

Obscene Onomastics in Medieval Trickster Tales

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Names or nicknames of tricksters, who often appear in both oral culture and in literature in the guise of servants or fools, are infused with what Bakhtin (16-17, 27-28, 48, 164-68, et pass.) called the grotesque debasement of language to the bodily lower stratum. This grotesque carnivalesque language, characteristic of the speech of the marketplace, emphasizes excrescences of the human body, especially the phallus, but also the nose, which often stands for it, as well as all the apertures of the body and hence the often interchanged activities of eating, copulation and excretion. It blurs, as well, the frontiers between categories of the human, the animate, and the inanimate. In this paper I shall exemplify the use of carnivalesque debasement in naming conventions of trickster figures, both in literary and subliterate texts from antiquity to the present, with primary emphasis on the medieval and renaissance periods.

The absurd names of servant figures that I shall be discussing, as well as the frequently cruel and illogical tricks in which they specialize will become clearer if they are studied in the context of the grotesque and anti-social activities of the universal folkloric figure of the trickster, which is their subliterate archetype. According to Jung, the trickster, an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity, embodies an absolutely undifferentiated consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has had hardly left the animal stage. In his clearest manifestations he is a faithful copy of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level' (Jung 200). He is also seen as poised at the crossroads of the secular and the spiritual. He has some of the features of a pagan deity, of an animal, a human being, a hero, and a buffoon; he serves both good and evil, and functions as denier and affirmer, destroyer and creator. He exists purely on the material level, where what most interests him is the gratification of his physical appetites. Others consider him as a reflection of a logically more sophisticated culture, which needs to create the trickster as a mediating figure to respond to the perception of contradictions in society (Kerényi, Radin, Babcock, Abrahams, Sayre, Koepping; for an accessible overview and up-to-date bibliography, see Lock and "Trickster Whey"). In any case, the trickster represents a symbolic inversion of established values, who is amoral, asocial, aggressive, impulsive, deceitful, exhibitionist, has an overdeveloped libido, and is constantly provoking all authority. From his position on the fringe of society, he mocks all conventions but in particular those relating to sexuality. His arms of attack range from coprophagy to scatology, i.e., from material dirt to verbal dirt. He may directly sling excrement or drench others in urine, traditional debasing gestures in terms of the topography of the body. He may, instead, obsessively repeat tabu words directly or through double entendres and thus make them, so to speak, come alive.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, the trickster's verbal games –the misremembering, the slips of the tongue, and the double entendres– reveal the unconscious desires of the “id”. The trickster's primal or unconscious desires typically work through language, turning on linguistic twists and polysemic significations, as will be richly exemplified.

Frequently the trickster possesses mental or physical abnormalities, particularly in the form of hypertrophied sexual organs, or other appendages that may stand for them, such as a hunchback, oversized feet, nose, or ears. His incorrigible impulses make him the incarnation of the phallus, with its uncontrollable and irrational disobedience. His phallus, serving as his double or alter ego can also be depicted as growing to enormous proportions and can even supplant him, with the motif of detachable phalluses appearing in many trickster tales. For example, the erect organ of the cunning semi-divine but sub-human animal trickster of the Winnebago reaches such a total emancipation that the trickster can remove it and carry it on his back in a box, or he can send it under water to copulate with the chief's daughter standing on the other side of the river (Radin). Compare a literary version of the same hypertrophism motif in Rabelais' Pantagruel where men who had gorged on great medlars (where *medlar* connotes the 'female pudenda', Partridge 153) had their members swell and grow so large that they could use them as a belt, twisting them four or five times around the body. In Andalusia today a variant of the Winnebago tale circulates in oral tradition in the joke about the girls who won't go into the pool for fear of male sexual organs lurking underwater. Another joke in the same tradition is about Don Quijote's servant, Sancho Panza (whose name means 'fat belly/gut'), who is said to have to travel with two boxes, one for his luggage and the other for his *cojones* 'testicles' (Brandes 153).

Examples of sexually overdeveloped tricksters in classical culture include the satyrs, and trickster deities such as Hermes, Mercury, and Priapus, who are imagined as gendered and supersexual. Satyrs, who represent the incorporation of animal nature into man, are depicted as having equine ears, tails and sometimes hoofs, and an always erect phallus of equine proportions and they may carry names such as 'Penis,' 'Erection,' or 'Gland' (Fränkel). Although they pursue human females, their successful sexual encounters are usually limited to quadrupeds.



Satyr (*Psykter*, Attic Red Figure [ca. 500-490 BC])



(Satyr pleased by a Nymph, Mosaic from Pompeii [ca. I AD])



Satyr (Attic Red Figure, ca. 500-480 BC)



Hermes, the wily and deceptive Greek god of fertility and crossroads, is represented as a kind of ‘flasher’ in the form of rectangular columns with erect genitals (sometimes with a human head superimposed) facing with menacing erection towards intruders.

