

A TAXONOMISING EXCURSUS INTO WORDPLAY AS AFFECTING ANTHROPONOMASTICS

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Abstract: *Gerrymander* is a notorious concept in politics, denoting as it does a form of manipulating the delimitation of electoral districts. The term was introduced in 1812, after the name of Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry. In 1888 in South Carolina, an aspirant congressman, Samuel Dibble, was involved in the *Dibble-mander* scandal. High-hopping plastic grasshoppers with which President Eisenhower used to toy were called *Eisenhopper* in 1953. The name of the opera singer Adelina Patti motivated lore of which there exist variants, and involving the Latin maxim *oportet pati*. A visual-cum-verbal pun in a recent Hanukkah greeting card involves a lexical item quite relevant for making sense of the etymology of the name of an obscure biblical character, a name that in Roman times was applied by homiletes to Samson's mother. The peculiarities of writing systems are such that a Greek male given name – Εὐτύχιος – found spelled in the Hebrew script as אַבְטִיחִיוס (*'btyhyws*) in an epitaph (undated but presumed late antique), at first sight would give a present-day Israeli the impression that this name was patterned after the usual Israeli Hebrew name for a watermelon, which is ubiquitous in summer. In the Israeli subtitles for a Colombian telenovela, a perhaps unintentional pun on a character's name occurs. Ways for wordplay to affect anthroponomastics are multitudinous, and they deserve discussion as well as a (partial) taxonomy. This is what the present study sets to do.

Keywords: playfulness, wordplay, devices of humour, neologisms, onomastic manipulation.

Onomastic puns in the present day: in prose from a book in literary studies, and in the subtitles of a TV series

Typically, puns are instances of phono-semantic matching, but in some script systems, puns may be graphemic, whether they are phonetic as well, or less obviously so. This is mainly the case of Far Eastern script systems, but also of Hebrew, as we showed in HaCohen-Kerner et al. (2013). Nissan (2014a) discussed onomastic puns in hieroglyphic Egyptian. As a language, present-day Hebrew comes with the cultural heritage of its speaking community. Features of its script, too, contribute to how the historical culture has historically shown sensitivity and appreciation for wordplay, and for wordplay about proper names in particular. Onomastic wordplay is unobtrusive in the Hebrew Bible (Garsiel 1991), and with showy brilliancy in late antique rabbinic homiletics. Sometimes, tales illustrated a personal name (Nissan 2014b, 2015).

One still comes across onomastic punning, in various Hebrew-language contexts. A scholar in literary studies, Nitzza Ben-Dov provided a discussion of fiction by S.Y. Agnon in a book of hers (Ben-Dov 1997) whose very title exploits a double sense: *Ahavót lo me'uššarót*, אהבות לא מאושרות, i.e., *Unhappy / Unapproved Loves*. On p. 294, Ben-Dov remarks about the behaviour of a character in *A Simple Story*, Bluma: “Bluma (בלומה) restrained (*balma* בלמה) herself”.

This was deliberate, whereas perhaps it just apt coincidence that in an entertainment context in Israel, the Hebrew subtitle of an imported television series, a 1996 Colombian telenovela (*La Viuda de Blanco*, Hebrew *Ha'almaná*, lit., ‘the widow’) whose episode 124 was on air in Israel in December 2002 on Arutzei Zahav’s Viva channel, stated:

אני אמשיך להתערב בעניינים של דיגו כי אני דואגת לו

Ani amšikh lehit'arév ba'inyaním šel Diego ki ani do'éget lo.

I'll keep meddling in Diego's affairs, because I am concerned (f.) for him.

This raises the issue of such personal names that are apt in context (Nissan 2013a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d). The following example is also from the broadcasted media. A newsreader on BBC Radio 4, on 30 December 2013 just before 8am, said: “Lord Judge, the well-named former Chief Justice”, and so forth. This shows that the aptness of his name was (as could be expected) perceived, and that moreover that perception did find public though informal expression.

There is a cultural precedent, which probably the author of the telenovela subtitle did not have on his or her mind. It is the given name *Doeg*, a homophone and homograph, the active present participle *do'ég* ‘worried’ (m.), whose feminine is *do'éget*. According to *1 Samuel* 22, the inhabitants of the priests’ town of Nob were massacred under the command of Doeg in punishment, because of the charge he had brought of their siding with David when he was a wanted fugitive. The high priest’s unsuccessful defence was that David was the king’s son-in-law, and that when David visited and requested the sword of Goliath, which was kept in Nob, the high priest was unaware that David was a fugitive, so his hospitality towards David and his compliance with David’s request had not been reprehensible. Ebiatar was a son of the high priest Ahimelech, and was the only one who managed to flee; he then joined David, and under David he became high priest himself.

The early rabbinic tradition homiletically interprets the personal name *Doeg*, which more precisely is דּוֹעֵג or דּוֹעֵג *do'ég*, as being an indicator of Doeg’s hypocrisy, showing himself preoccupied (as his name says). But as the biblical text names him by the variant דּוֹיֵג *doyég* when it relates that Saul, having accepted the denunciation made by Doeg, sent him to punish Nob, the early rabbinic tradition homiletically suggests (by interpreting דּוֹיֵג *doyég* as a participle ‘fishing’, from דָּג *dag* ‘fish’) that Doeg was caught like a fish in the net, as once he had made his denunciation, he was bound to become the emissary meting punishment.

Onomastic puns which come into being in the eyes of a modern beholder

It must be said that given names as occurring in a given historical stratum may come across as surprising to present-day recipients. In Tal Ilan's monumental *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity*, a glance at the first column of the first page (Ilan 2012: 585) of the index of personal names documented in the Hebrew script, would catch a striking name: **אבטיחיוס** ('*btyhyws*'), found in an epitaph, undated but presumed late antique, from Tel Eitun, south-west of Hebron.

This – as Tal Ilan points out in her book – was a Greek male given name, Εὐτύχιος. Classicists would traditionally Romanise it as *Euty chius*, but (I may add) the pronunciation was *Evtikhyos*, when it was transcribed into Hebrew script as **אבטיחיוס**.

What is so striking in the name **אבטיחיוס** is that (even though obviously there is no etymological relation) the string of Hebrew letters contains the substring **אבטיח** ('*btyh*'), which is part of the Hebrew lexicon: in Israeli Hebrew, it denotes 'watermelon' (*avatiakh*), but as occurring in *Exodus* it means '(yellow) melon'. For that reason, the unaware, faced with that name, would misread the personal name as *avatikhyus*, and would be of course quite puzzled.

Also consider, without delving into the ancient past, different pronunciations of English as they exist at present. For example, *Peter* in England is sometimes pronounced rather like *pizza*. When lady librarians at my neighbourhood library in London sing for a primary school class on visit, they utter "Come back *Pizza*, come back Paul", intending "Come back *Peter*, come back Paul".

There are as well puns that can only be understood by those aware of lore pertaining to a given person (a celebrity) in a given place, in a given period of time. Mohammad Reza Phalavi, the last Shah of Persia, divorced his second wife, Soraya Esfandiary (1932–2001), as she could not bear a child. She went into exile to Rome. She eventually had a local companion, Franco Indovina (1932–1972), a film director and screenwriter of some fame in his own right. In the end he perished when Alitalia Flight 112 crashed on approach to Palermo in Sicily. *Indovina* in Italian is also a noun for 'fortune teller (if a woman)', and two verbal forms (the imperative singular, and the third person singular of the indicative) of the verb for 'to guess'. I recall that on radio, ca. 1970, once a well-known comedian boasted, tongue in cheek, that he asked Soraya: "Soraya, a chi vuoi bene?" ('Soraya, who do you care about?', i.e., 'who do you love?'), and that she replied: "In-do-vi-na", in an insinuating tone, as though she meant: 'Guess who?', i.e., 'It's you'. The comedian's was boasting, tongue in cheek, that Soraya, unbeknown to him, had been in love with him (the comedian), and that he only discovered this from her reply.

