesthood to become a layperson. This decision was due to multiple reasons, according to written testimonies collected from his close allies. Some of his friends believe that he was struck by the contradictions and injustices of Christendom. Others also say that he resigned due to difficulty in reconciling his future preoccupations with teaching at the university, writing, and being a priest. That notwithstanding, he continued to be close to God and he remained a Christian until death.

While in France, the author pursued further studies in philosophy and sociology at Strasbourg University. There, he experienced racial segregation and stigmatization against Blacks, which made him begin to criticize the love for humanity and for the French nation that he had developed in school as a young boy during the colonial days. For six years, he had to study to become a teacher of philosophy through challenging means; without a scholarship, and as a result, he had to pick up minor jobs as an errand boy and night watchman. After his marriage to a young French teenage mother from a good home, he returned to Cameroun to teach philosophy. He took a teaching break to work as a civil servant for two years in a public office in Douala. Later, he went back to teach philosophy at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Yaoundé University while at the same time writing his doctoral thesis. He died on March 13, 1985.

Writing Career

Bernard Nanga is considered one of the most talented writers of his generation within Francophone Africa. The appearance of his first novel, *Les chauves-souris*, marks his remarkable entry into the world of literary writing. Through this novel, the Cameroonian writer positioned himself within the ranks of writers on disillusionment such as Ahmadou Kourouma, Thierno Monémbo, Sony Labou Tansi or Sassine. In a bid to reassess an exalted Western civilization, Nanga presents in this book the flaws in the African Society after independence; exposing self-seeking profiteers and criticizing social mores. Better still, *Les chauves-souris* exposes the mafia neocolonial bourgeoisie mainly present in the capital of Eborzel, within the context of the book. This mafia system comprises bureaucrats, public servants, high dignitaries of the administrative machinery, businessmen, and others.

In fact, right after independence, Eborzel becomes the heart of corruption and prostitution as everyone longs for a reputable position. Money and upward mobility become the order of the day, hence, the emergence of a society characterized by individualism and unrealistic ambitions. Consequently, aristocracy, ethics and morals are abandoned for selfish gains, corruption and mismanagement. Administrators, inspectors and, indeed, heads of public institutions are bribed just so they keep mute. The city becomes a fertile ground for the activities of loose women and young prostitutes as they also benefit from the share of the envelopes. With such unimaginable levels of unemployment, vulnerable men and women are forced to kotow to the corrupt system to survive, as humans do not really matter in the city of Eborzel. The principal character in *Les chauves-souris*, Robert Bilanga, is a public servant who is money-hungry, overambitious, and lecherous. He moves from one woman to the other just to satisfy his lust. He equally takes advantage of some of these women who have relationships with influential politicians to facilitate his access to them for opportunities. Eborzel appears to be a microcosm where personal interests control human relationships.

Through *Les chauves-souris*, Nanga condemns a corrupt system that marginalizes, tortures and impoverishes the masses. He simply but tactfully discloses the disillusion of the African people having gained independence. He throws light on the setbacks and the regrets due to a porous political system put in place by African leaders. He equally talks about problems associated with health care, lack of medical equipment and drugs in hospitals, poor quality of teaching, et cetera. In this way, the people, tired of sweet political talks would simply want to come out of their miserable condition. Owing to this, the people (represented by the likes of Roger and Marie) will wish for a new wind of change.

Apart from *Les chauves-souris*, Bernard Nanga also wrote *La Trahison de Marianne* which won the Noma Prize Award posthumously on April 15, 1985. In this autobiographical piece, he speaks against

racial discrimination and in particular, France's segregation towards the Black race.²¹ Hence, in this book, the protagonist is seen as some kind of scrap and rubbish which merits no attention in society. This exclusion is depicted by the segregational use of the setting. The various places visited by the character appear to be a pretext to denounce the shortcomings of modern society. From his small cottage to public places, the protagonist is confronted by marginalization and indeed xenophobia from the French community.

In fact, right from his arrival in France, the hero of the novel experiences hatred by the French people. He could not find a convenient place to stay under the pretext of being Black. He was lucky to meet Madam Lemaire who would offer him her attic as a place of abode. He would walk the streets as he was unable to use the tram or the bus due to financial challenges. He would frequent only places where there are fewer or no people to stay away from ridicule and stigmatization. In the streets and shops, how people look at him alone makes him feel like an outcast. When he leaves his cottage to tour the streets in search of minor jobs in shops or restaurants, he only comes home very late to avoid meeting many people.