Mercury and Priapus, the god of gardens and fertility, are also represented with equally overabundant or even animal phallic proportions. For example, miniatures of Priapus, phallus aflame, were hung in doorways, telling both evil spirits and human intruders to ‘f--- off’!



Priapus (fresco from Pompeii [ca. I AD])



Priapus (House of the Vettii, Pompeii [ca. I AD])



Priapus (Bronze Statuette, Picardy [ca. I AD])

The exaggerated sexual attributes of fools, clowns, mimes, and mummers throughout history are ultimately related to that of the satyrs and the Dionysian trickster deities. Roman examples of phallic display include Gallo-roman bronze ornaments depicting grotesque male busts, on the dome of whose shaved pate a lock of hair stands up in the form of an erect penis, while in Roman theater fools employed enormous leather phalluses. In the middle ages the animal-like sexuality of fools was often shown displaced to other objects associated with them, like the asses' ears and cock's crest, or an actual phallic-shaped cock, decorating their fool's caps. The fool's bauble was particularly seen as a detachable, self-operating organ with life of its own, which could be formed into a clear representation of a phallus or be capped with an emblematic replica of the fool's head (Maeterlinck [fig. 3], Schwarz, Willeford 10-11, Williams, Richard, Metzger, Gaignebet & Lajoux 190).

The trickster uses practical jokes and verbal games, such as obscene double entendres to subvert official order. One of his favorite games is a kind of false naiveté or pseudo-schizophrenia, where he pretends to understand only on the literal level (Levin). For example, a German version of a tale of the famous Medieval trickster Markolf (which name probably has its origin in the name Mercury) illustrates both Markolf's gluttony and his verbal ingenuity when he promises to bring his master Solomon an *[eier]fladen* 'pancake,' which he then ends up eating himself and replacing with a *[kuh]fladen* or 'cowflop.'

In medieval culture the gross trickster-servant figure with an absurd semantically transparent name, who inevitably outwits his master with his clever verbal games, has its literary roots in the Roman *servus* of Plautus and Terence, revived in narrative form in the twelfth-century Latin clerical *comedia*. For example, the cynical comedy *Babio* is a typical medieval "game in a name," where the characters have semantically transparent names appropriate to their role in the plot. The aptly-named young servant *Fodius* 'digger, fucker' tricks his miserly old pedant master *Babio* 'senile, stupid, fool, babbler' intellectually as well as sexually by cuckolding the old man with the latter's young wife, *Petula*, whose name connotes 'lascivious, prostitute.' *Fodius* manages to deny his misdeed by a grammatical ruse on his own name. When accused, he swears only that he is not having sex with *Petula* at that very moment (*luro sacras per aras, non fodit hanc Fodius*), but because *Babio* is too ignorant to distinguish the short *o* of the present tense *fodit* from the long *o* of the past tense *fodit* he becomes complicit in his own deception and eventual castration.

Another example in medieval comedy of the servant with a *redende Name* is the gross rustic servant *Spurius* 'bastard' who serves as the grotesquely inappropriate erotic counselor to his master *Pyrrhus* 'pear, fool, testicle.' On the model of Ovid, *Spurius* convinces his master in fifty bombastic verses to send an appropriately seductive gift of a meat pie to a woman whom he is trying to woo. Naturally, it is the messenger himself who ends up eating the pie with the help of his girlfriend, *Spurca* 'dirty, covered with excrement, fellatrix' (Elliott, Vasvari 1988). The function of verbally astute servants such as *Fodius* and *Spurius* is to create a topsy-turvy world of

illusion in which values are inverted and where the underdog becomes king of carnival, symbolizing the victory of imagination, astuteness, and of the pleasure principle (Babcock). Such tricky servants always triumph over their master, on whom in real life they must depend, with the servants' grotesque names serving as immediate metatextual clues to indicate their role as liminal personalities.

It belongs to the very essence of trickster-servant and fool figures that they should have grotesque names connoting their basic characteristics. For example, the medieval Irish trickster is called *crossans* which connotes lewd, obscene, boastful or contrary behavior. In one Irish tale the jesters in one household are called *Trick*, *Madcap* and *Mockery* combining the elements of which the tricksters' activities are made up (Harrison 52), particularly when we consider that terms for deception and trick always overlap semantically with sexual trickery, as even in contemporary English, where a prostitute is said to 'turn a trick.'

