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## Frank Zappa and Mikhail Bakhtin: Rabelais's carnival made contemporary

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FRANK ZAPPA AND MIKHAIL BAKHTIN:  
RABELAIS'S CARNIVAL MADE CONTEMPORARY

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
Sarah Hill Antinora

June 2008

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by  
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June 2008

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## ABSTRACT

Lustful fornication. Scatology. Gluttony. Defecation. These are just a few of the carnivalesque topoi used by satiric writers to challenge hierarchy. Mikhail Bakhtin bases his theory of carnival on the religious and agricultural festivals of the late Middle Ages, which playfully elevated the baseness of society. Bakhtin argues for the celebration of the lower body as a symbolic overturning of hierarchies as an essential release for society. Contemporary popular culture still requires the release that carnival brings, often coming in the form of wicked satire and parody. It is my contention that the twentieth-century composer Frank Zappa is our current "king of carnival." Zappa's music has all the elements of Bakhtin's theory; it focuses on the lower body, aims to degrade, celebrates the baseness in life, and uses humor to satirize. For this project, I use Bakhtin's theory of carnival to illuminate Zappa's sound and rhetoric. It is my hope that using this theoretical lens allows audiences to understand Zappa's choices in subject matter--whether those choices involve oral sex, profanity, or corrupt religious leaders. Those who can see his work as satire and understand the use of carnivalesque techniques in

challenging authority see the genius in his work. Those who are unwilling to see the humor are often the same targets that Zappa wishes to dethrone.

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CHAPTER ONE

ABSOLUTELY FREE!

A world of secret hungers

Perverting the men who make your laws

...

We see in the back of the City Hall  
mind

The dream of a girl about thirteen

Off with her clothes and into a bed

Where she tickles his fancy all night

lonnnnnnnnnng

...

I'd like to make her do a nasty on the

White House lawn

Gonna smother that girl in chocolate

syrup -

...

Gotta meet the Gurney's

And a dozen grey attorneys

I run the world from City Hall!

--Frank Zappa "Brown Shoes Don't Make It"

Sexual deviancy. Scatology. Gluttony. Defecation.

While this list may read as a precursor to a discussion on the Seven Deadly Sins, it is actually just a preview of a few of the topoi of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival. Bakhtin bases his theory on the prevailing religious and agricultural festivals of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance in early modern Europe, a time of strict hierarchical structure. During these times of festival, sanctioned by those in power, ridicule was not only allowed but encouraged. During carnival, and only during carnival, a peasant could be "king for a day." This disruption of hierarchy was accomplished through celebrating the lower bodily functions. During festivals, the physical body came to symbolize class hierarchy, with the lower classes correlating to the lower body. By celebrating sexuality, feces, flatulence, pregnancy, urination, gluttony, and vomit, the lower classes became symbolically prominent. Additionally in the realm of language, the masses slung humorous insults at those in power to denigrate them, thus overturning the hierarchical structure temporarily.

Contemporary satirists still employ carnivalesque rhetoric, even though the strict hierarchical structure of the Middle Ages has seemingly dissipated. The important



word here is "seemingly." The continued presence of satire suggests that power structures, whether they be political, religious, gender-based, or cultural, still exist. Further, carnivalesque satire insists on attempting to overturn hierarchies, by either highlighting their faults to encourage change or demeaning them to point out the desirability of revolution. Therefore, while it could be argued that the Catholic Church does not have quite the presumptive hold on western society as it had during the eras which created the foundations for the theory of carnival, nor is contemporary society organized in a strict feudal structure, the satire in Frank Zappa's lyrics to "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," above, indicates that other hierarchies live on. Those hierarchical structures are still very worthy of the satirist's wrath.

Although many contemporary examples of carnival in literature can be found, Zappa's work truly exemplifies Bakhtin's theory. No other artist of the late twentieth century uses carnivalesque laughter to mock and ridicule those in power as effectively or with such abandon as Zappa. While I make no attempt here to catalog each instance of Rabelaisian wit in Zappa's music, narrowing down the examples has proved much more difficult than

finding them. Zappa's work abounds with scenes of explicit sex, graphic language, scatological references, and debauchery. Although he indulges in the carnivalesque to challenge hierarchical structures, like Rabelais--Bakhtin's representative of the carnivalesque--he also does so in the spirit of laughter.

However, before analyzing the carnivalesque rhetoric employed by Zappa, a brief historical review of both the theory and its key components is required. I will begin by detailing the carnivalesque atmosphere of the late Middle Ages, highlighting aspects that would later inform Bakhtin's theory. I will then discuss the components of Bakhtin's theory of carnival, as seen in the work of François Rabelais. Since carnival relies heavily on parody, satire, and scatology, I will not only examine how these artistic forms work and why they are valid for a literary analysis, but also provide a definition of how these terms will be used throughout the rest of this essay.

## Medieval Festival and Carnival: A Time for Laughter

Great writers who use wicked satire are often either worshipped or reviled. Both the sixteenth-century French author François Rabelais and the twentieth-century American composer Frank Zappa provoke a wide array of reactions to their work. Bakhtin, who bases his theory of carnival on Rabelais's work, calls his Gargantua and Pantagruel "the most fearless book in world literature" (39). Bakhtin also refers to Rabelais as one of the least popular of writers of world literature, having been accused of reveling in "gross physiologism" (18). This description is similar to one offered Zappa by his critics who accuse him of obscenity and misogyny. Yet, Zappa also has been hailed as the "20th-century popular music's philosopher-king," known for lampooning "stupidity in the west" (Ouellette 48). How can these grossly different reactions be explained?