Nanga actually presents his personal experience as a Negro in France in *La Trahison de Marianne* [The betrayal of Marianne]. In this book, he talks about his woes, regrets, pains and indeed his difficulty in fitting into French society. He is hence the mouthpiece for those Africans who suffer racism in France and as such demystifies the pseudo-hospitality and the Eldorado that the French society claims to be. Apart from these two novels (*Les chauves-souris* and *La Trahison de Marianne*), Bernard Nanga is also known for his collection of poems (*Poèmes sans frontières* [poems without borders] followed by *Poèmes pour sourire* [Poems for laughs]) which was also published posthumously. Furthermore, his third novel, *Le Temps des Vampires* [The time of vampires] which was announced before his death, never saw the day. He is also known for some works in the area of philosophy.²²

Summary of *Les chauves-souris*

As the first novel of Bernard Nanga, *Les chauves-souris* mainly recounts events that take place in the city of Eborzel and in the village of Vémélé somewhere on the continent of Africa after independence. Written within the context of post-independence and characterized by the rise of indigenous elites who long for personal riches and power at all costs to the detriment of the masses, *Les chauves-souris* addresses the selfishness of corrupt and ambitious African elites, and it is Robert Bilanga, the main character, who is the reflection the strengths and weaknesses of this new class of bourgeois.

These elites create a favorable system for themselves in which women become objects of submission (represented by Clotilde, the wife of Robert Bilanga) and prostitution (represented by Arlette, Marie and Louise) and this new bourgeois are able to manipulate, their own advantage, the most vulnerable. With the rise of a new generation (represented by Roger Bilanga, Modolémé and Prof. Biyidi) who will begin to criticize such a corrupt and selfish system which only favours the old generation of elites, the dream of freedom is pursued. Finally, Robert Bilanga's rejection by his own people from the village of Vémélé becomes evident; his political speeches and the distribution of money and other goods all yield nothing.

Sociolinguistic Context of *Les chauves-souris*

The ten-chapter novel is mainly written in French; it is however laced with some anglicisms. Here are some examples:

1. "Le peu d'argent qu'ils en tiraient leur servait à l'achat du sel, du savon, de quelques **"yards"** de pagnes et de bouteilles de mauvais vins que de vieux cargos déversaient sur la côte."²³

²¹ Bernard Nanga, *La Trahison de Marianne*, vol. 9 (Nouvelles éditions africaines, 1984).

²² For example, *Philosophie et pauvreté*, Khartoujm, 1977 ; "Intervention dans le débat sur M. TOWA, L'idée d'une philosophie africaine", in *Cahiers du Département de philosophie* (1978), n.2, 102 sv. ; "La philosophie africaine et son milieu", in SUMNER, (ed), African philosophy - Philosophie africaine, Séminaire, Addis-Abeba, 1976. Addis Ababa, 1980, 263-273 ; "Le langage philosophique", *Actes du Colloque de philosophie de l'ENS*, Yaoundé, 4-8 avril, 1983. Yaoundé, Imprim. St Paul.

²³ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 31.

2. “Et il avait comparé la foule des fonctionnaires inefficaces qui s’écoulait des **buildings** administratifs aux chauves-souris.”²⁴
3. “Très beau et **hospitality**, votre pays, fit l’Américain à l’adresse de Bilanga, pendant qu’un rire tonitruant secouait tout son corps.”²⁵
4. “Oh ! **very nice**, renforça la blonde américaine”.²⁶

The use of these English expressions explains the fact that this country, then a young post-independent republic, had opened its arms to foreign investors, especially the Whites, including the Americans. This use of code-switching equally explains the bilingualism of the author’s country of origin.

The reader also encounters the use of some local expressions (*boukourou*, *taratata*, *bongossi*, *gandoura*, etc.) as well as some proper nouns (Bilanga, Djoungo, Bessala, Onguémé, Tanga, Biyidi, Bokéni, Mendouga, Bivougou, Modolémé, etc.) which indeed situates the story within its sociolinguistic and geographical context.

The names of cities and villages (Aboleya, Vemélé, Eborzel, etc.) employed in the story are only fictional. They are created by the author to present the events of the story indirectly. For instance, the name *Vemélé* to which the author attributes the meaning, “to expectorate”, would be understood later in the story when the whole *Vemélé* village rejects their own Bilanga for his super-selfish attitude and his lack of respect for the people.

Geographically again, the events in the story mainly take place between the city of Eborzel and the village of Vemélé in the Aboleya, which depicts two different living standards of two sets of people from the same country of origin. This makes readers understand the level of inequality and injustice within this young independent republic. The author summarizes this situation as follows: “*Et chacun se demandait à part soi ce que signifiait cette drôle d’indépendance qui s’arrêtaît quelque part sur les bords de la Doua*”²⁷. [And everyone, apart from himself, wondered what this funny independence which ended on the banks of Doua represented].