Gerrymander and *Dibble-mander* in nineteenth-century American politics

The word *gerrymander* /'dʒɛri,mændər/ in American English political terminology was introduced by the cartoon "Gerry-mander", by Elkanah Tilsdale (1771–1835),

often falsely attributed to Gilbert Stuart. The word was formed as a portmanteau (blend) of *salamander* and the name of a politician, *Gerry*. In a similar context, we come across the neologism *Dibble-mander*, a word that did not enter the lexicon other than in a particular local situation.



Figure 1. Elkanah Tisdale's *Gerry-mander* cartoon, originally published in the *Boston Sentinel* in 1812.¹

¹ The district depicted in the cartoon was created by the legislature of Massachusetts in order to favour the incumbent Democratic-Republican party candidates of Governor Elbridge Gerry over the Federalists in 1812. "Gerrymandering should not be confused with malapportionment, whereby the number of eligible voters per elected representative can vary widely without relation to how the boundaries are drawn. Nevertheless the *-mander* suffix has been applied to particular malapportionments. Sometimes political representatives use both gerrymandering and malapportionment to try to maintain power" (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerrymandering>). "The word gerrymander (originally written Gerry-mander) was used for the first time in the *Boston Gazette* on 26 March 1812. The word was created in reaction to a redrawing of Massachusetts state senate election districts under Governor Elbridge Gerry (pronounced /'geri/; 1744–1814). In

In his history of American political cartoons, Donald Dewey remarked (2007: 24):

Cartooning contributions to language in America began in the nineteenth century, when a print of the Union showed Pennsylvania in the middle, making it the Keystone State from that point on. More noted was the March 12, 1812, illustration that appeared in the *Boston Gazette* and introduced the word *gerrymander*. Inspired by Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry's decision to realign the voting district of Essex County to ensure re-election, Elkanah Tilsdale reconfigured the state map into a giant salamander that his editor dubbed "The Gerry-mander – a new species of Monster". The Tilsdale piece is widely regarded as the first American cartoon where wit was equal to the political point being made.

It must be said that Tilsdale drew a salamander that is more like a dragon, as it has wings, and its tongue resembles an arrow. A reproduction of that cartoon appears on p. 196 in Dewey (2007), but without the fuller map as in https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Gerry-Mander_Edit.png

Mark Wahlgren Summers published an article entitled "Party Games: The Art of Stealing Elections in the Late-Nineteenth-Century United States" (Summers 2001). He related the following on p. 428 (*italics added*):

What is most unsettling about the 1888 contest, however, is not the variety of ways parties could legally and illegally manipulate the outcome. It is the year's typicality. If the 1876 presidential election had been stolen twice over (once by Democratic fraud, bullying, killing, and rigging of the election laws down south and once by Republican returning boards' counting the votes in three states to give Rutherford B. Hayes his one-vote electoral majority), it came as the climax to a decade when Republican-run returning boards had certified convenient outcomes in Louisiana and Arkansas, when rival governors claiming the popular mandate had set up shop in Austin, Tallahassee, and Montgomery, and when rival armies skirmished across Arkansas on behalf of two gubernatorial candidates, each of whom had a court decision upholding his exclusive right to the office. In the years that followed, South Carolina Democrats used repeating voters and "tissue ballots", which were concealed within the folds of the one ballot each voter was entitled to, to count in some candidates for Congress and destroyed ballot boxes from Republican precincts. Resolved to cheat their way into six of the seven

1812, Governor Gerry signed a bill that redistricted Massachusetts to benefit his Democratic-Republican Party. When mapped, one of the contorted districts in the Boston area was said to resemble the shape of a salamander. The original gerrymander, and original 1812 gerrymander cartoon, depict the Essex South state senatorial district for the legislature of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Gerrymander is a portmanteau of the governor's last name and the word *salamander*. The redistricting was a notable success. Although in the 1812 election both the Massachusetts House and governorship were won by Federalists by a comfortable margin and cost Gerry his job, the redistricted state senate remained firmly in Democratic-Republican hands. The author of the term gerrymander may never be definitively established. Historians widely believe that the Federalist newspaper editors Nathan Hale, and Benjamin and John Russell coined the term, but the historical record does not have definitive evidence as to who created or uttered the word for the first time. [...] (*ibid.*).

congressional seats lawfully, they drew up the “Dibble-mander” that gave aspirant congressman Samuel Dibble a district he could not possibly lose and allotted the black Republican majority of the state control of a single new House district, a thing of squiggles, rags, and patches which, by a little vote buying and a rewritten election law, they managed to put into Democratic hands by the end of the 1880s.

President Eisenhower’s plastic grasshopper: the *Eisenhopper*

Portmanteau formation (a blend) occurs sometimes in lexical formation, most often in an informal register. Russell (1954) enumerated recent neologisms that had appeared in American English, and gave for each one the context of occurrence. *Eisenhopper* (a portmanteau of *Eisenhower* and *grasshopper*) for a plastic toy with which President Eisenhower used to fiddle was one such entry (Russell 1954: 216):

EISENHOPPER, n. See quotes. – 1953 *Inside the ACD* Feb. p. 4/2 During the campaign, President Eisenhower was reported as sending high-hopping plastic grasshoppers flying through the air while talking with visitors. These secret weapons against tension were promptly termed Eisenhoppers. *B’ham News* 19 March p. 14/6. Presidential burdens haven’t changed Ike’s engaging sense of humor. He still uses his mechanical grasshopper (the Eisenhopper) to relieve tension at staff meetings.

This is an example of an object which is a variant of a prototype (a toy emulating the shape and principal performance, i.e., jumping, of a grasshopper), and was named after a famous person with which that variant has historically been associated.

This can be set in terms of naturoid theory. Massimo Negrotti’s *theory of the artificial* has been renamed by him *naturoid theory*. According to Negrotti, an *artificial* is a “machine”, a technological device, designed and implemented so as to reproduce the *essential performance* – i.e., the particular performance which, at a given *observation level*, is considered to be characteristic – or more than one, of the *exemplar*, which is itself a subsystem (either natural, or also technological) of the global system, which can be heuristically isolated from the latter (and therefore is a subsystem) without significant losses of its essential performance being carried out. An artificial is such either *by structure*, or *by process*. It is an artificial by structure whenever, in order to reproduce the essential performance of the exemplar, the structure of the exemplar is reproduced. Otherwise, it is with an artificial by process that we are concerned. It is a nonempty subset of the spectrum of performances of the exemplar, which is reproduced in the artificial. Negrotti calls an artificial a *naturoid* if the exemplar is from nature, and in contrast *technoid* if the exemplar is itself a technical artefact. A table of the basic concepts of the theory of the artificial is given in Negrotti (1995: 32–33).

Negrotti (2004: 41) states the following fundamental assumption about observation levels:

The notion of observation level is crucial in our discussion. Although similar to concepts like “level of analysis” or “description level”, it differs from them in that it refers to

both, methodological considerations and anthropological-biological facts. In short, it takes into account aspects of perception due to our biological configuration and limits, which precede and affect every subsequent intellectual operation. Specifically, humans, in all their interactions with the world, cannot but assume an observation level per unit of time. Humans can shift very swiftly from an observation level to another but, at every unit of time, one level will always prevail over the others.

Negrotti (2000: 295, Table 1; 2002: 69) distinguishes between

- (A) the *concrete artificial*, consisting of material devices or processes, and
- (B) the *abstract artificial*, consisting of informational devices or processes.

He also distinguishes between

- (a) the *analytical artificial*, which reproduces structures, and
- (b) the *aesthetic artificial*, which reproduces appearance.

