

Alex Gino's children's novel George retitled Melissa 'to respect trans heroine'

Writer says they had not realised they should speak up about the title when the book was first published, but it will henceforth take the heroine's female name

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Alex Gino's award-winning children's novel about a trans girl, George, is being renamed Melissa, after Gino and publisher Scholastic said they made a mistake in titling it with a name "the main character does not like or want to use for herself".

Published in 2015, the novel follows the story of trans fourth grader Melissa, who is seen by everyone as a boy named George, but who decides to reveal who she really is by playing the role of Charlotte in her class play, Charlotte's Web. It won the American novelist, whose pronouns are they and them, literary prizes including the Children's Stonewall award, the Lambda literary award, and a Children's Choice book award.

But Gino said this summer that it had been a mistake to title the novel George, apologised to the character and to the wider trans community, and began changing the title to Melissa's Story when signing books for fans.

"The title of my book made it seem as though it is OK to use an old name for a person when they have provided you with a different name that works better for them. I want to be clear – it isn't," Gino said at the time. "The cover is beautiful. Iconic, even. But here's the thing: so many transgender people have been told that we are beautiful/handsome as a reason not to transition, myself included. We are told that we will mar something special, as though looking pleasant to others is more important than being ourselves. As if it's not more important than seeing who's really there, scars and all."

Gino explained that the original title came about because while they were writing the novel, they “jokingly” called it Girl George, playing on the singer Boy George. Scholastic, after acquiring the story, advised taking the word “girl” off the cover when publishing because “there would be some people who wouldn’t give the book to a boy if it had the word girl on it”; Gino, “stunned” to be published at all, agreed. “I wish I had realised to speak up then,” they said this summer.

Now Scholastic and Gino are officially changing the title of the book from George to Melissa “to respect Melissa and all trans people”, said the author. Scholastic, which will publish the new edition from next April in the US, added: “What we call people matters and we all deserve to be addressed in ways that feel good to us. Once you see a mistake, you can always change it.” Gino’s UK publisher, Scholastic UK, said it would also be replacing George with Melissa from the next reprint.

“No matter how many people have come to know it as George, we felt it was important to fix the title,” said Gino, urging readers to either make the title change themselves, print out new covers from Scholastic’s website, **or buy a new copy once Melissa is published**. “The text inside won’t change, so the name George will still appear to reflect the character’s growth within the novel, but Melissa will be the first name readers will know her by.”