In Vemélé, one is presented with the image of a people whose lives have almost come to a standstill: lack of health facilities, very far away farms, loss of agricultural produce due to the poor nature of roads, etc. On the contrary, in the city of Eborzel, one can find almost everything that makes life quite easy and enjoyable: boutiques, shops for all kinds of food, nightclubs, beautiful women, administrative buildings, health facilities, schools, villas, etc. This is the place where the elites, the bourgeois and the politicians live. Culturally, women are seen as objects of service to men and are always at the mercy of men, in both the city and village. In the city, men are able to control women by virtue of their positions and wealth. They use women not only for their sexual satisfaction but also for their political gains. Readers see how Bilanga snatches Arlette from Roger with his money, and how he goes to every length to have intimate relationships with Marie and Louise just to satisfy his political ambitions. In the village too, the women work on the farm from morning until evening; they are the same ones tasked to feed the family:

*Les hommes ne mangeaient pas les fruits, qu’ils regardaient avec mépris comme étant réservés aux enfants et aux Blancs. Manger une orange, pour un homme, c’était insignifiant, sinon indécent. On attendait que les femmes reviennent de la brousse, où elles remuaient le sol jusqu’à la nuit tombante, dans leurs champs d’arachides, de macabos, d’ignames et de manioc. L’unique repas de la journée se prenait tard dans la soirée lorsque les femmes, harassées, avaient encore le courage de préparer une platée de feuilles de manioc.*²⁸ [Men did not eat fruit, which they regarded with contempt as being reserved for children and Whites. Eating an orange, for a man, was insignificant, if not indecent. Women were expected to return from the bush, where they stirred the ground until nightfall, in their fields of peanuts, macabos, yams and cassava. The only meal of the day was taken late in the evening when the women, exhausted, still had the courage to prepare a meal of cassava leaves].

²⁴ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 82.

²⁵ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 201.

²⁶ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 201.

²⁷ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 43-44.

²⁸ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 42-43.

Les Chauves-Souris

In this work of Bernard Nanga, the expression *Les chauves-souris* is used in quite a number of instances. Here are some examples:

1. “*Bilanga avait fait jouer toute son expérience des êtres humains et avait dit à Roger, en répétant un mot célèbre d’un journaliste, que la plupart des hommes et des femmes d’Eborzel se comportaient comme des chauves-souris. Ils ne sortaient qu’à partir de la tombée de la nuit*”.²⁹ [Bilanga had used all his human experience and had told Roger, repeating a famous word from a journalist, that most of the men and women of Eborzel behaved like **bats**. They did not go out until the night fell].
2. “*On entendait au loin le cri des chauves-souris et les aboiements des chiens, que couvrait le ronronnement du groupe électrogène. Les insectes nocturnes scandaient la nuit de leur chant grouillant et ininterrompu*”³⁰ [From a distance the call of **bats** and the barking of dogs, covered by the purr of the generator. Nocturnal insects chanted at night with their swarming and uninterrupted song]
3. “*Une rafale de vent passa dans les broussailles et les raphias, couvrant les appels des chauves-souris. Djoungo se sentit emporté à l’aveuglette vers la voiture, s’affala au volant et mit le moteur en marche*.”³¹ [A gust of wind passed through the brush and raffias, covering the calls of the **bats**. Djoungo felt blindly carried towards the car, slumped at the wheel and started the engine].
4. “*Une nuée de chauves-souris qui peuplaient les manguiers et les palmiers de tous les espaces verts d’Eborzel s’éleva au-dessus du palais présidentiel et des bâtiments administratifs. C’était un spectacle que Bilanga observait chaque soir de son jardin depuis le début de sa convalescence*.”³² [A flock of **bats** that populated the mango and palm trees of all the green spaces of Eborzel rose above the presidential palace and administrative buildings. Bilanga had been watching the sight every evening from her garden since the beginning of her convalescence].
5. “*Mais dès que le soleil se couchait, d’innombrables pelotons de chauves-souris envahissaient le ciel et commençaient leur chasse aux insectes nocturnes qu’attirait de la brousse et des forêts voisines le halo des lumières électriques qui se formait au-dessus de la ville*.”³³ [But as soon as the sun set, countless platoons of **bats** invaded the sky and began their hunt for nocturnal insects that attracted from the bush and nearby forests the halo of electric lights that formed over the city].
6. “*Bilanga remarqua pour la première fois que les chauves-souris avaient un vol bizarre. Elles avançaient en zigzag, se laissaient tomber de quelques mètres et repartaient dans une autre direction, comme si elles s’étaient rattrapées dans une chute vertigineuse*.”³⁴ [Bilanga first noticed that the **bats** were having a bizarre flight. They moved forward in a zigzag, dropped a few meters and went back in another direction, as if they had caught themselves in a vertiginous fall].
7. “*Bilanga se rappela les réflexions d’un journaliste européen qui avaient fait le tour d’Eborzel et qui lui avaient valu une expulsion dans les vingt-quatre heures. En voyant tous les chômeurs qui trainaient dans les rues et les quartiers d’Eborzel, il les avait comparés à des insectes attirés par la lumière de la ville, où ils se faisaient gober par les chauves-souris*.”³⁵ [Bilanga recalled the reflections of a European journalist that had toured Eborzel and which had led to his expulsion within twenty-four hours. Seeing all the unemployed hanging out in the streets and neighborhoods

²⁹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 18.