Robots and virtual reality (when the latter interacts with the real world) belong in (Aa). Also a prosthesis replacing a body organ does, and so do pharmaceuticals. Category (Ba) includes artificial intelligence, as well as subsymbolic reasoning techniques. Examples of (Ab) include, e.g., sculpture; note that the purpose is not necessarily properly artistic, as arguably also facial reconstructions (either concrete, or as a computationally obtained 3D image), which reproduce a human individual's face based on the concrete evidence of skeletal remains (this being a rather controversial technique from forensic pathology: see Wilkinson 2004) also belong in category (Ab), and their purpose is eminently practical: the identification of a given anonymous human body (even though on occasion the technique has been applied in order to show how some historical character may have looked like when alive). Examples of category (Bb) include: drawing, maps, diagrams obtained by simulations in a space of parameters, as well as virtual reality when it is merely descriptive.

The opposite convention: naming an author after his book

Rabbi Mahalal'el Halleluyáh (both names are compounds whose literal sense is about praising the Lord) was the rabbi of the city of Ancona, Italy, in the year 5420 Anno Mundi (i.e., 1659/60). His writings are juridical, exegetic, and poetry, as pointed out in the travelogue of the famous Rabbi Haim Joseph David Azuláy (acronymously: Hida) in the entry for 2 June 1777 of his travelogue. As well as an important author, Hida was an emissary (a fund-raiser) on behalf of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel, and of the Hebron Jewish community in particular, in 1753–1757 and 1773–1778.²

A commentary to the Pentateuch by Rabbi Mahalal'el Halleluyáh is entitled

² Mathias Lehmann (2013) pointed out, in the conclusions of his paper: “Establishing trust and solidarity across cultural and linguistic divides and making the contemporary Land of Israel the common point of reference, the philanthropic network of the eighteenth century

Qódes̱h Hillulím (i.e., ‘consecrated in praise’) A collection of 65 juridical decisions of his is entitled *Hallél Gamúr*. 65 is the numerical value of the Hebrew letters of the word *Hallél*. The latter usually denotes a part of the liturgy of festivals or the new month day, and comprises several psalms of praise. As for the word *gamúr*, it means ‘completed’. This alludes to the expression *gamár et ha-Hallél* ‘to say the Hallél in full’.

Rabbi Mahalal’él Halleluyáh’s book entitled *Halleluyáh* comprises poetry and other writings. It is usual practice among rabbis to give their books a title alluding to their first name. It is also common in the rabbinic literature to sometimes refer to a particular rabbinic author by the title of one of his books.

In the case at hand, it is likely that the author devised for his books such titles that included a lexical corradical of his first name, *Mahalal’él*. One of those titles is *Halleluyáh*, and apparently this is the reason why *Halleluyáh* was appended to the name of the author, as though it was his family name.

The character name *Jobisca* in Edward Lear’s nonsense poetry: a name that presupposes a funny backstory to be inferred

In the nonsense poetry of Edward Lear (1812–1888) – he published his book in 1846 – one comes across a female character whose name is *Jobisca*. The poem is Lear’s *The Pobble Who Had No Toes*. Also consider Haldane’s (1957) *Aunt Jobisca, the Bellman, and the Hermit*. The name *Jobisca* is humorous, as apparently, the tragic biblical character of Job lent his name to that woman, this being made possible by the application of the Latin diminutive suffix *-isca* (the feminine form of *-iscus*).

This personal name is humorously coined indeed. It is a feminine form, formed by resorting to a Latinised Greek diminutive, of the name of the biblical character Job. It would be funny enough for parents to want to name their baby *Job*: it is funny, because it is not done and because Job was a character who suffered so much. Do not such parents fear it would bring bad luck to their child?³

made it possible for the Jews to become (or imagine themselves) as a nation in the nineteenth century” (*ibid.*: 1246).

Other than in Hebrew, works about Azulai include an important dissertation by Theodore Friedman (1952), a French translation of the travelogue (Harboun 1997–1999), an Italian translation of the travelogue (Azulai 2012), another article by Matthias Lehmann (2007) about the travelogue, and a paper by Yaacob Dueck (2014): Dueck is concerned with Azulai’s stay in Paris and his reading at the local Royal Library; so also did in their own study Maurice Liber and Alexander Marx (1913).

³ They would not call a baby girl (drawing upon Greek mythology) *Niobe*, would they? Niobe was turned into stone after all her children were killed, in retribution for her boasting about them. It must be said however that unlike Niobe, Job is culturally considered a saintly figure and, as such, one worthy of having babies named after him, especially in Christian cultures, both because children are named in fact after saints (but he is not in the saints’ calendar), and because Christian homiletic tradition about Job is invariably positive. In early rabbinic homiletics, opinions about Job were divided instead. At any rate, in Jewish onomastics his name is not given to children (there is no person, other than the biblical Job, called *Iyyov* in Hebrew).

The very name *Jobisca* is even funnier, because it presupposes an even more awkward narrative which one can easily infer: the parents of that character must have wanted a baby son so badly, so they could name him *Job*, that once a baby girl was born, they did not renounce their purpose and made up a feminine form of *Job* so that the child could be named accordingly.

But there is more to the use of a diminutive, if it enables an alternative semantic interpretation. False diminutives are a subclass of puns. Consider the following example. Max Nordau, a late-19th century Paris-based, German-language author, a prominent positivist (but in 1904, he became the most senior leader of the Zionist movement), had changed his family name into *Nordau* ('northern land by the water', 'northern waterside meadow') from *Südfeld* ('southern field'), in order to feel as far as possible from his Hapsburg background and the clearly Jewish identity of his father, Gabriel Südfeld, a Hebrew-language writer. Meir Südfeld had become Max Nordau. Maxa Nordau was Max Nordau's daughter. Try to figure out how to make up an endearing, perhaps diminutive form of *Maxa*. By applying a Latin diminutive suffix, you would get *Maxilla*. But *maxilla* is a term from cranial anatomy. It is not usually associated with the virtues of a woman's good looks.

Benito Mussolini used to be extolled for the macho value of his *mascella volitiva*, i.e., literally, 'assertive mandible', or, as this is sometimes rendered into English in connection to Mussolini, with *jutting jaw* or *jaw outthrust*. This is quite visible in a cartoon by Edmund Duffy, published by the *Baltimore Sun*, "Civilization Comes to Africa", and protesting Italy's use of gas during the conquest of independent Ethiopia, for which an authoritative account can be found in Del Boca (1976–1987).

In Duffy's cartoon, Mussolini, crowned with laurel, holds a gas mask in his left hand on his chest, under his jutting jaw which, and is looking upwards, while lifting in his right hand a rifle, on whose top a bleeding Black person, wearing a tunic labelled "Ethiopia", is bayoneted, raised supine in the cartoon top. The backdrop shows spires of smoke, apparently the toxic gas Mussolini's troops used. Isabel Simeral Johnson (1937: 41) reproduced Duffy's cartoon.

One does come across Muslim persons called *Ayyūb*. In the Spanish onomasticon, one comes across the name *Dolores* of some women. In that case, however, the intention is to place the girl under the protection of the Virgin Mary in relation to sorrows in her life, in English *Our Lady of Sorrows*, or *Our Lady of Piety*, or *Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows* or *Our Lady of the Seven Dolours* — as well as *the Sorrowful Mother* or *Mother of Sorrows*, which corresponds to the Latin *Mater Dolorosa* — and in Latin also *Beata Maria Virgo Perdolens*. The Italian equivalent names include *la Madonna dei sette dolori*, as well as *l'Addolorata*, or *Maria Addolorata*, or *Maria Dolorosa*, or *la Madonna Addolorata*. It is not inconceivable in Italy for a woman to be called *Maria Addolorata* rather than just *Maria*.