Bakhtin's theory of carnival can illuminate both of these writers' work, along with the work of many other artists, in helping to explain the public's diverse reactions.

In order to fully understand Bakhtin's theory, a historical look at early modern Europe on which he bases his theory is vital. Feudalistic Europe consisted of two

strict hierarchical structures, societal and religious. In both of those hierarchies, the vast majority of people fell into the lower classes. Under the feudal hierarchy, serfs tied to the land comprised the lowest class. The Catholic Church predominantly controlled the religious hierarchy, with the lower classes unable to question their stations in life due to their illiteracy. The hierarchies were not questioned and societal stability relied on the masses' complicity.

Yet, in that era of strict hierarchy, people needed a release. This release came in the form of either religious festivals or agricultural celebrations, many of which Bakhtin details in the foundation for his theory. The carnival atmosphere was prevalent in the late Middle Ages with up to three months of the year set aside for festivals. One such festival, the Feast of Fools, consisted of rituals allowing for the degradation of church rituals, symbols, and officials. This ridicule would take the form of indecent gestures, mudslinging, parody, and gluttonous feasting (74-75). For example, revelers frequently wore pants on their heads during religious festivals to mock the headdress of the popes (81). The Feast of the Ass, another popular celebration, "honored" the biblical story of Mary's

flight to Egypt with Jesus, with a heavy emphasis on the donkey, or ass, in the tale (78). The celebration known as "Easter Laughter" reveled in gluttony and sexual exhibition as it was the formal permission for the masses to resume eating meat and having sex at the end of Lent (78-79).

Each festival allowed for an inversion of the hierarchy. Turning things upside down and the mixing of lower and upper deliberately challenged hierarchy. Decrowning during carnival allowed for a destruction of the old so that a temporary new structure could be born (Bakhtin 410). Therefore, a jester could be thrust upward for the day and crowned king, or a clown could be abbot (Bakhtin 81). During carnival, the upside-down world is life; it still follows a structure, the "pattern of play" (Bakhtin 7). Although it liberates, it is only a mask. Everyone is equal during carnival, so hierarchy temporarily ceases to exist.

Each of the carnivals and festivals emphasized food, sex, defecation, and what Bakhtin calls "table talk" (284). Western society, then and now, considered each of these elements to be base and lowly when compared with workings of the mind, and yet they were elevated and made preeminent during the festivals. In any festival, food was the central

element. Banquet feasts and specific foods in particular were considered an essential element of the carnival. Festivals centered on a feast in order to promote an atmosphere of merriment. Bakhtin hypothesizes that the merriment stems from the belief that meals cannot be sad because food and sadness are incompatible (279). Therefore, the celebration of food during the festivals helped to create an environment of carnivalesque laughter.

Although medieval festivals celebrated all food, the sausage took center stage. The reasons for this were two-fold. In late medieval society, in addition to most cultures throughout Western history, meat was considered to be the center of the meal. At the same time, the lower classes had less access to meat, which elevated its value. The meat products of the festival created an environment of greater merriment since the masses considered its consumption a treat. Yet, the sausage's phallic nature ensured its status as the most prominent food image during carnival (Bakhtin 191-193). Each of these festivals allowed for the sexual play that capitalized on the sausage's phallic shape. The choice of sausage as the prominent meat product symbolically celebrated sex.

Although medieval festivals promoted the explicit talk of sex, genitalia, and pregnancy, much of the sexual celebration was symbolic. This particular era associated many different elements with the phallus specifically. In addition to the sausage, the nose also symbolized the penis during this time. It was thought that the size of a man's nose correlated to his phallus size (Bakhtin 86). Hence, jokes and innuendos centering on noses abounded during the festivals. Similarly, music was used to denote sex. The drumbeat itself was thought to simulate the rhythm of sexual intercourse, ensuring that beat-heavy musical arrangements be played during the festivals (Bakhtin 205). The emphasis on sex did not merely allow for laughter and merriment, although it certainly accomplished this. It was also a fundamental element of the carnival because of its inherent association with birth and renewal, allowing sex to symbolize the renewal of the hierarchical structure during the festivals.

Stemming from its emphasis on both the renewal by fertilization and the celebration of the lower body, excrement and defecation were also widely used in carnival. In the early sixteenth century, excrement literally represented fertility because of its use in farming. While

the use of excrement can be seen usually in negative terms in contemporary society, it was more ambivalent during the late Middle Ages. Medieval society centered on agriculture, and the importance of excrement as fertilizer would not be lost on any farm laborers, which most of the lower classes were. Thus, church leaders flung excrement at crowds during the carnivals and festivals as both a blessing and a humiliation, as both a positive and negative act (Bakhtin 147-151).