³⁰ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 57.

³¹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 68.

³² Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81.

³³ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81.

³⁴ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81.

³⁵ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81-82.

of Eborzel, he compared them to insects attracted by the light of the city, where they were swallowed by **bats**].

8. “*Et il avait comparé la foule des fonctionnaires inefficaces qui s’écoulait des buildings administratifs aux chauves-souris.*”³⁶ [And he compared the crowd of inefficient officials who flowed from the administrative buildings to **bats**].
9. “*Mais le mot était resté, énigmatique. À Eborzel on appelait les fonctionnaires les chauves-souris. Il était laissé à chacun le soin d’interpréter cette appellation.*”³⁷ [But the word had remained, enigmatic. In Eborzel, the officials were called **bats**. It was left to everyone to interpret this name]
10. “*Lorsque Bilanga ouvrit la porte à Chauvin, le cri des chauves-souris mêlé à la mélodie plaintive du gardien s’engouffra avec le vent nocturne dans le salon*”.³⁸ [When Bilanga opened the door to Chauvin, the call of **bats** mixed with the plaintive melody of the keeper rushed with the night wind into the living room].
11. “*Un vol de chauves-souris dont il revit en un dernier éclair de conscience les abats fantasques dans le ciel nocturne d’Eborzel. Bilanga comprit, avant de sombrer dans la nuit qui venait subitement l’envelopper en plein jour, qu’il n’avait pas d’ailes*”³⁹. [A flight of **bats** of which he relives in a last flash of consciousness the whimsical offal in the night sky of Eborzel. Bilanga understood, before sinking into the night that suddenly enveloped him in broad daylight, that he had no wings].
12. “*Clotilde la conduisit jusqu’au portail et lui demanda de revenir la voir quand elle en aurait le temps. Marie promit qu’elle n’y manquerait pas. Puis elle gagna la rue. Déjà une nuée de chauves-souris s’ébattaient dans le ciel d’Eborzel*”⁴⁰. [Clotilde led her to the gate and asked her to come back to see her when she had time. Mary promised that she would not fail. Then she went to the streets. Already a flock of **bats** frolicked in the sky of Eborzel]

From these examples, the use of *les chauves-souris* can be categorized into two:

1. *Les chauves-souris* as used by the author to describe the environment, the ambience and the time of certain events to render the story very real and imaginary to the reader. This is found in examples (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (10), (11) and (12).
2. *Les chauves-souris* used by the author to relate to human beings whose attitudes or characteristics are attributed to those of bats (*les chauves-souris*) as seen in examples (1), (7), (8) and (9).

Having gone through these instances of Bernard Nanga’s use of bats, it would be pertinent for us to ask ourselves the following question: To what extent is Bernard Nanga able to compare human beings to bats?

The Bat

To be able to answer the question above, there is a need to do some level of studies on the animal “bat”. To do this, inspiration shall be drawn from Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon’s study on this mammal in his work entitled “*l’Histoire Naturelle*”, a study that is based on Louis Jean Marie d’Aubeton’s work titled *Memoire sur les chauves-souris, 1759*.⁴¹

³⁶ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 82.

³⁷ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 82.

³⁸ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 105.

³⁹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 195.

⁴⁰ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 203.

⁴¹ François Prud’homme, “Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?: 100 Clés Pour Comprendre Les Chauves-Souris,” *Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?*, 2013, 1–208.

The bat is a half-quadruped and a half-volatile animal and yet is not wholly any of the two. In describing their habitat and their flying mechanism, this is what Buffon says:

*Toutes... n'habitent que les lieux ténébreux, n'en sortent que la nuit... leur vol... ni très rapide ni bien direct; il se fait par des vibrations brusques dans une direction oblique et tortueuse: elles ne laissent pas de saisir en passant des moucheron, les cousins, et surtout les papillons phalènes qui ne volent que la nuit... elles sont engourdies pendant l'hiver.*⁴² [All... inhabit only dark places, come out only at night... their flying... neither very fast nor very direct; It is done by sudden vibrations in an oblique and tortuous direction: they do not leave to seize while passing midges, cousins, and especially moths that fly only at night ... they are numb during the winter].