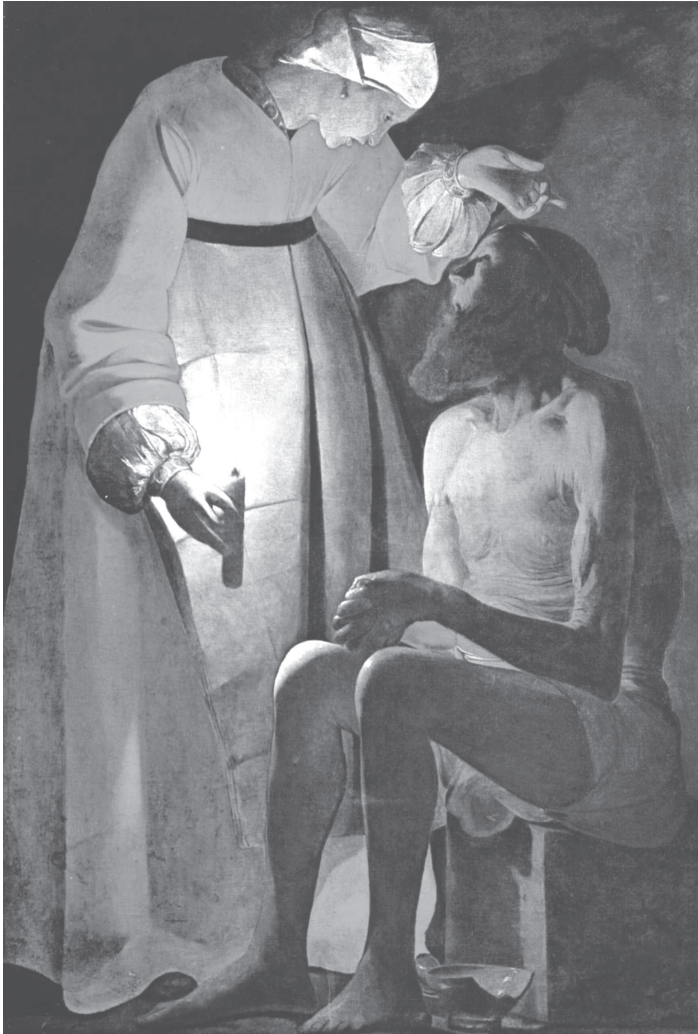


Figure 2. The painting *Job raillé par sa femme* by Georges de la Tour (Vic-sur-Seille, 1593 – Lunéville, 1652). The painting is currently at the Musée Départemental des Vosges in Épinal. In the original, red (the colour of her dress) and black predominate. http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Georges_de_La_Tour_044.jpg



Figure 3. A cartoon by Edmund Duffy published by the *Baltimore Sun*, “Civilization Comes to Africa”, protesting towards Italy’s use of gas during the conquest of independent Ethiopia. In Duffy’s cartoon, Mussolini’s jutting jaw (his *mascella volitiva*) is prominent.

Flattering and unflattering onomastic manipulation: the cases of three ladies

Anagrammatic interpretation

In the London free newspaper *Evening Standard* – a newspaper where photographs of the model Cara Delevingne had appeared quite often⁴ – in the issue of Tuesday, 24 March 2015, this letter from a reader appeared (on p. 51), signed “Owen”:

An anagram of Cara Delevingne is “Learn. Dance. Give”. Is this a philosophy by which to live?

Anagrams in onomastics are behind the formation of the penname *Voltaire* from Francois-Marie Arouet (with *v* and *u* interchanging and an *l* in excess), or even in scientific zoological nomenclature: the genus name *Dacelo* – of an Australian bird – was formed by anagramming the name *Alcedo* of the kingfisher, a related taxon.

Whereas the newspaper reader devised a flattering interpretation of the name of a particular woman, one also comes across unflattering onomastic nicknames or onomastic interpretations associated with a particular woman.

Hitting her in order to hit him: *La Gorgone Zola*

Let us begin with such a nickname. Émile Zola was prominent in France’s Dreyfusard camp, and therefore was smeared atrociously by far rightists, who also targeted his kin or persons around him. For example, Émile Zola had to stand by his Italian-born father’s memory. François Zola (1796–1847) was born Francesco Antonio Giuseppe Maria Zolla. Some of the son’s papers defended the reputation of his father, an important and meritorious engineer – but also, to Émile Zola’s enemies, a bloody foreigner, one they charged with corruption. Émile had to point out that even though his father François had been a Venetian by birth, Émile’s maternal grandparents had been peasants in France’s countryside. Moreover, the son had to counteract falsification concerning his father’s military past and uncovered some evidence with tampering with the record, by the same person who notoriously falsified evidence concerning Alfred Dreyfus

Il s’est trouvé des âmes basses, d’immondes insulteurs, dans la guerre effroyable des guet-apens qui m’est faite, parce que j’ai simplement voulu la vérité et la justice, il s’est trouvé des violateurs de sépulture pour aller arracher mon père à la tombe honorée, où il dormait depuis plus de cinquante ans. On me hurle, parmi un flot de boue: «Votre père est un voleur». Et l’on trouve un vieillard de quatre-vingt ans passés, qui cherche des injures et des outrages dans les tremblants souvenirs de sa treizième année, pour raconter que mon père était un parasite et qu’il avait commis toutes les fautes. Ce vieillard n’a

⁴ On another occasion, a reader complained, with some justification, for photographs of that model appearing grotesquely often in that same newspaper. Let us say something about her family name. *Delevingne* is clearly a dialectal form of the standard Italian *Delle Vigne*, literally ‘of the vineyards’. The spelling *ngn* redoubles the sound which in Spanish is written instead as *ñ*. Note however that the sound that in standard Italian is written as *gn* is pronounced as *ñ* only in northern Italy, whereas it is pronounced as double elsewhere in Italy.

qu'une excuse: il croit défendre le drapeau, il aide sa mémoire pour terrasser en moi le traître. Ah! le pauvre homme! Ah la mauvaise action dont on lui a fait salir sa vieillesse.

Émile Zola had two close friends, a couple, and the woman was plain looking. In the anti-Dreyfusard camp, she was derisively nicknamed *la Gorgone Zola*, by combining his own name as a label for her, and describing her as a Gorgone, as petrifyingly ugly as Medusa. The nickname *la Gorgone Zola* has the feminine definite article precede the name (masculine in French) for a putrid Italian cheese, *le gorgonzola* in French (a cheese names after the town of Gorgonzola, northeast of Milan).

It must be said that while defending the memory of his father, Émile Zola did not miss a splendid opportunity to hit as an unfortunately named director of archives. Émile Zola had to trace the records of his father's military career, and discovered that they had been recently tampered with. It was claimed that around 1830, his father had unduly appropriated money of the army, while in North Africa. Émile was able to argue that had François Zola been guilty as so belatedly charged (and for the very reason that Émile had become the champion defending Alfred Dreyfus), then for sure under the July Monarchy François would have been given by the King no opportunity to meet his heir apparent in order to discuss a public project. Just as a crucial document in the charges against Alfred Dreyfus had been forged, likewise the folder of the long dead François Zola had recently ended up in the hands of the same forger, and important documents supposed to be in the folder appeared to have disappeared.

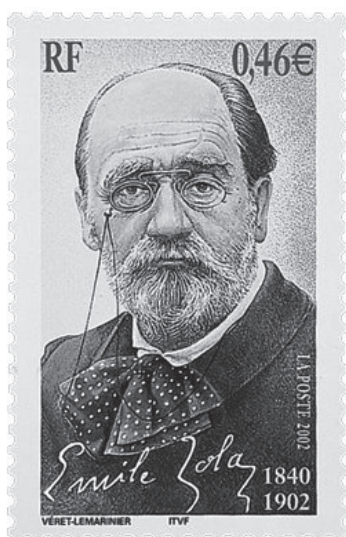


Figure 4. A French stamp of 2002, commemorating Émile Zola.

