

Some Name Traditions in Epigrammatic Satire

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NAME-CALLING AND WORDPLAY seem to have gone hand in hand since earliest recorded literature. Analogous sounds suggest play of meaning. Names based upon personal characteristics frequently have innate satire. When satire found its way into brief pungent verses, headed either by a name-title or incorporating the name into the lines, we have one form, perhaps the most clearly recognized form of the epigram.

The *Greek Anthology*¹ contains the earliest large corpus of epigrams in the Western World. The range of its material makes inclusive definition very difficult. The variety of patterns include all known topics of short lyric verses. The oldest, perhaps the point of departure, lie in simple, at first, laudatory inscriptions, the ancestors of the serious epitaphs. The collection, however, contains both pagan and Christian proems, dedicatory, theological, declamatory, descriptive, hortatory, admonitory, invocative, convivial, and satirical representations, to say nothing of riddles, oracles, proverbs, and arithmetical problems. In most categories names appear. The complimentary verses were probably addressed to real persons, living or dead. Patronage poetry has an unbroken tradition down to modern times. Name-play and satiric name-usage form only a segment of the *Anthology*. True names as well as wordplay names appear in the uncomplimentary names. Actual persons may be referred to, or the implications may be disguised behind common or figurative associations.

The *Anthology* contains three specific epigrams (XI, 210, 222, 181) which depend for their points upon wordplay. Aulus, the cowardly soldier, a name which in the seventeenth century found

¹ The Loeb Classics served for sources for the *Greek Anthology* and Martial. For Owen, see *Epigrammatum Ioan Oweni*, Bresslau, 1668. Valentin Löber, *Teutsch-redender Owenus*, Hamburg, 1653. For the English poets, see Robert Anderson, *The Works of the British Poets*, London, 1795, 13 vols.

interpretation as a blower, boaster or wind-bag and may have had a similar suggestion in earlier times — this Aulus feared war so much that he would associate only with persons who had peaceful names. He had for friend, Lysimachus, whose name meant “deliverer from battle.” The two other names have impolite interpretations, one playing upon Chilon and the other upon Onios, a shortening of Antonios.

When the *Anthology* calls a very thin man, Marcus (he was so thin that he passed through a hole in an atom, and when he was blowing a horn, he fell in), we may have an ironic suggestion by contrast, since the root relates to Sanscrit *mar*, *mṛd*: to crush or break, and as a noun in Latin means a large hammer. The name was very common, and Martial used it several times in derogatory ways. In established Christian times, it was, for the most part, dropped from bad usage for obvious apostolic reasons. The *Anthology* (XI, 268) calls a man with an exceedingly long nose Proclus. When he sneezed, he could not hear his nose, it was so far from his ears. The Latin adverb, *procul*, means: at a distance; a great way off, but this is only a guess at a possible relationship.

The names are very numerous for those whom we may designate gently as light ladies. The names in the *Anthology*, with but a few exceptions, are different from those employed by Martial. Double implications are rare. Lembion and Kerkurion (V, 44), terms for small boats, offer possible wordplay. On the other hand, Thais, a famous Greek courtesan, seems to have received polite treatment in naming, in contrast to Martial's use of the name (IV, 12, 84; VI, 93). In Christian times, Thais was the subject of a religious romance, although the name kept bad connotations as late as the end of the sixteenth century in John Owen's epigrams (II, 124; IX, 97). As a generality, names of Christian saints do not appear in satiric epigrams.

The epigrams of the Latin poet, Martial, are of two kinds. They are either psychophantically obliging, frequently to a disgusting degree when we know something about the persons to whom they were addressed, or they were insultingly, obscenely biting when aimed at enemies and at real or fancied rivals. In the flattering compositions, real persons appear; in the derogatory ones, indications of caution seem to exist. Certainly Martial invited trouble if his attacks were not partially hidden by the anonymity of