Just as the use of excrement allowed for growth, so too does the use of insults. The term "mudslinging," to hurl insults, derives from the literal slinging of dung during these festivals (Bakhtin 147). As the peasants heaped excrement onto their fields to encourage growth, and priests tossed dung on crowds during festivals, the "slinging" of "mud" was quite literal in its original connotation. During the festivals, the lower classes were also encouraged to "mudsling" verbally, as it was the only time this was permitted. During carnivals, the motivation was laughter and a temporary overturning of the hierarchy. Mudslinging allows for the lower classes to verbally denigrate those in power through carnivalesque laughter.



## Bakhtin's Theory of Carnival: Carnavalesque Rhetoric

While medieval towns often allowed three months to be set aside for carnival, this has changed because our society is no longer as mandated by religious and agricultural calendars. Yet, Bakhtin claims that the carnivalesque still exists. It has lived on in our literature and art as an artist's strategy to promote change and challenge contemporary hierarchies. However, the basic tenets are the same as those seen in the medieval festivals, with an overriding emphasis on laughter.

In Bakhtin's view, carnival laughter can only be a positive act. Bakhtin quotes Aristotle's assertion from de Anima that "of all living creatures only man is endowed with laughter" (68). The ability to laugh separates humanity from other species and, in fact, elevates humanity above others. Bakhtin also asserts that laughter makes humankind healthier, since it diminishes the bad (Emerson 7). Further, in eras of repression, the need for laughter is even more necessary. Bakhtin states that without this type of release, man would burst because laughter is his "second nature" and it cannot be repressed indefinitely (75). This laughter has the ability to destroy all pretense

and fears in favor of freedom (Morson 93). Although carnival laughter accompanies mockery and challenges all norms, it is not meant in anger. As Bakhtin states, carnival laughter is a public act, of all people but also directed at all people. Thus, it can only be "ambivalent" (11-12). It is light-hearted and free. If the themes or subject matter of writers who revel in the carnivalesque appear to be offensive, the laughter and humor help to diminish the hostility of the words.

Additionally, the carnivalesque humor cannot be taken as a serious threat. Even though carnival laughter challenges norms, which will always exist, the ridicule implied in this humor can never fully succeed (Morson 94). Yet, this burst of laughter also constitutes a burst of discovery or imagination (Emerson 20). After all, individuals laugh in reaction to carnivalesque ridicule, often initiated through parody or satire. The laughter substantiates that at least some change in attitude or thought, or some discovery of circumstances, has occurred. Although temporary, the hierarchy has been overturned.

Carnival laughter aims at subverting power structures. For Rabelais, these rulers include the upper echelon of the medieval hierarchy and the religious leaders. Celebrating

what Bakhtin calls the "material bodily lower stratum," accomplishes the decrowning (368). To degrade those higher on the hierarchy, there must be a concentration to the lower. Thus, if the direction of "upward" relates to monarchs and heaven, symbolically that would correlate to the head and face on the human body. The direction of "downward" represents the lower classes and earth. This correlates to the belly and reproductive organs. Therefore, carnival often celebrates sex, birth, pregnancy, food and drink, defecation, and urination (Bakhtin 21). Hence, hierarchical upheaval occurs in two ways: celebration of the lower body which symbolically elevates the lower classes, and the linking of the lower body to the physical or material humanity of those in power thereby denigrating them.

Both Bakhtin and Rabelais idealize the character that masturbates, urinates, spits, and defecates since he celebrates all acts associated with the baseness in life, the lower body, and most importantly the bodily orifices. Bakhtin calls this emphasis on the "material bodily principle"--food, drink, defecation, and sex--"grotesque realism" (18). Only the openings are accessible to the outside world or to change; only the orifices eliminate the

boundaries between the body and its world (Morson 226).

These orifices at times symbolize the hole to purgatory in religious satire while also being useful for their numerous obscene connotations in others (Bakhtin 377).

Moreover, Bakhtin extends "carnival" to encompass the following three forms: the ritual spectacles, which includes the feasts discussed in the earlier section above, comic verbal compositions, which includes oral or written parodies, and various forms of billingsgate, which consist of curses and oaths (5). In each form, Bakhtin focuses on the creator's use of carnivalesque rhetoric and themes, especially as used in a satirical or parodical context. Thus, Bakhtin views the chimeras of illuminated manuscripts, Kerch's terracotta collection depicting elderly pregnant hags laughing, and Cervantes's gluttonous Sancho as all equally carnivalesque. Painters contemporaneous to Rabelais include Pieter Breughel whose carnivalesque work famously celebrates the peasant class and Hieronymus Bosch whose carnivalesque imagery portrays the sin of humanity.

Bakhtin's theory highlights the words used to demonstrate the freedom from hierarchy. While carnivalesque rhetoric allows for the elevation of the lower classes, it

is fundamentally concerned with degrading those in power. According to Bakhtin, during carnival, the king is the clown mocked by everyone. Bakhtin refers to this process as "decrowning," or "dethroning" (197). Carnival turns everything upside-down. In fact, Bakhtin calls carnival a "turnabout" (11). Certain rhetoric conveys that upheaval in literature: "down," "inside out," "vice versa," "upside down," "thrust down," "turn over," "bottom to top," and "bottoms up" (370). Since these terms fundamentally represent the symbolic overturning of the hierarchy, Rabelais and other authors of carnivalesque literature use them extensively. Rabelais also incorporates the following images into his work, many of which were seen in the carnivals and festivals mentioned above: garments are worn backwards, pants are worn on heads, people walk backwards or show one's backside, and still others ride a horse facing the tail (411). By placing a clothing item associated with the lower body on the head, true-life peasants and Rabelaisian characters turned conventions upside-down through parody. These terms and images illustrate the ideas of carnival, or the dethroning of hierarchy. Therefore, carnivalesque rhetoric and imagery allow for the decrowning of those in power.