Previously, Émile Zola had met with obstacles in trying to access his father's folder. An onomastic coincidence enabled the priceless sarcastic sentence: "J'ai voulu savoir s'il

avait fallu des prodiges d'intelligence pour retrouver le dossier judiciaire, et j'ai demandé à M. le contrôleur général Cretin, si les recherches avaient donné beaucoup de peine."

Hosea's wife and talmudic puns about her name

The extraordinary thing about the biblical prophet Hosea is that he deliberately married a prostitute, so that he could use her and her subsequent children of uncertain paternity as analogues for the wayward, misbehaving society he was addressing and rebuking. The following example, from late antiquity, shows how interpretations ascribed to debating sages are intended to deride that biblical harlot – the one the prophet Hosea was ordered to wed. The translation as given here is from the *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate *Pesaḥim*, 87a–87b, in the Soncino English translation (Epstein 1935–1948, their brackets, my braces enclosing text based on their footnotes):

The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah {*Hosea* 1:1}: Four prophets prophesied in one age, and the greatest of all of them was Hosea. For it is said, The Lord spoke at first with Hosea {*Hosea* 1:2}: did He then speak first with Hosea; were there not many prophets from Moses until Hosea?

Said R. Johanan: He was the first of four prophets who prophesied in that age. And these are they: Hosea, Isaiah, Amos and Micah. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hosea, 'Thy children have sinned,' to which he should have replied. 'They are Thy children, they are the children of Thy favoured ones they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; extend {literally 'roll'} Thy mercy to them.' Not enough that he did not say thus, but he said to Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! The whole world is Thine; exchange them for a different nation. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'What shall I do with this old man? I will order him: "Go and marry {literally 'take'} a harlot and beget thee children of harlotry"; and then I will order him: "Send her away from thy presence." If he will be able to send [her] away, so will I too send Israel away.' For it is said, And the Lord said unto Hosea: 'Go, take unto thee a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry' {*Hosea* 1:2}; and it is written, So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim {*Hosea* 1:3}. 'Gomer': Rab said, [That intimates] that all satisfied their lust [*Gomerim*] {literally 'completed'} on her; 'the daughter of {87b:} Diblaim': [a woman of] in fame [*Dibbah*] and the daughter of [a woman of] in fame [*Dibbah*]. {Rab interprets Diblaim as a dual form of Dibbah, ill fame.} Samuel said: [It means] that she was as sweet in everyone's mouth as a cake of figs [Debelah]. While R. Johanan interpreted: [It means] that all trod upon her {a euphemism for sexual indulgence} like a cake of figs [is trodden]. Another interpretation: 'Gomer': Rab Judah said: They desired to destroy [*Le-gammer*] the wealth of Israel in her days.

R. Johanan said: They did indeed despoil [their wealth], for it is said, For the king of Aram [Syria] destroyed then, and made them like the dust in threshing {*2 Kings* 13:7}. And she conceived, and bore him a son. And the Lord said unto him: 'Call his name Jezreel; for yet in little while, and I will visit the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.' And she conceived again, and bore a daughter. And He said unto him: 'Call her name *Lo-ruhamah* [that hath not obtained compassion]; for I will no more have compassion upon the house of

Israel, that I should in any wise pardon them... And she conceived, and bore a son. And He said: 'Call his name *Lo-ammi* [not my people]; for ye are not My people, and I will not be yours' {*Hosea* 1:3–6, 1:8–9}. After two sons and one daughter were born to him, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hosea: 'Shouldst thou have not learned from thy teacher Moses, for as soon as I spoke with him he parted from his wife; so do thou too part from her.' 'Sovereign of the Universe!' pleaded he: 'I have children by her, and I can neither expel her nor divorce her.'

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'Then if thou, whose wife is a harlot and thy children are the children of harlotry, and thou knowest not whether they are thine or they belong to others, yet [thou] art so; then Israel who are My children, the children of My tried ones, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; one of the four possessions which I have acquired in this world – (The Torah is one possession, for it is written, The Lord acquired me as the beginning of His way {*Proverbs* 8:22}). Heaven and earth is one possession. As it is written, [God Most High] Who possesses heaven and earth {*Genesis* 14:19}. The Temple is one possession, for it is written, This mountain [sc. the Temple Mount], which His right hand had acquired {*Psalms* 78:54}. Israel is one possession, for it is written, This people that Thou hast gotten.) {*Exodus* 15:16; cf. *Maxims of the Fathers* 6:10} Yet thou sayest, Exchange them for a different people!'

As soon as he perceived that he had sinned, he arose to supplicate mercy for himself. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'Instead of supplicating mercy for thyself, supplicate mercy for Israel, against whom I have decreed three decrees because of thee.'⁵ [Thereupon] he arose and begged for mercy, and He annulled the decree[s]. Then He began to bless them, as it is said: Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea... and it shall come to pass that, instead of that it which was said unto them: Ye are not My people', it shall be said unto them: Ye are the children of the living God.' And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together... And I will sow her unto Me in the land; and I will have compassion upon her that hath not obtained compassion; and I will say to them that were not My people: 'Thou art My people' {*Hosea* 2:1 ff, 2:25}.

Actaeon distorted into Acton in Henry Fielding's Tom Jones

In book 17, chapter 3 — entitled "The arrival of Mr. Western, with some matters concerning his paternal authority" — of the novel *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding (1707–1754), a novel he completed in late 1748 and first published in 1749, the comic character Mr. Western (a hunting enthusiast, a squire who hates the nobility, and who in the end will become the father-in-law of Tom Jones, but who for the time being is at odds with his sister concerning whom his daughter is to marry or not to marry) relates about people he had met and he did not like to meet:

⁵ A footnote to the Soncino translation enumerate these as (a) wordplay on the place-name *Jezreel* ('G-d shall sow', interpreted here as 'shall scatter', 'shall send into exile'), and the literal sense of the names Hosea gave his two children: (b) *Lo-ruhamah* 'she who hath not obtained compassion', and (c) *Lo-ammi* 'not my people'. Hosea states that eventually these names shall be reversed into *Ruhamah* 'she who hath obtained compassion', and *Ammi* 'my people'. As for "And I will sow her unto Me in the land", this reinterprets *Jezreel* from 'scattering away from the place', into 'sowing in place'.

“You surprise me much, my good friend”, said Allworthy. “Why, zounds! I am surprised myself”, answered the squire; “I went to zee sister Western last night according to her own appointment, and there I was a-had into a whole roomful of women. There was my lady cousin Bellaston and my Lady Betty and my Lady Catharine and my Lady I-don’t-know-who; d—n [= darn] me if you ever catch me among such a kennel of hoop-petticoat b—s [= bitches]. D—n me, I’d rather be run by my own dogs, as one Acton was, that the story-book says was turned into a hare, and his own dogs killed un and eat un. Od rabbit it, no mortal was ever run in such a manner: if I dodged one way, one had me; if I offered to clap back, another slapped me. ‘Oh, certainly one of the greatest matches in England’, says one cousin” (here he attempted to mimic them. “A very advantageous offer indeed”, cries another cousin (for you must know they be all my cousins, thof I never zeed [= seen] half o’ um [= of them] before). ‘Surely’, says that fat a—se b— [= bitch], my Lady Bellaston, ‘cousin, you must be out of your wits to think of refusing such an offer’.”

“Now I begin to understand, says Allworthy; “some person hath made proposals to Miss Western, which the ladies of the family approve but is not to your liking”.