Because of its nature, many people hold superstitious beliefs about the bat. It would take Donald R. Griffin and Robert Galambos' 1940 study on echolocation, which provides a depth of knowledge on bats, to debunk such superstitions and beliefs.⁴³ Bats are found all over the world apart from very high latitudinal zones. The bat is an animal with the head turned upside down, flies at night, sleeps at daytime and sees with the ears. They are sometimes seen flying together in good numbers. Their nocturnal lifestyle and their mode of flying are scary and this explains such superstitions about them; "*it is the only flying mammal that is able to live with the head upside down, capture a mosquito in the darkness of the night and sleep at winter.*"⁴⁴ Surprisingly again, the bat seems to be afraid of light and it is, for this reason, many people label them as being diabolic, just as Flaubert (1924) does in "*La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*".⁴⁵ In the Middle Ages, envious people were tagged as bats since the latter had always been associated with traits of deceit and works in the dark. This is how Willem describes the former French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, in a sketch of a bat with big ears, on the front page of the *Libération* on 13th September 2011.

From Jean de La Fontaine's perspective, the bat is known to be an opportunistic creature that switches camps depending on where there appears to be favour or interest. This phenomenon can be explained by Marie de France's Indian story of around 1180. According to the story, once upon a time, there was a war between furry animals and feathered animals.⁴⁶ The bat which had lost its feathers (as a result of a confrontation it had with the fox, the deer and the unicorn) was at the side of the birds, but realizing how things were turning against them in the battle, he ran to join their foes. The bat was maltreated, and beaten up and its feathers were ripped off as the foes considered the bat as a bastard. It is therefore out of this shame that the bat hides itself from its folks only to go out when it is dark. This also explains why the bat has wings but no feathers.

It would also be important to reflect, bio-scientifically, on how the bat has been associated with certain viral pandemic diseases such as Ebola and even Coronavirus, to understand how the bat may not be regarded as human-friendly.

The Politicians, the Bureaucrats and the Elite, are they bats?

This brief description of the bat gives a clear image of what it represents generally and philosophically in Bernard Nanga's novel, and equally gives an idea of why the author chooses the title, "*les chauves-souris*". The next analysis shows the extent politicians, bureaucrats and elites of this new independent republic are compared to bats by the author.

In the novel, the nocturnal outings, of this elite class of Eborzel are exhibited, drawing parallels to the behaviour of the bat. Instead of returning to their matrimonial homes, the likes of Bilanga spend the best part of the night taking expensive and exotic drinks with ladies who themselves are ready to do anything for money:

- i. "...la plupart des hommes et des femmes d'Eborzel se comportaient comme des chauves-souris. Ils ne sortaient qu'à partir de la tombée de la nuit."⁴⁷
[most of the men and women of Eborzel behaved like bats. They didn't go out until nightfall].

⁴² Prud'homme, "Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?: 100 Clés Pour Comprendre Les Chauves-Souris," 7-8.

⁴³ Prud'homme, "Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?: 100 Clés Pour Comprendre Les Chauves-Souris."

⁴⁴ Prud'homme, "Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?: 100 Clés Pour Comprendre Les Chauves-Souris."

⁴⁵ Gustave Flaubert, *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, vol. 3 (Louis Conard, Libraire-Éditeur, 1924).

⁴⁶ Prud'homme, "Les Chauves-Souris Ont-Elles Peur de La Lumière?: 100 Clés Pour Comprendre Les Chauves-Souris."

⁴⁷ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 18.

- ii. *“Le Caveau était la boîte de nuit la plus fréquentée de la ville après le Safari Club. On y rencontrait tous les petits chefs d’entreprise et les noceurs de la ville qui venaient se défouler en compagnie de leurs petites amies. Des hommes d’affaires s’y donnaient parfois rendez-vous... Tout le gros et le petit gratin d’Eborzel allaient dépenser chaque soir au Caveau, et à des prix prohibitifs, ses suppléments de salaires”*⁴⁸

[Le Caveau was the busiest nightclub in the city after the Safari Club. We met all the little entrepreneurs and partygoers of the city who came to let off steam in the company of their girlfriends. Businessmen sometimes met there... All the big and small gratin of Eborzel went to spend every night at the Caveau, and at prohibitive prices, their extra salaries].

Obviously, it is for the shame of being seen by their families and other dignified people that these licentious lots engage in their immoral acts in the dark. It is by this same bat-like attitude that the likes of Bilanga build villas in the villages, very far places, for their secret love meetings (such as the one between Bilanga and Marie) and other immoral acts. More betraying is the fact that Bilanga employs a watchman who alone stays and keeps watch over his villa in the village in the absence of Bilanga, while Bilanga has relatives (including his own mother) living in deplorable conditions in the same village. Why would Bilanga not have such love meetings with Marie in his villa in Eborzel if he is not ashamed or has nothing to hide?