Medieval literature is full of onomastically-challenged servant figures, who both have trick names and live by their tricks. Abusive (nick)names and the creation of proper names from sexual or scatological terms is one of the most frequently utilized techniques of popular humor. Names and epithets of tricksters are often grouped in lengthy and often complex strings of hyperbolic abusive language, semantically and grammatically isolated from context, where naming, addressing, and insulting become inseparable activities. Such a combination of ambivalent and ironic epithets of praise and abuse, along with oaths and invectives, form the typical verbal abuse of the festive popular culture, and are particularly prevalent in the subculture of marginalized groups in all periods (Bakhtin, Labov, Dundes, McDowell, Murray).

Ludic onomastics is part of language play, one of the most beloved forms of human activity, and part of oral-carnavalesque culture. It is one the (paraliterary) "little genres of oral discourse" (Bakhtin), such as lying, bragging, and insult competitions, ludic fables and fabliaux, *sermons joyeux*, the *antipastourelle*, and what I have called perverted proverbs, all of which I have studied elsewhere (see Haywood & Vasvari). Examples of ludic onomastics are nicknames centered on physical defects, illness, and scatological and sexual insults, such as the medieval Fr. *boiteux* 'lame', *bossuet* 'hunchback', *Boyau/Boillet* 'with a big gut,' various terms with *cul* 'ass' (*grant cul*, *gros cul*, *trou de cul*, *poil au cul* 'big ass, asshole, hair on the ass'), *couille* 'balls,' and many more, including Eng. *Letcher* 'letcher', *Cunteles* 'cunt', *Prytayle* 'penis-tail', and French *Grossteste*, *Conilaud*, *Vitu*, *Chiart*, *Chaille/Chiasson*, *Chastrez*, and *Coillot/Coille* '[big] balls' (Carriez).

David Gilmore (76-90) discusses the continued proliferation of such disparaging terms, often scatological, obscene, and always embarrassing in the Andalusia of today, where it functions in the form of the *apodo* as a genre of covert verbal, mostly male-on-male aggression, much as gossip does for women. Gilmore documents how in one agricultural town of 1,570 households there are only 217 patronymics to go around, all common Castilian ones, compounded by only a handful of Christian names. To compensate for this paucity of official

names, he found 400 nicknames, 40 to 1 of them attached to men, including ones such as, *Antonio la Chochona* ('Antonio Big Twat'), *Manolillo el Chocho* 'Big Twat,' *Joseillo el Cagachino* 'Shit on the Floor,' *La Rogelia*, a feminine distortion of a male's name applied to a man, and *Maripepa Caramelo*, applied to another unfortunate man who was not effeminate but had a high-pitched voice, and *Juanito de la Cagarruta* and *Joseillo el Cagachino*, both of whom purportedly shit their pants.

In stereotyped invectives the borderline between adjective, noun, and common and proper noun becomes totally blurred. The comic effect consists in the ingenuous over-accumulation, often in rhyme, of vulgar epithets. As such catalogues of abusive terms are by their very exaggeration much more conducive to laughter than to functioning as actual insults they turn into a verbal game that socializes linguistic aggressiveness. Invective epithets serve to enumerate the moral and physical defects and dishonest occupations of cunning jack-of-all-trades, rogue servants, who in the middle ages belonged to the itinerant homeless hordes, including pimps, porters, prostitutes, pickpockets, gamblers, beggars, and the like. Sometimes such would-be servants boastfully list their own vices and occupations by way of self-recommendation for a job. In other cases, it is the masters who extol their servants with such terms and, with carnivalesque logic, contract them or keeps them on as servants in spite of their tricky character. In this carnivalesque language such series of abusive, or often self-abusive names, rather than functioning as true insulting epithets, are by their exaggeration and incongruity part of the carnivalesque genre of billingsgate, or popular invective, where they have fully retained their playful and ambivalent linguistic vitality. Ultimately, in carnivalesque language names, nicknames and terms of abusive praise or praiseful abuse become indistinguishable.

Two medieval examples of such hyperbolic lists of praise-abuse are the thirteenth-century Provençal poem, "Le truand aux cent métiers," a list of some eighty dishonest occupations of a medieval Jack-of-all-trades, and the very similar "Dit de l'Herberie" of Rutebeuf (Bec [89-84], Picot [492]), both burlesque monologues of professional self-praise of a rogue who brags that he will recount all his occupations, among which he includes ruffian, pirate, thief, pimp, cutpurse, and many more. In both lists even seemingly innocuous occupations, such as "basket maker" simultaneously carry dishonest connotations of being a cheat.

In the fourteenth century Spanish *Libro de buen amor* a tricky adolescent go-between miserably humiliates his master in a love adventure, following which the master good-humoredly extols/insults his servant, as (ed. Willis, 1620-21)

a scoundrely young pimp [...] a charming young fellow;
except for fourteen things I never saw anyone better
than he was.

He was deceitful, drunken, a thief and a tattler, a
card-cheat, a brawler, greedy and quarrelsome, a wrangler

a fortune-teller, dirty and superstitious, stupid and lazy.