Figure 5. Wool and silk tapestry from France (Gobelins), showing *Diana and Actaeon*, and dated to 1680–1700. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which received it as a present in 1964 from Mrs. George S. Amory. Diana (Artemis) is changing Actaeon into a stag. Edith Standen remarked (1988: 149): “It is signed I. IANS, and so must have been woven in the workshop of either Jean Jans the Elder or the Younger, heads of a Gobelins haute-lisse workshop from 1662 to 1668 and from 1668 to 1723, respectively. The subject of the tapestry shows it to be from a series of the *Metamorphoses* that is known to have been woven by the younger Jans and others in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries”. The image also appears in Standen (1988: 160).

Consider in particular the words “I’d rather be run by my own dogs, as one Acton was, that the story-book says was turned into a hare, and his own dogs killed un and eat un”. The huntsman Western, being uncultivated, thinks of the mythological huntsman Actaeon as some English huntsman, bearing an English name, *Acton*. Western likens the “bitches” he disliked meeting to “Acton”’s hounds.



Figure 6. Detail from the previous image: Actaeon is turned into a stag, while his hounds watch.

Tom Keymer and Alice Wakely, in their notes to the 2005 Penguin edition of *Tom Jones*, remarked:

Western means Actaeon, the mythical huntsman (Acton being a suburb west of London, where HF’s cousin Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and later HF himself, lived). When during a hunt Acteon surprised Diana and her nymphs bathing naked, she turned him into a stag to be devoured by his own hounds (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, iii. 138 ff.)

What do we know about Henry Fielding’s reading in the classics? Which editions was he able to access? Raymond Hilliard, in his book *Ritual Violence and the Maternal in the British Novel*, explains in a note (Hilliard 2010: 260):

Fielding’s allusion to the myth of Actaeon and Diana departs from his most likely source for it, book 3 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, by making the hounds females (Ovid mixes the sexes, though most of his hounds are males); see “*The Metamorphoses*” of Ovid, trans.

Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Harcourt Brace, [1993,] 81–86, or, for the Latin, see Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, ed. W.S. Anderson (Stuttgart, Germany: B.G. Teubner, 1996), lines 143–252. Joseph Addison's translation of book 3 in the Samuel Garth edition of 1717, with translations by various eminent writers including John Dryden, departs from the original by not naming or referring to individual hounds (see *Ovid's "Metamorphoses" in Fifteen Books*, ed. Samuel Garth (London, 1717), book 3, lines 188–304). Although Fielding's Latin was much stronger than his Greek, he was, of course, familiar with Greek literature both in translation and in the original, and could have noticed that in a brief reference in Euripides's *Bacchae*, Artemis's dogs are implicitly female (in *Euripidis Fabulae*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., ed. Gilbert Murray, 3: lines 984, 1091, 872, 1369, and 1212, Oxford Classical Text [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913]; for commentary on these passages, see Charles Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 34, 43. In book 3, chapter 2 of *Joseph Andrews*, Parson Adams mentions Euripides. We know that Fielding's personal library contained a 1694 edition of Euripides's plays in Greek, and with a Latin translation; see Frederick G. Ribble and Anne G. Ribble, *Fielding's Library: An Annotated Catalogue* (Charlottesville: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1996). On Fielding's familiarity, or possible familiarity, with specific works of ancient Greek and Roman literature, see Nancy A. Mace, *Henry Fielding's Novels and the Classical Tradition* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996). Mace gives no indication that Fielding had read *The Bacchae*, nor does Gesine Manuwald, "Henry Fielding's Intertextuality: Plundering the Rich Common of Classical Authors", *Classical and Modern Literature* 26, no. 1 (2006): 141–69.

Therefore, scholarship has been able to form a fairly clear idea of the conduits Henry Fielding was able to tap.

Hector Berlioz, Adelina Patti, and *oportet pati*

The Latin idiom *Oportet pati*, 'It is necessary to suffer', is associated with the opera singer Adelina Patti and the composer Hector Berlioz, in an anecdote or witty statement of which versions exist. One of them is a text that Berlioz wrote in Patti's album. Another version is in an article in a periodical, and it, too, emanates directly from Berlioz. When in narrative, anecdotal form, it is a spurious version, and this was the version which I first came across, many years ago.

It states that Adelina Patti was hosting a banquet, and that before it began, one of the guests was bored, and said: "*Oportet pati*". Patti intervened, saying: "I understand! You are saying *oportet pati*, 'we want Patti'! So you want me to sing!" Her guest retorted: "If you wish. But it also means *apportez le pâté* ['Bring on the pâté']". This version employs various elements that were present in Berlioz's original witty text.

A book by Wilhelm Ganz, *Memories of a Musician: Reminiscences of Seventy Years of Musical Life*, was published in London by John Murray in 1913. On p. 210, Ganz related:

Shortly after one of [Adelina] Patti's concerts, at which I conducted the orchestra, *Puck* had an excellent cartoon with the following verses:

"OPORTET PATI"
OR
"WE ALL WANT PATTI!"

'Tis said that Hector Berlioz once wrought
A novel version of an ancient adage,
And clothed in words expressing modern thought
One of the grimmest notions of a sad age.

"Oportet pati" was the monkish text
He dealt with, saying, "It is meet to suffer"
Was its translation by some dull, unsexed,
Monastic, gloomy, superstitious duffer.

Next came a cheerfuller interpretation
Ingeniously excogitated by
A French *gourmet* of world-wide reputation,
Who vowed the axiom meant "Bring up the Pie!"

The rendering by Berlioz devised
Was the most graceful, sympathetic, natty;
He gave it thus: "Correctly modernised,
'Oportet pati,' means 'We all want Patti.'"

Our version of the Latin saw shall be
The same as that of France's great musician;
"We all want Patti." Ever fain are we
To court the song-spells of that sweet magician.

See! PUCK has drawn her nestling in a pie —
A mimic paté, pasty architectural;
The Nightingale is just about to fly,
No longer her departure is conjectural.

She leaves her island home and friends to reap
A golden harvest on a foreign shore;
Heaven guide her safely o'er the storm-toss'd deep!
Good luck, dear Queen of Song, and "Au revoir."



Figure 7. Wilhelm Ganz and Adelina Patti, in a cartoon from the satirical magazine *Puck*. Image facing p. 210 in Ganz (1913). The *Puck* caption explains its own wordplay: “OPORTET PATI, OR WE ALL WANT PATTI (PATÉ). / Mr. Ganz (under Mr. Harrison's clever auspices) has dished up a ‘patée’ always to our taste”.

The website <http://www.hberlioz.com/London/wganz.htm> (created and maintained by Monir Tayeb and Michel Austin), in its Sec. 9, identifies two sources for the anecdote. The first one is that In Adelina Patti's album Berlioz wrote:

“Oportet pati”. Les latinistes traduisent cet adage par “Il faut souffrir”, les moines par “Apportez le pâté” et les amis de la musique par “Il nous faut Patti”.⁶

That is to say:

Oportet pati [in Latin]. Latinists translate this adage by “It is necessary to suffer”. Monks [do so] by [calling out]: “Bring on the pâté” [according to the stereotype of monks' gluttony], whereas music-lovers [do so] by [calling out]: “We need [Adelina] Patti [to sing for us]”.

The second source for the anecdote is something Berlioz wrote on p. 2 in the *Journal des Débats*⁷ of 13 January 1863.⁸ This is the French text:

⁶ <http://www.hberlioz.com/Works/BerliozMLWorks.html#CG> gives the bibliographical entry as Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance Générale*, vol. 8 (2003), p. 613, n. 1. The correct year, however, is 2002 (Berlioz 2002).