Although the religious and agricultural festivals allowed for a temporary destruction of the hierarchy, the medieval hierarchy was actually crumbling during Rabelais's time. Bakhtin asserts that Rabelais points to the instability of power and looks forward to a new world (401). Decrowning portrays the unstable and temporary nature of any hierarchy; all in power will eventually fall (Morson 443). Rabelais uses the topoi of carnival to decrown two kings in his work, Picrochole and Anarchus, as an analogy to the destruction of the feudalistic hierarchy. He accomplishes this literary hierarchical upheaval by allowing the lower body to overturn the power figures and institutions, using banquet imagery, sexual references, scatology, abusive language, and laughter (Edwards 28-29). These same elements were celebrated during the actual medieval festivals that were discussed above.

Just as food was the central element during the religious and agricultural festivals of the Middle Ages, Bakhtin also predominantly features feasting in his literary theory. Bakhtin asserts feasting as so essential to merriment that no comic scene can be without it, even if only as a metaphor (279). Again, the sausage is the predominant food imagery seen in carnivalesque literature,

playing on its phallic nature. In fact, Rabelais names one of his characters Saint Sausage. By linking the sausage, a sexual image, with a religious saint, Rabelais denigrates not only this particular character, but also the religious institution he represents (Bakhtin 191-193). Bakhtin further substantiates his literary theory by providing other examples of satiric uses of gluttony in classic works. One famous example is Sancho Panza, whose surname translates to "fat belly." Cervantes characterizes Panza as combining an overly abundant appetite and thirst with an equal amount of defecation (22).

Bakhtin also claims that an author's celebration of sex is not only a celebration of the lower body, but also an attempt to challenge hierarchy. As stated earlier, in Rabelais's time it was thought that the size and shape of a man's nose indicated his phallus size. In his work, Rabelais provides lengthy physical descriptions of his characters, often lingering on the depiction of a male character's nose. Additionally, he often portrays a nose lifting up to represent an erection (Bakhtin 86).

Rabelais's work also uses the drum as sexual imagery. Rabelais likens the beat of the drum to the rhythm of sexual intercourse, and the word "drummer" as used by

Rabelais meant "lover." Further, Rabelais uses drum-related words, such as "stroke" and "stick," to denote the sexual act (Bakhtin 205).

This imagery is further seen in the use of the female form in carnivalesque literature. The image of a woman's body represented the temptation of the flesh in Rabelais's time, as well as in ours (Bakhtin 240). A common Rabelaisian image is an old "hag" giving birth (Bakhtin 26). Bakhtin calls this the ideal grotesque image because it unites the "dying" and ugly body with the unformed body rife with potential (26). Although this Gallic type of imagery opposes an idealization of women, Bakhtin insists that this type of imagery is not actually negative; instead, it is ambivalent (241). The linking of sex, death, and rebirth celebrates the challenge to hierarchy. However, no matter how explicit the language, the female body is not considered negative. It acts as a carnival representation of renewal. Note that death in carnival is also not negative since the dead merely fertilize the newly born--the destruction of the old kingdom (or previous season, year, etc.) allows for the birth of the new (Bakhtin 404-410).



Just as death is a source for rebirth, so is excrement. As discussed earlier, medieval festivals encouraged the slinging of dung, an element of humiliation and renewal. Today, the slinging of excrement to fertilize is only done symbolically through the slinging of insults (at least one hopes) (Morson 443). Thus, according to the theory of carnival, offensive language actually allows for growth. Critics point to the use of abusive language as probably the most controversial aspect of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin admits that even modern readers find Rabelais's graphic language difficult to read (146). However, while Rabelais was criticized for his work, his abusive language was not problematic at the time he was writing. Instead, his worries of censorship stemmed from the institutions that he chose to ridicule (Morson 454). It is also important to note that in early modern Europe this type of ridicule and verbal assault was allowed only during carnival. Bakhtin's theory extends this freedom of language into the work of carnivalesque writers. While the language may be graphic, it must be exaggerated to reach its aims.

Bakhtin theorizes that there are two types of language: authoritarian and the shouted, unprintable word (Morson 446). In order for the masses to denigrate those in

power, or those who use "authoritarian" speech, then the people must use the "unprintable word" to overthrow them. The abusive language is indecent, profane, mocking, complex, and ultimately takes on the character of laughter (Bakhtin 16-17). Strikingly, there is an expansive list of insults relating to the genitals, anus, buttocks, belly, and nose--all representing the lower bodily stratum. Conversely, far fewer terms for arms, legs, the face, and eyes exist. Carnavalesque writers use lower bodily expressions as abuse because they are by nature more expressive and intended to mock (Bakhtin 319). In the era of Rabelais, society was afraid of being too serious and staunchly defended its right to laughter and "table talk" (Bakhtin 178-179). Rabelais's contemporaries thought that laughter liberated individuals from their internal censors. Hence, Bakhtin argues for carnival, and especially carnivalesque rhetoric, as true freedom of speech (94).