The youth is named Huron ‘ferret,’ a name whose multiple connotations must be understood in the context of the characteristic grotesque genital attributes of tricksters (Vasvári 1995). On the denotative level, the ‘ferret’ refers to a small carnivore with a long flexible body that moves rapidly and with agility and is used to hunt rabbits. At the same time, because of his movements, elongated shape and inclination to pursue conies into their hutches the term ‘ferret’ has been generalized in numerous languages as ‘phallus.’ Compare, in English, the now innocent sounding *Pop goes the weasel*, which has its origins in the same ambiguous image.

One of the most detailed descriptions of the grotesque qualities of servants is in the Decameron (VI, 10), of *Guccio Balena/Porco* ‘Whale/Pig,’ servant to the charlatan salesman of relics, *Frate Cipolla* ‘Friar Onion.’ As his porcine name indicates, *Guccio* is short, ugly, dirty, and oversexed. In addition, his master in a catalogue reminiscent of the description of Huron brags that his servant possesses nine such characteristics that if Salomon or Aristotle or Seneca had even one of them, it would nullify all their virtue, wisdom, and morality: “He is slow, [...] a liar, negligent, disobedient, foul-mouthed [...] forgetful [...], not to mention a few other little faults, which it would be better to keep quiet.”

Picaresque servants like *Hurón* and *Guccio Porco* are also related to the medieval marginalized figure and onomastic joke par excellence, *Nemo* ‘No One’, or, better, ‘Anti-Someone.’ Although it is first recorded as a cunning trick name in Odysseus the onomastic joke is further elaborated in the Middle Ages. *Nemo* becomes a mock saint in parodic sermons, with appropriate reinterpretations of Latin Biblical sentences such as in *Nemo Deum vidit* ‘No one sees God,’ *Deus claudit et Nemo aperit* ‘God knocks and No One opens.’ *Nemo* also becomes associated with the misdeeds of servants, for which “No One” always claims responsibility (Calman, Meyer-Heisig, Schuster). Compare also similarly carnivalesque “No” place names, like French *Niort*, and English *No Name*, *Nobody’s Business*, and *Nome* (originally “No Name”), all of which really exist in the United States (McMullen).

In the fifteenth-century Clement Marot plays on a variant of the Nemo figure as servant in the following verses (Koopman 161):

Vray est qu’il avoyt ung valet
 Qui s’appeloyt Nichil valet
 (‘It’s true that he had a valet ‘servant’/ whose name was Nichil Valet
 “worthless servant”).

The rhymed word, *valet* ‘servant,’ also connotes ‘phallus,’ imagined as man’s unreliable and disobedient servant, as in the following obscene riddle in Middle French (Hassell 639D):

Demande: Quel est tel valet? Se il ne lui monte en la teste, riens ne feroit ne pour maistre ne pour dame.

Response: Ce est dit pour un vit, qui au besoing ne voelt mettre a point.

(‘Question: Who is such a valet If he doesn’t feel like it, he won’t do anything for master nor lady.

Answer: That’s said of the prick, which refuses to be ready/to get an erection when needed.’)

Lists of insults when they are incorporated into insult contests or “flyting” are often nothing but an unbroken string of invectives, whose virtuosity demands an even more inventive retort from the insulted adversary, as in the following fifteenth-century Scottish competition (Legman 786-87; see also many more examples in Juckers & Taavitsainen):

Canker’d Cursed Creature, Crabbed Corbit Kittle, Buntin-ars’d, Buegle-back’ed, Bodied like a Beetle; Sarie-shitten, shell-paddock, ill-shapen shit, to which the only appropriate reply is to top the invectives:
Fond Fliter, Shit Shiter, Bacon Byter, all defil’d,
Blunt-bleiter, Paddock pricker, Pudding-eater perverse [...]
Jock blunt, thrawn Frunt, kiss the Cunt of the Cow,
Rubiator, Fornicator by Nature.

As we shall presently see, many of these insult terms are readily convertible into proper names.

Fifteenth-century German *Fasnachtspiele* ‘carnival plays,’ offer a particularly rich documentation in invective naming conventions, where invectives similar to the Scottish ones have clearly become nicknames. In one play in form of a lawsuit the two protagonists represent the gluttony of tricksters, with the plaintiff called *Fritz Weinschlunt* ‘Fritz Winegullet’ and the defendant *Heinz Molkenfross* ‘Heinz Dairygorger’ (Keller n. 10). In another, the fools, who are trying to pose as lovers and who sport fool’s caps, ass’s ears, and cuckoo feathers, have names like *Der Ulein Kolb* ‘owl’s ass,’ *Nasenstanck* ‘nose stink,’ *Muckenrussel* ‘gnat snout’ (Hans Folz, *Die Liebesnarren. Em Spiel von Narren*, in Wuttke & Wuttke 82-90).