⁷ <http://www.hberlioz.com/feuilletons/debatsindex.htm>

⁸ <http://www.hberlioz.com/feuilletons/debats630113.htm#oportet>

Seul M. Calzado [...] se moque des beaux orchestres, des chœurs nombreux, des costumes, des décors, de la mise en scène, mettant toute sa foi dans le vieil adage latin: *Oportet pati*, que les savants de l'Académie des Inscriptions traduisent par: Il faut souffrir; les moines par: Apportez le pâté, et les abonnés du Théâtre-Italien par: Il nous faut Patti.

That is to say:

But Mr. Calzado [...] has no time for good orchestras, for large choruses, for costumes, for stage-sets, for staging. He puts all his trust in the old Latin adage *Oportet pati*, which the scholars from the Académie des Inscriptions translate as “It is necessary to suffer”; Monks [do so] by [calling out]: “Bring on the pâté” [according to the stereotype of monks’ gluttony], whereas season-ticket holders at the Théâtre-Italien [do so] by [calling out]: “We need [Adelina] Patti [to sing for us]”.



Figure 8. The composer, conductor and pianist Wilhelm Ganz (Mainz, 1833 – London, 1914).

Samson’s mother, Hazlelponi, and the *Sheitel on a Dreidel* card for Hanukkah

In Nissan (2013b, Sec. 2), I stated:

In the midrashic (i.e., traditional Jewish homiletic) interpretation of Jacob’s deathbed blessing for his sons, what he says about the future of the tribe to be descended from Gad (*Genesis*, 49:19) was taken to refer to Elijah [*Genesis Rabbah*, 99:12], just as what he says about the tribe of Dan was taken to refer to Samson [*Genesis Rabbah*, 99:18–19], who according to the biblical account, was from the territory of Dan, a Danite indeed.

In a footnote, I explained:

The midrashic literature also attempts to nevertheless give Samson a Judahite ancestry, in that his father's mother is claimed to have been from the tribe of Judah, and, more conspicuously so, in that Samson's mother (whose name is not stated, in the biblical account of her) is identified with *Hatslelponi*, a woman from the tribe of Judah.

Early rabbinic homiletics felt able to infer from the biblical text that Samson's mother was more intelligent than Manoah, Samson's father. In fact, after their meeting with the angel who foretold Samson's birth, the husband became convinced they were going to die, because of the supernatural vision they experience, but his wife pointed out that had they been intended to die, they would not have been foretold the birth of a baby, receiving instructions about how to raise him, and besides, the sacrifice they offered would not have been well received.

Moreover, rabbinic homiletics (in both *Numbers Rabbah* 10, and in the *Babylonian Talmud's* tractate *Bava Batra* 91a) filled the gap in our knowledge, by suggesting that the name of Samson's mother was *Haššēleponi* (now usually pronounced *Hatslelponi*).⁹ That name does appear in the Hebrew Bible, but it is that of an obscure woman, intro-

⁹ Actually the spelling of the particular personal name in those rabbinic sources appears in variants according to the manuscript, and generally speaking, it is distorted by adding the feminine suffix *-it*. In the passage from the *Babylonian Talmud*, the relevant passage is as follows (given here as in the Soncino English translation, i.e., Epstein 1935–1948; their brackets, our braces enclosing text loosely based on their footnotes):

R. Hanan b. Raba further stated in the name of Rab: [The name of] the mother of Abraham [was] Amathlai the daughter of Karnebo {i.e. *kar Nebo*, 'sheep of Mt. Nebo': a sheep is a clean animal}; [the name of] the mother of Haman was Amathlai, the daughter of 'Orabti {from '*oreb*' 'raven', an unclean animal}; and your mnemonic [may be], 'unclean [to] unclean, clean [to] clean' {as Abraham is a saint, so his grandmother was named after a clean animal, whereas Haman was a wicked person, so his grandmother was named after an unclean animal}. The mother of David was named Nizbeth the daughter of Adael. The mother of Samson [was named] Zlelponith, and his sister, Nashyan. In what [respect] do [these names] matter? {literally: 'is the outcome'} – In respect of a reply to the heretics.

The latter is apparently out of concern that hostile apologists may claim that there are gaps in the understanding of the Bible, as some characters mentioned there (such as Samson's mother) or even unmentioned ones, but relatives of well-known individuals, are unnamed, and as therefore we ignore those names, arguably we *do not fully* understand the biblical narrative (or things related to the narrative).

I suspect that perhaps, just perhaps, there a humorous intent, poking fun at the way some sectarians, especially among the Gnostics, had with the Old Testament, in order to reverse its theology. Sometimes their narratives attached some major narrative to rather marginal biblical characters. Now, if somebody was able to retort by filling innocuously any conceivable gap in biblical narratives, that place would be "taken", thus pre-empting the competing Gnostic narrative.

duced in a genealogical table as being the sister of some men from the tribe of Judah (*1 Chronicles* 4:3). I interpret

ha = the (a determinative article prefix, unusual yet not unique in a biblical personal name);

tsel (*tsel*) = the usual *tsel* = shadow, whose plural is *tsalim*;

poni = my face (a grammatical and lexical form not otherwise instantiated in Hebrew).

The sense as applied to the little girl must have been “She is the reflected image of my own face”, that is to say, “She is my spitted image”, said by her mother.

Even though Samson’s mother is unnamed in the Bible, she nevertheless has a rather important narrative role. Moreover, a painter representing the scene of the angel with Samson’s future parents would have had to represent Samson’s mother as an equal (at least visually) of Samson’s father.



Figure 9. Detail from a painting of 1648 by Frans Post, *The Sacrifice of Manoah*. As the angel rises in the smoke of the altar, Samson’s future mother covers her face, whereas her husband watches in awe. In this detail, we just see the biblical scene, not the landscape.



Figure 10. The entire painting of 1648 by Frans Post, *The Sacrifice of Manoah*.¹⁰ It is at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. This painting, in which a biblical scene is taking place in what appears to be the coast of Brazil (there is an armadillo in the bottom left corner, and the flora is tropical), is discussed at the beginning of an article by Benjamin Schmidt (2001), entitled “The Hope of the Netherlands: Menasseh ben Israel and the Dutch Idea of America” (the title of Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel’s book discussed is *The Hope of Israel*).

At the beginning of a study of his, Benjamin Schmidt (2001: 86) commented about a strange Dutch painting of 1648, which set that scene near the coast of Brazil (where the Netherlands had conquered Portuguese territory), with even an armadillo in the foreground:

¹⁰ The title by which we know painting is not necessarily one given by the artist, or even from his or her own days. Ruth Bernard Yeazell has authored a book, *Picture Titles: How and Why Western Paintings Acquired Their Names* (Yeazell 2015). To say it with the publisher’s blurb:

A picture’s title is often our first guide to understanding the image. Yet paintings didn’t always have titles, and many canvases acquired their names from curators, dealers, and printmakers – not the artists. Taking an original, historical look at how Western paintings were named, *Picture Titles* shows how the practice developed in response to the conditions of the modern art world and how titles have shaped the reception of artwork from the time of Bruegel and Rembrandt to the present.

The Old Testament and the New World combined in a number of curious ways in the culture of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. The mixture of the two, if sometimes improbable and somewhat infrequent, can be revealing nonetheless of the setting of religious history and the shape of geographic imagination in the early modern Netherlands. Consider, among the most exotic blends, the tropical *Sacrifice of Manoah* (1648) by Frans Post, a biblical landscape that stages the old in the new with remarkable effect (Fig. 4.1). Against a broad and gently mountainous background, an episode of dramatic devotion takes place. A man and a woman – Manoah and his wife, as described in Judges 13 – kneel before a stone altar on which a kid has just been sacrificed. Suspended within the pillar of gray smoke billowing up from their offering, an angel glances knowingly at the performance below while gesturing grandly toward the heavens above. [...]