Moreover, the bureaucrats create very attractive conditions with their money to lure vulnerable ones just as bats do to insects that are attracted by city lights;

*Mais dès que le soleil se couchait, d’innombrables pelotons de chauves-souris envahissaient le ciel et commençaient leur chasse aux insectes nocturnes qu’attirait de la brousse et des forêts voisines le halo des lumières électriques qui se formait au-dessus de la ville.*⁴⁹

[But as soon as the sun went down, countless platoons of bats flooded the sky and began their hunt for nocturnal insects that were attracted from the bush and nearby forests by the halo of electric lights that formed over the city].

The power of the attraction is explained by how Louise will accept to marry the old ambassador Obengué, and how Bilanga snatches Arlette from his son Roger. In fact, their nocturnal outings are just for their own gains and satisfaction. While these bosses will be enjoying, the attendants will be on standby to take their commands, and their drivers will be waiting long hours outside for them.

Again, another distinct trait of this class of elites is the creation of camps where members share a strong sense of fraternity. Once a member, one receives a kind of support and protection from all other members and one is able to achieve one’s ambitions as one plays their cards well and remains faithful to the group. Here, a sense of communion mirroring how bats normally move together is portrayed. This is how Bilanga succeeds in getting the endorsement for his candidature despite all the wrongs and the crimes he had committed:

*Au bout de deux mois d’enquêtes sur les candidats aux élections, le P.D.P.U.R. proclama les listes. Bilanga s’était dépensé en visites nocturnes et en recours à des divers responsables dont il s’assura l’appui moyennant d’importants pourboires. Louise l’avait introduit auprès d’Obengué. Malgré sa répugnance, Marie avait accepté de déposer pour lui chez Avala de quoi payer quelques caisses de Whisky et de champagne, en remerciement pour la peine qu’Avala s’était donnée la nuit où, avec Marie, il l’avait raccompagné un peu ivre chez lui...et Avala avait évoqué son nom au cours d’une conversation avec son ami le ministre de l’Administration territoire M. Tefe Togo. Le ministre avait qualifié Bilanga de fonctionnaire sans histoires.*⁵⁰

[After two months of investigations into the candidates for the elections, the P.D.P.U.R. announced the lists. Bilanga had spent time on night visits and on the use of various officials, whose support he secured with large tips. Louise had introduced him to Obengué. Despite his repugnance, Marie

⁴⁸ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 113.

⁴⁹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81.

⁵⁰ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 173.

had agreed to lead him to Avala provided he offers some few cases of whisky and champagne, in gratitude for the trouble that Avala had given himself the night when, with Marie, he had accompanied him a little drunk home... and Avala had mentioned his name during a conversation with his friend the Minister of Territorial Administration, Mr. Tefe Togo. The minister qualified Bilanga as a civil servant without guilt].

Similarly, Bilanga is able to pay to withdraw Arlette's letter written to the "Tribune du peuple" newspaper, a letter which could have been exploited by his political opponents.

*Tout en prenant l'enveloppe, Bilanga, en remerciant, en avait remis une autre à Minala Minnam. Les deux hommes s'étaient donné une chaude poignée de main, accompagnée d'un rire complice. Le rire des males qui connaissent ce genre de problèmes.*⁵¹

[While taking the envelope with thanks, Bilanga, handed another one to Minala Minnam. The two men had given each other a warm handshake, accompanied by a complicit laugh. The laughter of males who experience this kind of problem].

The novel goes on to show how Mr Chauvin gets out of the tax evasion scandal due to his membership in this powerful class of elites. He simply offers an amount which is only a small fraction of how much he had evaded in ten years.

Voyez-vous, monsieur Bilanga, les services que nous pouvons vous rendre en fin de compte ne sont pas monnayables. Les bases humanistes des relations entre nos deux pays sont plus importantes que tout le reste. Nous assurons votre protection sur le plan monétaire, militaire et international, ... Mais pour en venir aux sommes que vous exigez, dit M. Chauvin en adoucissant la voix, on peut s'entendre. Je vous offre cent vingt millions.

[You see, Mr. Bilanga, the services we can ultimately provide to you are not redeemable for cash. The humanistic foundations of relations between our two countries are more important than anything else. We ensure your protection on the monetary, military and international levels, ... But to come to the sums you are demanding, says Mr. Chauvin, softening his voice, we can agree. I offer you one hundred and twenty million].

*Les cent vingt, vous le payez directement à l'Etat. Les papiers de réclamation vous parviendront d'ici quelques jours... Et par la suite, tachez de vous modérer dans la façon de vous servir. Nous voulons bien être bons princes, mais nous avons des bouches à nourrir.*⁵²

[The one hundred and twenty, you pay it directly to the State. The claim papers will reach you in a few days... And afterwards, try to moderate yourself in a befitting manner. We want to be good princes, but we have mouths to feed].