### Scatology

The Illinois Enema Bandit

I heard he's on the loose

I heard he's on the loose

Lord, the pitiful screams

Of all them college-educated women...

Boy, he'd just be tyin' 'em up

(They'd be all bound down!)

Just be pumpin' every one of 'em up

With all the bag fulla

The Illinois Enema Bandit Juice

--Frank Zappa "The Legend of the Illinois Enema Bandit"

Just as the literal slinging of dung during the medieval festivals led to the verbal "mudslinging" of insults, scatology as a literary device is commonly used by carnivalesque authors. "Scatology" can be loosely defined as "the representation of the process and product of elimination of the body's waste products (feces, urine, flatus, phlegm, vomitus)" (Persels xiii). However, scatological satire would be an attack, or challenge to hierarchy, using words related to skata (Lee 5). While non-satirical uses of scatology exist in both Rabelais and other classic literary works, for the purposes of carnival, scatology is almost exclusively satirical when used in conjunction with an attack on the hierarchy.

Scatology has long been used as a reason for critics to dismiss an artist's work, including Rabelais, Swift, Erasmus, and others, but fundamentally its use does not

deem a work good or bad; it is neutral (Lee 2-3). Its long literary history validates its use as a significant literary and rhetorical device, dating back to Aristophanes. His play The Clouds uses scatological humor to satirize Socrates and likens his words and breath to flatulence (Lee 7-9). Later, Juvenal continues to use scatology as a form of character defamation. While "negative" scatology is definitely seen in carnivalesque works, it is used in a positive sense equally as often.

Rabelais uses scatological satire in both its positive and negative associations. One critic notes that he makes over sixty references to just flatulence in Gargantua and Pantagruel (Bowen 7). He often connects defecation with religion in his scathing attacks on the Church. In one instance, the religious sermons endured by a character release themselves via diarrhea. Yet, later in the book, defecation equates to a purging or cleansing (LaGuardia 25). In Rabelais, a character may drown in his urine or have fear beaten out of him to end his constipation (Bakhtin 149). Rabelais and other writers of carnival do not shy away from scatological references. Instead, they view scatology as the most pointed agent of ridicule that a satirist has.

## Parody

She's my groupie bang bang,

Groupie bang bang,

Groupie bang bang

Looks is where she gets her bread

But the boys all say she gives good

head

Got to see that girl tonight

Ain't been laid since ten last night

--Frank Zappa "Groupie Bang Bang"

The theory of carnival names parody as an instrumental tool in degrading those in power. Bakhtin recounts the numerous types of parody used during carnivals and festivals in his Rabelais and His World. Parodies of legal documents include wills and decrees, while public orators engaged in parodic debates and dialogues (14). As many of these carnivals were religious festivals, much of the parody centered on the Church. The clothing of the clergy was mimicked, the religious rituals were exaggerated, and obscene gestures and oaths were assigned to saints (191). Yet, parody during carnival was not viewed as negative, as it was aimed in all directions.

In fact, while parody often uses ridicule, it is usually ambivalent. For example, a parodist may mock a hero's status, but the hero as a person is not undermined; instead, the parody may only ridicule society's need for heroization (Morson 434). While the word is commonly used to denote satire, parody is just one type of satire and does not necessarily have to be satiric at all. Parody can be "playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive" (Hutcheon 32). All that the term parody truly implies is "bitextual synthesis," in which a text is imitated and remarked upon in a new text (Hutcheon 32).

In her book A Theory of Parody, Linda Hutcheon details how these two versions of parody have come into existence. Early definitions of parody only label poems of moderate length using epic meter and language, but on a trivial subject. The term comes from the Greek parodia, meaning "counter song" (32). However, para- has two distinct meanings. When translated as "counter" or "against," parody takes on the ridiculing image of satire. Yet, when translated as "beside," all parody really denotes is comparison with an ironic distance (32-35). The difference

here can appear subtle, but in looking at particular examples, the two uses of parody are much more discernable.

Since parody is often confused as synonymous with satire, it is important to begin with parody's other uses first. While satire implies a moral stance or some type of judgment, parody on its own has no social implications (Hutcheon 16). Instead, parody actually describes a "refunctioning" of a known form to the parodist's needs. The parodist often flouts a form with affection for the original text (Hutcheon 4-5). Hutcheon quotes Sir Theodore Martin as stating, "Let no one parody a poet unless he loves him" (30). James Joyce's Ulysses serves as an example of this type of parody. Joyce's work does not ridicule Homer's Odysseus or denigrate the original work. There is no inference from Ulysses that Joyce thought of Homer's writing as poor and unworthy of the attention it has received throughout the centuries. Instead, Joyce's work honors Homer's, while also playing with some of the tropes that Homer made famous. Therefore, only the most successful, only the best, are subjects for parody (Hutcheon 76-77). The parodist's work stands "beside" the original, elevating his/her own work in the literary hierarchy.

Zappa's "Groupie Bang Bang," cited above, functions as an example of this type of parody. Zappa unmistakably bases the melody on Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," a love song. Holly's song depicts the narrator's love for a girl and his insistence that she love him in return. Zappa's song depicts the narrator's lust for a groupie and his insistence that she sexually gratify him. While the sexuality of the song intrinsically implies the carnivalesque, the lyrics mock the rock and roll lifestyle rather than condemn the women known as "groupies." In terms of parody, though, Zappa's song clearly does not imply that Holly's original should be ridiculed. Instead, he uses a well-known piece of music to juxtapose the two types of "love."