common names or by protective double implications. A few illustrations seem to indicate such restraints. A certain Zoilus never comes off well. He smells to high heaven (II, 42); he is a thief (XI, 54); or he is several worse things (XI, 85; 92, XII, 54). The name has the general sense of a censorious person and refers specifically to an ill-advised critic of Homer. The name is used this way by John Owen for a bad poet (IV, 6). In the seventeenth century, the name applied to any person hostile to virtue. Martial called one of his drunkards, Acerra (I, 28), which means: incense-pot or smoke-pot. Perhaps our colloquialism "to be smoked" has a long ancestry. Caecilius, as a name, had an honorable place in Roman history. Martial's application to a blockhead or a fool, one who is blind, found safety in a general allusion. Similarly, Celer (I, 63) for a boring fellow, with its primary meaning of fast or speedy, suggests our usage when we call a slow-poke, speedy, in a fashion analogous to naming a fat boy "Skinny." To one who had lost his manhood, Martial gave the name Glytus, related to the adjective, glutus (soft), a fact which makes his intention obvious. Sotades (IV, 26), an obscene Greek poet, gave his name in Martial to a person of equally low morals. These suggestions may be sufficient to show that if we knew more about contemporary allusions and attachments, in other words, low-life semantics of Martial's Rome, we could comprehend many more double meanings.

The satiric epigram revived with many other classical forms during the Renaissance. The Martial mode dominated both in the inflated compliment with its grovelling search for patrons and in direct, derisive name-calling. In the sixteenth century, the corpus of the *Greek Anthology* seems to have contributed less to satiric traditions than it did to the host of other short lyric forms, especially in Weib-Wein-und-Gesang motifs. A majority of satirical name-usages seem to derive from direct Martial borrowings or from the employment of personalized Latin adjectives. The flourishing period, roughly from 1500 to 1700 found no Latin or vernacular poet who did not try his hand at the epigram with a sting. We note, however, an increase of caution. The broader Latin names concealed the actual person or objective of the verse. Both the laws of libel as well as the danger of the personal duel had their restrictive effect. Current given names appear but rarely in derogatory epigrams.

John Owen (1560?—1622) represents well the tradition as it existed about 1600. His cleverness was recognized throughout Europe, and he was translated widely into most Western vernaculars. His couplets and quatrains are about equally divided between compliments and barbs. In respect to the latter, he depended heavily upon Martial for names when he gave specific appellations. Otherwise, he hid behind a descriptive generality: "To a bald-headed man; To an atheist; to an adulterer," and so on. Frequently, the Latin names have taken on contemporary meaning, a designation not found commonly in classical dictionaries. Owen's fools: Cottula (I, 45), interpreted as "little ass," and Gaurus (V, 41), "vainglorious fellow" were recognized by his fellow-latinists. Those not so well-informed had in Valentin Löber's German adaptation of Owen an appended, explanatory list of names with their meanings.² Cuckolds, in addition to the obvious appellations of Corneus (I, 133) and Cornutus (IV, 53; V, 17), bear names of Pontius (I, 63), Ligurinus (V, 10), and Paetus (V, 65), which, according to Löber's list, meant merman, bad mouth, and leering eyes, respectively. His doctors, Linus (II, 123), a dauber or salve-smearer, and Cinna (V, 86), a drinkmixer, follow the same pattern. One quack he called Galenus (I, 15), by way of ironic allusion to the famous Greek, Galen. In similar fashion, a bad lawyer became Justinianus (I, 15), although he had no merits

² Other derogatory names in Löber's list are as follows (I keep his spellings): Albinus, Blasser, pale fellow; Apollonius, Schwartzkünstler, magician, dealer in black arts; Aretinus, Nachahmer, copycat; Attalus, Zärtling, delicate fellow; Ausonius, Widerschaller, echoer; Baldinus, Schwindeler, swindler; Barbonius, Rübenfresser, beet-eater; Camilla, reformirte Kuplerin, reformed go-between; Carolina, Fleischlich weib, fat woman; Cotta, das Haupt/per contrarium aliud, the head, by opposite allusion, something else (also Cottula, diminutive); Crassus, Dicker, a fat man; Dama, Kammerkätzgen, chambermaid (whore); Delila, Betlerin, beggar-woman; Epicurus, Schwelgebauch, wind-bag; Flaccus, Hangohr, droopy-ears (ass); Gellia, Lachmund, giggler; Gnatho, Vielfraz, glutton; Gorgonius, Schneller, by opposite, Fauler, Swifty for slow-poke; Hernicus, Frawenheld, play-boy; Labienus, Trulmaul, dirty-mouth; Leno, Hurenwirth, whore-master (feminine, Lena); Lesbia, Weinmälchen, wine-guzzler; Moranus, alter Narr, old fool; Morus, Narr, fool; Naevia, Fleckchen, little spot; Oranus, Spermaul, big mouth; Pansa, Breitfusz, big (flat) foot; Pinotus, Sauffer, drunkard; Plotus, Flachfuss, flat foot; Placentinus, Liebediener, pimp; Possus (feminine: Possa), Verkäufer, seller (of love); Silius, Spötter, mocker; Tomasinus, Stück vom Esel, part of an ass; Zoilus, Tugendfeind, virtue hater.