Another *Fasnachtspiel* provides a particularly extensive catalogue of names of rogue characters, called out at the beginning by the crier (Keller 372). The invective-nicknames range from relatively mild *Landschalk* ‘itinerant rogue,’ and *Feltrud* ‘(field) dog/fox’ (which, like Huron above, is a sexualization of hunting images), to several grotesque animal terms, *Speckkuh* ‘bacon cow,’ *Schweinsohr* ‘pig’s ear,’ *Kalbseuter* ‘cow’s utter,’ *Eberzan* ‘boar’s tooth,’ to *Der tauft Jud* ‘baptized Jew,’ variant of *Der Jud*, a popular insult name. Most telling is the name *Schlauraff* which

shows that fools with such names inhabit *Schlaraffenland* or the Land of Cockaigne, the topsy-turvy world, which like carnival, represents the reversal of hierarchical order, and in which such rogue characters dwell (Wunderlich, Vasvari 1991).

Arndt (78-83), who in his *Die Personennamen des deutschen Schauspiels des Mittelalters* provided an extensive lists of grotesque fools' names in carnival plays, left most without adequate commentary, sometimes out of reticence and often out of ignorance of many of the sexual connotations. Among the more picturesque terms listed but not explicated by Arndt are the following:

-- *Sauerkübel* 'sour/pickling bucket,' *Sauerzapf* 'plug or bung of a vinegar barrel,' *Scheisskübel* 'shitbucket,' and *Gruomatsack* 'sack full of bran/excrement.

-- *Vilweiss* 'Know-it-all,' and, in the same play, *Studfaul* 'Lazy-as-a-post,' who brags about his incomparable laziness, both of whom must also inhabit *Schlaraffenland* where it is the laziest and the biggest liars who are made king (on the enormously popular medieval genre of the lying tale see Vasvari 1989).

-- *Otto Eulenvist von Pirntan*, who is onomastic cousin to the much more famous trickster, *Till Eulenspiegel*, whose name, bowdlerized as 'owl-mirror,' actually has its actual etymology in Flemish *ul den spegel* 'wipe my ass' (Richter 38), the meaning which is clearly alluded to in the many illustrations of the young Till riding on a horse behind his father, provocatively "flashing" his bare buttocks to passers-by.

-- *Hainkam* 'Cockscomb,' with allusion to the cockscomb, sometimes replaced by a phallus, on top of fools' caps (on cocks as phallus see further Vasvári In press).

-- *Pilzan* 'foal's [first] tooth,' which, like *Eberzahn* above, connotes 'horniness,' in this case of an adolescent. Toothache, for example, was regarded in folk culture as a punishment for sexual guilt. Compare the tale of the woman with a toothache who tells her husband that the priest can cure it. The suspicious husband sends their son to spy on the pair, and he comes back with the report that the priest "pulled a very long tooth from mother's hole" (Anonymous 1901). Or compare the prostitute in the Decameron (VII, 9) who gets a client to pull out a tooth to give her as a memento, but he soon finds out the she has a whole bag filled with client's pulled teeth (Vasvári 2008).

-- *Schürzenesel* 'skirt-chaser,' literally 'apron-ass,' because in traditional culture the ass, renowned for his enormous erectile capacity, was the popular image par excellence of both lust and laziness, and term for ass often came to connote the phallus (vid. Vasvari 1990, which also documents the sexual connotations of articles of female clothing, like smocks and aprons, which cover the genital area).

-- *Tytke Druckenworst* 'Dietrich [Pressed/Dry Sausage' and *Rübengrebel von Erlestigen* 'Rootdigger,' which refers not to agricultural labor but to love's labor of the manroot, or *Rübe*, which I have dubbed elsewhere vegetal-genital onomastics (Vasvári 1988).

Another variant of fool's names in carnival plays is the invention of trickster popular genital saints in the French *sermons joyeux* (Koopmans), as the male *St. Boudin* (blood sausage eaten particularly at carnival/phallus), the female *Sainte Fente* (Saint Split/Crack), the confessor *Saint Couillebault, confesseur*, whose name is homonymous with *couille* = *con* = *fesseur* ('nice balls = cunt = ass[man]'), and the latter's "sister", *Sainte Velue* ('saint hairy'), among whose miracles is that she gives back a woman her virginity. There is also a masculine *Saint Velu*, in the *Sermon de saint Velu* (circa 1520) said to have been buried in Italy after being martyred in the town of *Viterbie* (*vit* 'penis'), strangled by a *con*. He is famous for many "miracles" like making women "fat" and making milk go into their breasts and for his "medicines," whose nature is readily apparent from the female faithful who are urged to pray to him: *Qu'il vous doit donner passion/ quant on voudra votre combatre/ et que d'un coup on vous abbate/ pour fourrer votre pelisson* ('That he grant you passion / when you want to enter into combat [=con=batter 'cunt bang'] / and that you get killed /hit/fucked in a quick one/ to stuff your furpiece'). Other similar saints include *Sainte Folie*, *Saint Frappcul*, *Saint Pou*, and *Saint Jambon* (where *jambon* 'ham/ass'), who was martyred in truly saintly fashion, tortured by his skin being salted, then hung, and finally sold [into slavery]: *sallé...pendu... vendu au beau marché au plus. Offrant*. Meanwhile, *Saint Andouille* ('tripe sausage' eaten at carnival/phallus) was boiled and roasted on coals and then cut up into pieces ingested by women.