While this type of parody does imply affection for the original work, it also indicates that certain conventions have become tired. One critic, Northrop Frye, holds this view. Frye holds that while a parodist such as Joyce may not in fact be ridiculing Homer's work, the parodist inverts the tropes that are now "worn out" (Hutcheon 36). It only follows that a parodist such as Joyce would select Homer's work to parody, since it is the original and best of its kind. However, the parody becomes an inverse of the



original. This type of parody cannot be called ridicule, but it does rely on a tone of irony. The parodist honors the best works in history not merely through imitation, but through the art of distinction.

The most famous works, those at the top of the literary hierarchy, are the most ripe for parody precisely because they are the most famous. For a parody to be successful, the audience must be able to reference the original work. This necessity accounts for two characteristics of parody. First, parody is most prevalent in times of learning, since the parodist relies on the competence of his/her audience. If the audience is not aware of the work or convention being parodied, the parody cannot work. Thus, parody occurs most often during "periods of sophistication" (Hutcheon 18-19). However, even the most learned societies are still more familiar with certain works rather than others. Therefore, parody utilizes the most famous works, whether the parodist reveres them or not, to ensure that the audience will be familiar with the references. The Bible and the classics of literature are the most parodied texts not because they deserve to be ridiculed, but because the parodist can be assured that the audience can play its part in the dialogue (Hutcheon 2-3).

Parody at its most basic level is dialogue. It is not a coincidence that the theorist behind dialogism is also Mikhail Bakhtin. While a complete discussion of dialogism would not be appropriate in this context, some of the fundamentals of Bakhtin's theory help to shed light on both parody and his theory of carnival. Dialogism states that all literary work is informed by all previous works, while also acting to inform all contemporary and future works (Hutcheon 22-23). Literature, as well as all culture, is an on-going dialogue in which all people play a part. The theory does not rely on only "good writers" or "learned readers" to be part of the dialogue; instead, it is democratic without any hierarchy. While Hutcheon quotes Bakhtin as labeling parody as "intentional dialogized hybrid," other critics have called it transtextuality, intertextuality, or hypertextuality (69). This distinction separates parody from plagiarism and imitation. Further, Bakhtin evades the questions of plagiarism through his theory of dialogism, as all of humankind engages in the dialogue. Thus, the idea of a sole "author" is suspect in Bakhtin's view. However, Bakhtin allows parody further liberties, claiming that it is reminiscent of indirect discourse. It is as if the work being parodied is all in

quotation marks (Hutcheon 41). As will be seen in Chapter Two, this type of borrowing is actually called quotation when used in music. And, again, parody does not merely quote the original, or imitate; it is imitation with a difference.

Of course, the difference in parody often does allow the parodist to ridicule the original work, the original artist, or the values or themes associated with that work. When an imitation "wounds" the original by emphasizing its faults, it is satiric parody (Hight 68). When parody is used to ridicule, it is a form of satire--which is why many mistakenly use the two terms interchangeably today. Additionally, for the purposes of this project, much of the parody that will be examined in the upcoming chapters are examples of scathing satire. Yet, carnival does not require parody to be of a ridiculing nature.

#### Satire

And if these words you do not heed  
Your pocketbook just kinda might recede  
When some man comes along and claims  
godly need  
He will clean you out right through

your tweed

\*That's right, remember there is a big

Difference between kneeling down

And bending over...\*

He's got twenty million dollars

In his Heavenly Bank Account...

All from those chumps who was

\*Born again\*

--Frank Zappa "Heavenly Bank Account"

One could label satire as the "serious side" of carnival. While carnival is supposed to be light-hearted and free, upheaval serves as its driving force. Those in power designed the feasts and celebrations to temporarily dismantle the hierarchy and allow freedom to all. Temporarily, the masses criticized those in power by pointing out their faults, ridiculing with humor. Whether satire has longer lasting effects than allowed for by carnival will be discussed in Chapter Three. Yet, even if the satire only allows for the utterance of insult, it is still quite an agent of change. Satire acts as a polemic device, offering a controversial argument to displace the one in power (Griffin 7).

Most critics consider satire to be both a rhetorical and moral device. It attacks vice and folly by intermingling wit with ridicule. One mode of satire is satirical parody. Parody and satire converge when a satirist attacks and persuades through exaggeration (Griffin 1). Hutcheon quotes Ben Jonson as supporting this view of parody: "A parody, a parody with a kind of miraculous gift to make it absurder than it was" (30). When parody critically ridicules, it is also satire, since it acts as the "malicious denigrating vehicle" of satire (Hutcheon 10). By highlighting the faults and follies of the world, satirical parody may seem negative. Yet, many critics maintain that it is actually optimistic. Since satire has the moral or social aim to correct society's ills, satire is idealistic in its attempt to create change. While the rhetoric may be negative, the aim is positive (Hutcheon 56-57).