This behaviour is influenced by the old saying: "birds of a feather, flock together". Envy, whose fruits are cunning and greed, is a distinguishing feature of this new bourgeois. Desirous of climbing the sociopolitical ladder, they use all sorts of cunning to achieve this ambition. They are very greedy in their quest to the extent that they keep soiling their hands with corruption and crimes. Bilanga would use sugar-coated words and his money to have his way with women like Marie, Louise and Arlette:

*Toujours aussi belle, avait lancé Bilanga avec son sourire le plus admiratif. Bilanga savait séduire les femmes et souligner leurs avantages. Et Marie était une jeune femme dans la trentaine. Son buste s'était quelque peu affaissé à la suite des allaitements. Elle en était au désespoir, bien qu'elle eût un beau corps svelte et bien conservé.*⁵³

[Always beautiful, Bilanga said with his most admiring smile. Bilanga knew how to seduce women and emphasize their advantages. And Mary was a young woman in her thirties. Her bust had sagging somewhat as a result of breastfeeding. She was in despair, although she had a beautiful, slender and well-preserved body]

⁵¹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 159.

⁵² Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 103-105.

⁵³ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 9.

His affair with these women was definitely not out of sincere love but to use them as agents to achieve his dream of becoming the Minister for the Aboleya region. Bilanga knows very well that Marie also sees Avala, but considering what he stands to gain from her, he does everything possible to get Marie to fall in love with him; using seductive words, offering her money and promising her marriage. This is similar to his encounter with Louise, who is already married to Ambassador Obengué.

- i. *“Mais Louise s’était tout à coup mis en tête de convoler avec le vieil ambassadeur itinérant, qui voulait l’épouser comme seconde femme. Bilanga, qui se savait bien placé de Louise, avait fait un petit recul stratégique.”*⁵⁴

[But Louise had suddenly decided to marry the old Goodwill Ambassador, who wanted to marry her as a second wife. Bilanga, who knew that Louise was well placed, had made a small strategic retreat].

- ii. *“Mais Bilanga ne savais pas finalement ce qui le liait à Louise... Louise n’était pas une véritable beauté. Grande de taille et plutôt forte, elle avait la hanche et le buste comme les aimaient les males d’Eborzel, ...”*⁵⁵

[But Bilanga didn’t know what bound him to Louise... Louise was not a real beauty. Tall in stature and rather strong, she had hip and bust just as the men of Eborzel liked]

It is thanks to Louise that:

*“Bilanga avait pu franchir quelques barrages périlleux et s’était hissé, en y laissant une bonne partie de son gagne-pain, jusqu’au bureau des Affaires économiques. C’était un poste en vue et envié.”*⁵⁶

[Bilanga had been able to cross some perilous roadblocks and had climbed, leaving a good part of his livelihood, to the office of Economic Affairs. It was a prominent and envied position]

And that is how these bureaucrats behave; they offer you something with one hand and take more with the other. They are very cunning and deceptive just like the bizarre flying nature of bats, as the author describes it.

*“Bilanga remarqua pour la première fois que les chauves-souris avaient un vol bizarre. Elles avançaient en zigzag, se laissaient tomber de quelques mètres et repartaient dans une autre direction, comme si elles s’étaient rattrapées dans une chute vertigineuse.”*⁵⁷

[Bilanga first noticed that bats were having a bizarre flight. They advanced in zigzag, dropped a few meters and left in another direction as if they had caught themselves in a vertiginous fall].

With the ideology of “*celui qui n’avance recule*”⁵⁸ (you are left behind if you do not move forward), these new politically drunk men are even ready to buy the vote of the masses. Bilanga who had for long forgotten his roots (coming from a remote area with poor roads and where farming is the main occupation) and had become short of respect for his own people, is ready to entice them with money (mainly proceeds from his corrupt deals), drinks and other products. However, since everything that has a beginning has an end, Bilanga is totally rejected and maltreated by his people who would have now learnt their lessons with these greedy men and would have become wise. Yet, it would be too late when Bilanga would realise that one cannot have his/her cake and eat it.

*“Un vol de chauves-souris dont il revit en un dernier éclair de conscience les abats fantasques dans le ciel nocturne d’Eborzel. Bilanga comprit, avant de sombrer dans la nuit qui venait subitement l’envelopper en plein jour, qu’il n’avait pas d’ailes.”*⁵⁹ [A flight of bats of which he relives in a last flash of consciousness the whimsical offal in the night sky of Eborzel. Bilanga

⁵⁴ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 14.

⁵⁵ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 19.

⁵⁶ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 16.

⁵⁷ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 81.

⁵⁸ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 16.