In the *Fasnachspiele* the humor of the scatological or sexual meaning of fools' names is heightened by their obsessive accumulation. Compare an Old German Marian play, where the tricky servant Rubinus introduces the play and himself with nineteen different ridiculous but not obscene names (Kummer 38): *Gumpolt. Rumpolt. Harolt, Narolt, Seibolt, Neidolt, Hirolt. Mirolt. Leupolt, Deupolt, Hospolt. Rospolt, Tibolt, Nimdolt. Enchenpolt. Frauenholt. Isandolt, Gundolt, Ranpolt, und der schon Akcherpolt*. To this list he later adds *Pastaun* and *Ekhart* before giving his "real" name, *Rubein* (from Lat. *Rubinus* 'red haired,' a sign of cunningness in the Middle Ages). Although Rubein brags about how mornings he hides behind the fence and then pounces on girls as they take their animals to pasture, his many names have no sexual connotations, but their very accumulation is funny, and they make him into an anti-Nemo, or 'Everyfool.'

As in the above list, even when the names themselves may not be obscene, their very excessive accumulation, perhaps in rhyme and with other linguistic games, can be a source of hilarity. A masterpiece in this genre is the "Chanson contenant les noms des principaux négociants de Lyon," supposedly a list of actual people active in Lyon in the middle of the eighteenth century (first edited in 1846 by J-B. Montfalcon). It is

worthwhile to reproduce the whole list to illustrate how the hilarity is achieved by a variety of literary techniques: the rhyme (*Violon, Rigoudon, Babillon, Rapillon*), by semantic association (*Le Rouge, le Gris, Le Roux*), by pseudo-proverbs (*Petit Coeur, Grand Joueur*), syntactically correct semantic nonsense (*Le Gros, Robinet, Soulage*) by *parodia sacra* (*Avé, Maria, Philis*, homonymous with Ave, Maria, Filius, and *Saint-Joseph, Vachet, Fize*, a play on ‘Saint Joseph, Vache et Fils’), as well as some supposedly “real” names, but which were like the Andalusian nicknames or *apodos* discussed above as a male-on-male discourse, which could straight-out function as names of characters in carnivalesque genres (such as *Sautemouche, Compagnon* [buddy/testicle, vid. Vasvari 1983], *Boudin, Sale, Baton, La Sausse, Farinet, Bourdon*, and *Cocquard* which means ‘trickster, fool’):

Violon
 Rigoudon,
 Sautemouche,
 Detournes, Michel, Morin,
 Paillard, Bouchet, Catin,
 Beauvais, Fichet, Carmouche,
 Perrotton,
 Compagnon,
 De la Fosse,
 Thou, Boudin, Sale, Baton,
 Pourrat, Mettra, Toinon,
 La Sausse,
 Le Gros, Robinet, Soulage,
 Vidalin, Dansson, Ménage,
 May, Guillot
 Beau, Chicot,
 Soulas, Treille,
 Servan, Marion, Dubois,
 Fay, Dru, Comte, Puy, Bois
 Bouteille,
 Babillon, Rapillon,
 Ronjon, Miervre,
 Nalet, Pachet, Salicon
 Ferlat, Courraux, Giton,
 Chaix, Concler, Gilles, Lièvre,
 Blanc, Cocquard,
 Bon, Pinard,
 Poivre, Motte,
 Le Rouge, Le Gris, Le Roux,
 Le Court, Le Long, Saphoux,

La Motte,
 Dressons, Noud,
 La Griffoud,
 Avé, Maria, Philis,
 De Bouteau, Paradis,
 Viton, Jamet, Lafitte,
 Aubonnet,
 Farinet,
 La Gajette,
 Prost, May, Pourtat, Sain, Remi,
 Troy, Perrat, Calami
 Mouchette,
 Choisi, Margotton, Sautille,
 Toy, fourton, Viola, Guille,
 Simon, Chef,
 Saint-Joseph,
 Vachet, Fize,
 Garan, Cusinet, Siblant,
 Selle, Bidet, Déjean,
 Déglise
 Petit Coeur
 Grand, Jouteur,
 La Rivoire,
 Bonafous, Travi, Mollet,
 Sans, Vitaux, Serpollet,
 Adam, Sondas, L'Histoire,
 Audet, Mont,
 Jansse, Iron,
 Plin, Des Granges,
 Lenoir, Demonat, Patou,
 Gris, Bourdon, Labat, Foust,
 Des Anges.