The debate over whether satire operates as a negative or positive force has led to a division of critics. One camp views Horace as the quintessential satirist. He fundamentally likes people, but acknowledges them as blind fools who need his moral guidance. Through his satire, he aims to cure them of their folly. The other camp sees

Juvenal as the preeminent satirist. He dislikes humankind, but aims to help the individual. His brand of satire wounds and punishes (Highet 235). Where Horace is pleasantly facetious, Juvenal angrily storms (Griffin 24-25). Both follow the carnivalesque principle to degrade those in power, but the usage of scatology and degrading insults follows Juvenal's lead more closely than Horace's. Yet, the laughing nature of carnival aligns with Horace. Thus, both views of satire are useful here.

Critics of satire also disagree on its origins. It is now believed that the word comes from lanx satura, meaning "food for thought" (Griffin 6). This brand of satire acts as inquiry, or "little chats," that create open-ended conversations between the satirist and his/her audience (Griffin 39). In earlier centuries, others believed that the word also derived from satyr, meaning "wild" or "lawless." The satyr was presented at the end of a trilogy of Greek tragedies in order to lighten the mood of the audience. The satyr always mocked, or parodied, the tragedies that the audience had just experienced. This brand of satire acts more as provocation (Griffin 7). Although Isaac Casaubon later proved this etymology to be incorrect when he discovered the word's Roman roots, the

belief that satire derived from the Greek satyr informed how critics and writers constructed the idea of "satire" (Dryden).

Discussions and uses of satire changed throughout the years. Lucilius and Aristophanes rely on irony and facetiousness, while Quintilian labels satire as a purely Roman phenomenon (Griffin 8-9). John Donne's satire in the Elizabethan Era bases his work on the satyr, relying on harsh criticisms in the spirit of Juvenal (Griffin 10-11). Later, Alexander Pope uses his pen as his sword to violently provoke change. With works including Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal," Jonathan Swift does not aim to reform, but to vex (Griffin 26-27). He intends to shock his readers out of their complacency--to provoke them by disorienting them (Griffin 52-53). By the twentieth century, critics such as Mary Claire Randolph have adapted John Dryden's satirical theory to conclude that satire includes two parts: Part A lashes out against a vice; Part B commends the opposite virtue. However, even Randolph concedes that often Part B is only implied, still leaving the two types of satire to coexist and defy one irrefutable definition (Griffin 28-29).

Two characteristics that help to define satire is the emphasis on play and the satirist's tendency towards loquacity. Since satire contains moral undertones, many underemphasize its use of laughter and its element of pleasure. Dryden contends that pleasure accounts for at least one half of satire's merits (Griffin 161). The satirist's ability to play with language, create puns, and invent new insults is an art form often overlooked as satirists revel in allusions, irony, and fantasy. They are "connoisseurs of abuse" (Griffin 168). In his Satire: A Critical Reintroduction, Dustin Griffin invokes Aristotle's category of epideictic speech, or rhetorical display urging praise or blame (72-73). While satirists often want to provoke blame towards a vice or folly, they also want praise for their rhetorical skill. As Griffin writes, "Anybody can call names, but it requires skill to make a malefactor die sweetly" (73). Thus, it is not uncommon to find seemingly never-ending columns of abuses, or catalogues of lists, in satire (168). Satirists not only love language, but love to impress their readers with their wit.

Rabelais certainly utilizes each of the modes of satire in Gargantua and Pantagruel. Fundamentally the work



can be seen as a light-hearted parody of the adventures so popular in medieval fiction. His characters search for the oracle of the Holy Bottle instead of the legendary knights' searches for the Holy Grail. He traces the giant's lineage up through Pantagruel in parody of the Book of Genesis, in a list spanning two entire pages (Rabelais 18-21).

Pantagruel's mother dies in the midst of childbirth, linking birth and death in the spirit of carnival (26). For whole chapters at a time, readers live in his mouth, a mouth into which an earlier character had defecated. Yet, throughout Pantagruel's adventures, exaggerated versions of popular tales, Rabelais provokes inquiry. He challenges the morality of the church leaders, the effectiveness of the education system, and the rhetoric of law. As Pantagruel is a member of the upper class himself, Rabelais's tale repeatedly allows the reader to imagine a hierarchy in upheaval.

As Bakhtin selected Rabelais on which to base his literary theory of carnival, it is understandable that his five-book collection would be the embodiment of scatology, parody, and satire. Although Bakhtin applies his theory to a variety of highly-esteemed artists, including Shakespeare, Voltaire, Cervantes, and Erasmus, none

encompass the spirit and rhetorical strategies of carnival as well as Rabelais. However, it is my assertion that a new artist has inherited the throne as "king of carnival."

Frank Zappa's album titles alone demonstrate his use of the carnivalesque. His emphasis on freedom and laughter is prominent on Absolutely Free, Does Humor Belong in Music?, and You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore. He rails against censorship in favor of the freedom of expression on Have I Offended Someone? and Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention. He hints at vulgarity with MOFO! Project/Object, which stands for "The Making of Freak Out," not the profane "mother fucker." Furthermore, the individual elements of carnival are also explored in titles. For example, to experience his celebration of the sausage, listen to Uncle Meat or Burnt Weeny Sandwich. However, album titles do not do his work justice as either an artist or as the current exemplar of carnival. The following chapter will explore the various ways in which Zappa's sound and lyrics epitomize carnivalesque rhetoric in depth. Get ready for sex, shit, and rock and roll.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DOES HUMOR BELONG IN MUSIC?