⁵⁹ Nanga, *Les Chauves-Souris*, 195.

understood, before sinking into the night that suddenly enveloped him in broad daylight, that he had no wings].

This is comparable to the situation within which the bat found itself in the Indian story of Marie de France. Without a doubt, these politicians, bureaucrats and new bourgeois are real bats in human flesh.

Implication of Study

From every indication, this study shows that the title has a hidden meaning beyond the surface meaning. It will, therefore, be simplistic and erroneous for the reader to be in a haste to draw inferences from a title without subjecting it to a pragmatic analysis. Clearly, several contextual elements inform the actual meaning of a title that the reader must take into account. Let us examine them.

The title/book content relationship

The link that exists between the title and the content of the novel cannot be overemphasized. No matter how dissociated the title may seem on the surface, it has a link with the content of the story. One could be misled into thinking that a book with a title such as “*les chauves-souris*” could probably be a biological documentary on bats. However, Bernard Nanga tactfully uses the natural features and attitude of bats to characterize the behavior of the new bourgeoisie class without error. Consequently, the socio-cultural context, the spatio-temporal context, the choice of expressions and the stylistics of the presentation of events in the book all flow together to bring out the real meaning of the title in the end.

Origin of author

Many writers tackle the reality of their time within their home origin. Africanity is manifest in the works of Bernard Nanga, Ahmadou Kourouma, Mongo Béti and Alioum Fantouré, among others, in works such as *les chauves-souris*, *les Soleils des Indépendances*, *le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* and *le Cercle des tropiques*. In *les chauves-souris*, Bernard Nanga tackles the question of selfishness and the quest for power and riches by African leaders and the elite within the post-independence era in Africa, his homeland. His choice of *les chauves-souris* as title to characterize this class of African politicians is right in the sense that bats are common creatures in Africa and in many African traditional societies, people hold superstitious beliefs about bats as being strange animals.

Spatio-temporal context effect on title choice

The space and time within which a book is written influence the title. This is explained by the fact that writers themselves are social activists and their primordial role is to write about events of their time in order to create awareness and engage every social being to take the needed action for the needed social change. As George Mikes puts it, “The writer’s influence must be harnessed for the good of society, for right, decent, useful and beneficial aims.”⁶⁰ *Les chauves-souris* is written within the context of West Africa in the post-independence era where power and selfishness had become the pursuit of many men in socio-political positions. Their greed will lead to the extent of suppressing anyone who speaks or writes anything against their foul practices. This situation is manifest in Bernard Nanga’s book where everything possible is done by Bilanga to get Biyidi, the young professor, punished for writing and teaching these young students just to enlighten them about the wrongdoings of this elite class. The writer within this spatiotemporal reality would therefore have to be cautious, and creative and use wit in their compositions. It is in this way that Bernard Nanga’s choice of animal title to characterize humans is very well appreciated.

Philosophical Implications of the Title

No matter the objectivity of a message, there may be traces of underlying beliefs and philosophies of the speaker since arguments are always made from a particular point of view. Philosophically, Bernard Nanga shares in Jean de La Fontaine’s ideology, which characterizes the bat as an opportunistic creature that changes camps based on its personal interest, as shown in Marie de France’s Indian story. If the author

⁶⁰ George Mikes, “The Writer’s Role?,” *Index on Censorship* 15, no. 2 (1986): 7.

refers to this new bourgeoisie class as bats, then it is evident that the author's philosophy has an implication on his title.

The Use of Figures of Speech

Primarily, the title serves the purpose of capturing the attention and the interest of the reader and it is for this reason that the writer resorts to the use of figures of speech, according to Antoniou et al (2015). This study equally confirms this assertion. The use of figures of speech allows the writer to present their message in an artistic and seducing manner that attracts the attention and interest of readers. It is also a way of presenting the message indirectly to, in a way, avoid the trouble of the power-drunk (especially within the era of post-independence in Africa). Bernard Nanga uses metaphor in his title "*Les chauves-souris*" by way of indirectly comparing the class of the new bourgeoisie and politicians to bats. The use of metaphor is remarkable in the works of African writers such as Ahmadou Kourouma, Mongo Béti, etc.

CONCLUSION

Certainly, there is a general agreement that the basic function of the title is to identify the book. However, many titles can be deceptive. A number of factors go into the composition of a title and these factors have implications on the actual meaning of the title. These include the origin of the author, the era within which the book is written, the beliefs or philosophies of the writer and the use of figures of speech, among others. Bernard Nanga uses very well the traits of bats to characterize the politicians and the new class of bourgeoisie. The selfishness and the opportunistic nature of bats according to Jean de La Fontaine's philosophy are qualities that are attributable to these characters and the author obviously shares this philosophy. From this perspective, it can be argued that this book merits the title "*Les chauves-souris*".

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