comparable to the author of the Justinian code. Readers would catch the opposite meaning when another legal mind bore the name Fronto (IX, 19), broad forehead, when, actually, he was a low brow. Misers, Harpales (IV, 232), snatcher, penny-pincher, and Colinus (IX, 26), a stingy fellow, were recognizable from their names. Owen's Philopatri (I, 48), a lover of his country, is in an epigram about a coward. He loves his native land only when it is at peace. Numerous, similar names derive with their old or new secondary meanings either directly from Martial's models, or they are formed upon a basis analogous to his usage. They circulated freely among European Latin epigrammatists as common property. For a considerable time, the same names or their variants kept their place in vernacular epigrams before, finally, they succumbed to modern language translations, adaptations, or figurative wordplay. After 1700, visible weakening of originality is obvious. I trace briefly the English epigrammatists. The story for German, French, and the other Romance languages shows the same pattern as one may see by reference to the epigrams of Von Logau, Lessing, Boileau, Voltaire, Marini, and others.

Ben Jonson (1573—1637) was thoroughly familiar with the epigrams of classical origin. He made imitations from the *Greek Anthology* for his compliments, and he turned to Martial for his jibes. Many of his Latin epigrams are paraphrased directly from the latter. The same influence appears in his English creations. Compliments are to real persons; satire chooses concealing names, either of the Martial-type or of English typifying adjectives which suggest the primary or characterizing humor of his character. We are most familiar with this kind of creation in Jonson's plays. Volpone, the fox; Corvino a merchant-prince; Sir Politick Would-be, and so on. Shakespeare's fools are named in the same tradition. An oaf in Jonson's epigrams has the name of Groom Ideot. A medical man is Dr. Empirick. A century later Christopher Smart (1722—71) has a Dr. Drug. About the same time, Lessing writes about Dr. Klystill. A glutton becomes simply Gut. Great lovers are Pertinax Cob and Groyne. A merchant is Hornet because you get stung when you trade with him. A bad poet has the tag, Poet-Ape; a thief is Redway. Other satiric names are Lieutenant Shift, Sir Cod, Sir Voluptuous Beast, Don Surly, Sir Annual Tilter, Bank the Usurer, Old Colt, Sir Luckless Woo-all, Mungril, Esquire, Lippe the teacher,

Captain Hazard, the Cheater, to be only selective, not exhaustive. Such names protect the writer and leave to the reader the substitution of actual personal representatives for the fault castigated. From Jonson's time, such inventiveness does not find improvement. William Walsh calls his miser Gripe. Smart says simply Mr. Miser. A bad poet is Scribbletonius, which is not as good as Lessing's Meister Kauz or Master Screech Owl.

The nearer we approach our own time, the more gentle does the satiric epigram become. Both naming and wordplay grow into the ultimate of generalities. A last English illustration by James Smith (1775—1839) is characteristic. His daughter had asked for money:

Dear Bell, to gain money, sure, silence is best,
For dumb Bells are fittest to open the chest.

American journalists throughout the nineteenth century used many traditional patterns into which they packed their wordplay. A few examples will conclude this perspective. (Cf., my article, "Traditional American Wordplay: The Epigram and Perverted Proverbs," *Western Folklore*, VIII, 348—357). The memory of Ben Jonson appears in a few instances. Smug, the smith, is a drunkard. Dormouse, the preacher, puts you to sleep. Hungry Joe is a bunco-steerer. More commonly, however, specific allusion hides behind ordinary names: William Jones, John, Kate, Sue, and the like. Adam and Eve keep their place in verse satire, but prose has taken over sarcastic naming: a lawyer is shyster, mouthpiece, ambulance chaser; a doctor goes by pill-roller, saw-bones, quack; a rich man answers to money-bags, got-rocks, and so on. With our less-than-little Latin and no Greek, the classical tradition in epigrammatic satire has ended in vernacular slang and invective, where, after all, it began.

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