Many more stories with grotesque-named servants, especially in oral tradition, serve only as an excuse for the narrator and his audience to be able to enjoy the power of tabu words said aloud, as is shown by many oral “name tales,” a kind of formulaic joke collected throughout Europe. Formulaic jokes are generically framed stories, anecdotes, or turns of phrase which differ from other forms of humor in their relative independence from specific speech events and are built on predictable prosodic, narrative, and semantic forms. They are thus easily recontextualized in a wide variety of situations, leading to their wide geographic and chronological range. For example, in one South Slavic tale (Krauss 441-45) the trickster-servant presents himself to his

new master with the name *Zumpf* ‘penis,’ to the master’s wife as *Votz* ‘cunt,’ and to the daughter as *Reisfleisch*, a kind of ‘meat risotto.’ The very first night he seduces the daughter and immediately runs off, the purpose of the whole infantile tale being only to give occasion to the equivocations resulting from the ridiculous situation of parents and daughter pursuing the servant through the village, each calling him by a different one of his absurd names. In other variants, the rogue substitutes other ridiculous names from his repertoire of self-naming, emphasizing in apt trickster fashion in equal measure copulation and excretion, such as *Haar* ‘hair,’ *Pint* ‘penis,’ *Ramm* ‘ram,’ *Loch* ‘hole,’ *Vözlein* ‘little cunt,’ *Estrauftdurch* ‘it drips through,’ *Schwül* ‘queer,’ *Vögle* ‘I fuck,’ *Du vögelst* ‘you fuck,’ *Haltedenfingerinsarschloch* ‘hold your finger in your asshole,’ *Wissmirdasgesseses* ‘Wipe my ass,’ *Küssunsdiarskapp* ‘Kiss my ass.’ An ever more infantile variant of the joke of a fool using an usual name to achieve seduction is still current in Modern Greek in the story of the clever boy who finds work in the garden of a king, whose daughter he manages to seduce by telling the king, the daughter, and the queen, in turn, that his name is “Penis,” “Big Meatball, and “Pussy” (Orso no. 218; in a variant in no. 219 the trickster calls himself “Porridge”). Compare, in the context of such onomastic seduction jokes, the name of the famous trickster Till Eulenspiegel, above, or the invitation, in the Scottish flyting also cited above, to “Come kiss my Erse,” to which the obscene reply, hilariously couched in an elaborately high linguistic register: *Compear upon thy knee and kisse my foul foundation*. Note also that the fascination with inventive naming of the genitals is definitely a strongly male-gendered oral discourse, as shown by Deborah Cameron; she found that male students in a linguistics class assignment produced almost three times as many such terms as females, and produced more unusual, idiosyncratic and even newly coined terms, such as, two cite two food metaphors, “The Big Whopper,” “Oscar Meyer” (a brand of kosher frankfurter and at the same time a clever personification).

In other variants of ludicrous name tales collected in Picardie in 1880 (Anonymous 1884, Carnoy) the French-speaking rogue manages to convince a priest, and that man’s maid and sister, successively, that his name is *J’ai trois poils au con* ‘I have three hairs on my cunt,’ *Ça m’démange* ‘I’ve got an itch,’ and *Dominus vobiscum* ‘God be with you,’ and, in still another variant, the servant calls himself *Atrappe-mes-couilles-par-derrière* ‘Grab-me-by-the-balls-from-the-back,’ *Le Chien* and *La Sauce* (this last a name that appears on the list of names from Lyon, above). Other versions of name tales have been collected in Flemish (Anonymous 1888) about a man who only likes to hire servants with curious names and refuses those not interesting enough, so that one day a rogue appears who claims his name is *Prends-mes-couilles-par-derrière* ‘Grab-me-by-the-balls-from-behind.’ Ultimately all these stories are interchangeable, with the sole aim that the master should be made to look ridiculous, or, even better, actually to suffer bodily harm when he is duped by the rogue.