That painting was especially significant for viewers in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, as the latter's goals and endeavours in the Americas were clad in religious ideology.



Figure 11. The armadillo from the painting of 1648 by Frans Post, *Sacrifice of Manoah*.

As mentioned, the lexical element *poní* for ‘my face’ which I identify inside the biblical female name *Haṣṣēleponí* (now usually pronounced *Hatslelponí*) is unique, a hapax, it is a grammatical and lexical form not otherwise instantiated in Hebrew. The Hebrew noun for ‘face’ is the pluralia tantum *panim*. In Israeli Hebrew, the singular *pan* has been neologised in the sense ‘facet’. I think however that in antiquity, the singular form (not preserved) of the word *panim* for ‘face’ was *pon*, by analogy with *yom* for ‘day’, and its plural *yamim* for ‘days’.

Incidentally, the English conjunction *lest* in the senses ‘in order that not’ (“relating an act to its negative result”) and ‘that’ (“relating a feeling of fear, anxiety etc. to an undesired but possible event”)¹¹ is expressed in Biblical Hebrew by the word *pen*, and in Targumic Aramaic by the word *pon*. The latter however more generally introduces the subjunctive mood. One comes across a manuscript variant spelled *pwnyn* (thus like a plural) in *Targum Job* 4:16 (Jastrow 1903: 1143, s.v. **puna*), as an adverb in the sense ‘alternately’ (Jastrow, *ibid.*).

The spinning top, a toy shaped to spin on its tapered point, has been in recent centuries associated with the festival of Hanukkah, within Judaism. It is called *dreidel* in Yiddish (from *dreyen* ‘to turn’, cf. *drehen* in German, and unrelated to Italian *trottola*, stressed on the antepenult), and *svivón* or *sēvivón* in Israeli Hebrew.

In December 2014, in reply to greetings I emailed him, I received from a non-Jewish scholar of humour a greeting card he had found on the Web, for the Jewish festival of Hanukkah. The e-card, in colour, was entitled “Sheitel on a dreidel”, thus inserting two Yiddish words (respectively for ‘wig’ and ‘top [the toy]’) in English syntax. Awkwardly, the greeting card shows a woman’s wig (of a brunette) as the background of a top of which two facets are shown (as though it replaced a woman’s face). The two facets of the top as shown are the letters for P and N.



Figure 12. The *Sheitel on a dreidel* (wig on a four-sided spinning top) greeting card for Hanukkah.¹² The handle on top of the wooden toy is of transparent plastic (not fully visible here). The toy’s bottom is round.

¹¹ Both quotations are from the *Longman’s English Larousse* ([Watson] 1968).

¹² <http://www.jta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/sheital-on-a-dreidel.jpg> (sic).

Four-faceted tops (teetotums) with a letter on each facet are widespread in European Christian cultures (and also among Ashkenazi Jews), and all apparently derive from an ancient Roman model.¹³

The version of the toy with Hebrew letters is usually interpreted as follows:

N(es) = ‘a miracle’

G(adol) = ‘great’

H(aya) = ‘was’

P(o) = ‘here’, because it’s a toy from Israel (and apparently exported from there), replacing *Š(am)* = ‘there’ as usual on tops manufactured in the Diaspora.

In the e-card as reproduced here, the contiguousness of the P and N forms the Israeli Hebrew word *pan*, being the singular of the pluralia tantum old word *paním* ‘face’. In Israel, *pan* is used in the sense ‘facet’, so this word being spelled out inside the card befits the facets of the toy. There is a visual pun, or rather visual pun combined with a verbal conundrum, in that photograph in the e-card. Aptly, PN (for *pan*, from *paním*) appears precisely where we would expect the woman’s face to be.

Concluding remarks

In this study, we have considered several situations involving wordplay or puns (whether originally intended as puns, or otherwise) in relation to personal names. We considered examples from a Hebrew book in literary studies, and from the Hebrew subtitles of a Colombian telenovela. We showed how awkward the Hebrew spelling of a Greek name in an ancient inscription would look to an Israeli reader, as though the name *Euty chius* (actually motivated by ‘good luck’)¹⁴ was motivated instead by the word for ‘watermelon’. We explained an Italian comedian’s gag (ca. 1970) about Princess Soraya and Franco Indovina’s liaison. We saw that 19th-century American politics generated out of the personal names of politicians both the still extant word *gerrymander*, and the long-forgotten *Dibble-mander*.

We came across President Eisenhower’s toy, a plastic grasshopper, the Eisenhower. We considered also the opposite convention: a rabbi who got his family name from the title of one of his books, whereas his books were themselves entitled by alluding to his first name. We discussed the name Jobisca from Edward Lear’s nonsense poetry, as well as the name, *Maxa Nordau*, of the daughter of the positivist philosopher Max Nordau (originally Meir Südfeld).

We saw that a newspaper reader in London interpreted anagrammatically the name of the model Cara Delevingne as “Learn. Dance. Give”. We then considered a cruel nickname Émile Zola’s haters gave the wife, in a couple of his friends. We also

¹³ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dreidel>, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teetotum, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top

¹⁴ Goodluck Jonathan (b. 1957) is a Nigerian zoologist who in 2010–2015 was his country’s president.

considered how Émile Zola himself played unflatteringly with the horrible family name of a senior official: “J’ai voulu savoir s’il avait fallu des prodiges d’*intelligence* pour retrouver le dossier judiciaire, et j’ai demandé à M. le contrôleur général *Cretin*, si les recherches avaient donné beaucoup de peine”. The Bible relates that the prophet Hosea was ordered to wed a harlot, so he would use his and her situation as an allegory; we considered wordplay concerning her name, as appears in the *Babylonian Talmud*.

We discussed the mythological huntsman’s name *Actaeon* as being distorted into *Acton* by a comic character (himself a huntsman) in Henry Fielding’s novel *Tom Jones*. Then we turned to how Hector Berlioz (as well as the British satirical magazine *Puck*) played with a Latin maxim in relation to the name of the opera singer Adelina Patti. And finally, we discussed a biblical woman’s name that the early rabbinic tradition applied to Samson’s mother (unnamed in the biblical narrative about her), and saw how lexicon and grammar (relevant for that personal name) combine in the visual pun of a recent greeting card for Hanukkah.

We can see then that across cultures and historical periods, playing with personal names in complex ways and in situationally apt manner has been a widespread cultural practice. With varying degrees of funniness, it has enriched human communication. It has also made some personal names vulnerable – bearing a personal name is a risky lifestyle, it appears – but not always you could guess beforehand which names would ultimately prove to be “safe”.

Table 1. Structure of this article.

Abstract
Onomastic puns in the present day: in prose from a book in literary studies, and in the subtitles of a TV series
Onomastic puns which come into being in the eyes of a modern beholder
<i>Gerrymander</i> and <i>Dibble-mander</i> in nineteenth-century American politics
President Eisenhower’s plastic grasshopper: the <i>Eisenhopper</i>
The opposite convention: naming an author after his book
The character name <i>Jobisca</i> in Edward Lear’s nonsense poetry: a name that presupposes a funny backstory to be inferred
Flattering and unflattering onomastic manipulation: the cases of three ladies
Anagrammatic interpretation
Hitting her in order to hit him: <i>La Gorgone Zola</i>
Hosea’s wife, and talmudic puns about her name
<i>Actaeon</i> distorted into <i>Acton</i> in Henry Fielding’s <i>Tom Jones</i>
Hector Berlioz, Adelina Patti, and <i>oportet pati</i>
Samson’s mother, Hazleponi, and the <i>Sheitel on a Dreidel</i> card for Hanukkah
Concluding remarks
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¹⁵ Jastrow's dictionary has often been reprinted by various publishers. It is now freely downloadable.

¹⁶ *The Public Opinion Quarterly* has been published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

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