The tradition of such onomastic tales continues today in oral tradition, where jokes can be invented without the necessity of creating a forced shaggy dog tale to justify

them. Today for the most part only mass-culture writers, like cartoonists, pop singers, drag queens and kings, headline writers and advertising copywriters, and the oral humor of children indulge in such humor. As examples, in homosexual subculture note the names of drag kings such as *Muff E. Oso* (a play on *muff* ‘female sexual organ’ and *Mafioso*) and *Pelvis Parsley*, a play on Elvis Presley (see many examples in a special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality*). See also the lists of fictitious novel and authors, which must be read –and pronounced– together to get the joke, as in *The Easiest Way* by *Eileen Back* [‘I lean back’]. One scholar of onomastics recalls how in his student days at the University of Michigan a common practical joke was to hand in fictitious slips at the Circulation Desk so that names like *Lena Genster* [=‘lean against her’ would be called out loudly (Rennick 225). Names like *Seymour Hare* (=‘see more hair’) and *Tommy Screwzer* (=‘Tommy screws her’) are in the same tradition. Compare also Sp. *Benito Cómelas* (=ven y tócamelas ‘come and feel up my [balls]’), *Federico Jones* [=Federi + cojones ‘Fred Balls’ (Anonymous 1901). Similarly, in Mexico in a series called *Telegrama Nacional* and another called *War News*, dating from World War II, a supposed war correspondent sends home reports from the Far East with names of Japanese generals with names like (Jiménez): *Minabo Tadduro* (=mi nabo tan duro ‘my root is so hard’), *Tuhoyo Teatako* (=tu hoyo te ataco] ‘I attack your hole’), *Yanomi Loto Kes* (=ya no me lo toques ‘don’t touch my thing anymore’), *Nojoda Migatta* (=no joda mi gata ‘don’t fuck my cat’), *Mipicha Tikabe* (= mi picha te cabe ‘my prick fits into you’), *Yokero Tuchiko* (=yo quiero tu chico ‘I want your child’).

The trickster who represents incorrigible impulses and the insubordinate libido becomes a personification of the phallus, so that in the argot of the European languages a mean, stupid, foolish, or lazy person is often called by genital names, some of which, are simultaneously foodstuffs, as in Eng. *prick* ‘phallus, nasty person, Fr. *couillon* ‘balls/lazy person,’ Dutch *kloot* ‘balls/young man/fool,’ Fr. *con* ‘cunt/nasty male,’ *andouille* ‘blood sausage/flaccid phallus/fool,’ Eng. *doodle* ‘child’s penis/fool,’ Yiddish and Yiddish-Eng. *schmuck*, *putz* ‘phallus/fool,’ Eng. *weenie* ‘frankfurter, insignificant penis, despicable person,’ It. *coglione* ‘balls/stupid fool,’ *cazzo* and *minchia* ‘phallus/fool.’ Ultimately, tricksters and their tail/tale are inseparable in naming conventions. Conversely, the male organ can be ridiculously personified and be given, *pars pro toto*, names appropriate to fool figures, such as in this list of genital names collected on my college campus: *Dick[ie]*, *Mr. Happy*, [*Mr.*] *Peter*, *Peter Dinkle*, *Ralph*, *Slick Rick*, *Woody* (Cameron).



Testa di cazzi, 'Dickhead'
(Renaissance Italian pottery piece
by Francesco Urbini, ca. 1535)

In the foregoing analysis I have tried to show that the trickster, one of the most ubiquitous archetypal figures of humanity is a marginal or 'liminal' personality of anti-structure across cultures, from the semi-divine trickster of preliterate myths, to his more modern, deritualized and secularized variants, who represent his evolution into something less sinister, such as his literary manifestations as the picaresque servant of many masters, and, in popular culture, as the clown, or the slapstick comic. Nevertheless, tricky servants and fools across cultures maintain constant the archetypal characteristics of the trickster, especially his malicious astuteness and his grotesque corporal image, represented by his obscene and abusive nicknames. Contemporary manifestations of the trickster include animated characters such as Bugs Bunny, whose corporeal hypertrophy, like that of many medieval fools, has moved upward, to his enormous ears. Compare also the popular character of cult proportions of the early eighties, the fat and unkempt Bluto Blutarsky of the hit movie *Animal House* who, for example, in the very first scene of the movie urinates on someone's shoes while guzzling beer. Compare also Richard Nixon's nickname *Tricky Dick* a commentary on the politically 'new' Nixon who appeared every few years, with its clever reduplicative rhyme and the trickster-like sexual/foolishness connotations of both *Trick* and *Dick* 'the prick who is going to screw you.

The trickster, disordered and free from social constraints, is, finally, the incarnation of humor, who is given license to break the rules of society with his ludic behavior. By the creation of a regressively infantile foolish persona he can mask and de-authorize his aggressive impulses and negate the seriousness of the words and gestures of his derisive jokes and stories. In short, he represents the victory of laughter over the seriousness of tabus. His nicknames, inseparable from ritual insults, function as a verbal game with a kind of magic power, with the obscene language functioning as a substitute for action, that is, with verbal insults replacing acts of aggression, and with salacious expression defusing the impulse to copulate (Rancour-Laferrriere 222).

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