I couldn't say where she's coming from,

But I just met a lady named Dinah-Moe-

Humm

She stroll on over, say look here, bum,

I got a forty dollar bill say you can't

make me cum

(Y'jes can't do it)

She made a bet with her sister who's a

little bit dumb

She could prove it any time all men was

scum

I don't mind that she called me a bum,

But I knew right away she was really

gonna cum

(So I got down to it)

I whipped off her bloomers 'n stiffened

my thumb

An' applied rotation on her sugar plum

I poked 'n stroked till my wrist got

numb

But I still didn't hear no Dinah-Moe

Humm,

Dinah-Moe Humm

--Frank Zappa "Dinah Moe Hum"

Twentieth-century composer Frank Zappa released more than sixty albums, received two Grammy Awards, and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. His 1968 album with the Mothers of Invention, We're Only in It for the Money, was inducted into the prestigious National Recording Registry, and Rolling Stone named Zappa the 71st most important rock artist of all time. Yet, while Zappa's work rightly has been the focus of musical criticism, his lyrics have been largely ignored by critics. The one notable exception, Ben Watson's Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play, provides an in-depth examination of Zappa's music, combining historical biography with Freudian analysis and the principles of the dada movement. However, even this critical text essentially ignores Zappa's penchant for satire and humor. As a large portion of Zappa's work serves to answer the question he poses on his 1986 album Does Humor Belong in Music?, the lack of critical analysis centering on his use of carnivalesque laughter is anomalous.

For me, Zappa's work invites analysis through numerous theoretical lenses, including feminist, New Historicist, and psychoanalytical approaches. As seen in the excerpt above, the lines from "Dinah Moe Hum" alone speaks to each of these theories. However, I contend that Bakhtin's theory of carnival most illuminates Zappa's music and sound. His lyrics focus on the lower body, aim to degrade, celebrate the baseness in life, and use humor to satirize. While it would be virtually impossible to investigate each instance of Zappa's Rabelaisian wit in a project of this scale, I will explore the most pertinent examples here. This chapter examines the primary examples of Zappa's musical parodies and lyrical satires which aim to degrade contemporary hierarchical structures. In particular, I will examine those examples that adhere to the celebration of what Bakhtin calls the lower bodily stratum.

Although Zappa's lyrics focus on themes of sex, the phallus, excrement, and food, and his music even often sounds reminiscent of contemporary carnivals and fairs, most of these examples are not explicit in their association with the theory of carnival. The cover art of Zappa's 1973 album Grand Wazoo depicts a musical battle inspired by the battle between Gargantua and Picrocole from

Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel. While the cover art does not prove that Zappa was aware of either Rabelais or the theory of carnival, it does at least indicate that Zappa's cover artist, Cal Schenkel, was aware of Rabelais's work and its appropriateness as a visual representation of Zappa's sound. Therefore, Zappa's music can be seen as a contemporary version of Rabelais, or as the twentieth-century exemplar of the carnivalesque.

#### Rabelaisian Wit in Zappa

As discussed in Chapter One, Bakhtin claims laughter to be the most fundamental element of carnival. Without humor, the rhetoric of carnival could be viewed as a legitimate threat to hierarchy. The laughter enables the carnivalesque writer to be free with his/her attacks. Similarly, Zappa infuses his parody and satire with humor in an effort to free himself from the era's musical expectations. He said, "We play free music...unencumbered by American cultural suppression" (Slaven 60). One way in which his music is free is that it defies categorization. While many label Zappa as a rock artist, many of his compositions lack the traditional trappings of rock music, such as lyrics or guitar. By creating music difficult to

categorize, he is freed to create without being bound by expectations of a particular genre. For example, one of his earliest works, the "bicycle concerto" performed on Steve Allen's variety show in the 1960's, consists of Zappa "playing" the bicycle using a bass bow and drumsticks. He later reprised this piece on an episode of The Monkees, except that this time he and Monkee Michael Nesmith played the car. Neither of these compositions can be categorized. In fact, many would even question their validity as music. Yet, both are rooted in Zappa's love of the unconventional and free, inspired by rebel classical composers who came before him, such as Stravinsky and Webern. The former worked in a broad spectrum of musical genres, often subverting them. The latter created music with what is known in composition as "twelve-tone," considered avant garde in its time (Zappa and Occiogrosso 34-35). Further, the lyrics to the hundreds of Zappa songs demonstrate his aim to be free from the rules of propriety. He accomplishes this lyrical freedom in much the same way as Rabelais before him, through the intermingling of humor with the celebration of the lower bodily elements.

Carnavalesque writers often explicitly use terms that illustrate the inversion of the hierarchical pyramid. While

Rabelais uses the term "upside-down" repeatedly in his work, Zappa uses similar rhetoric. He notes that the theme of his early work was to dress down, "not only sartorially but musically and linguistically" (Kostelanetz xi). Zappa's sound depends on a "mixing of high with low," or switching between classical music and pop-rock (Kostelanetz xi). In his The Real Frank Zappa Book, Zappa writes that he consistently strived to create both the "musically, uncompromising boy-is-this-ever-hard-to-play" compositions and the satirical stories accompanied by less elaborate arrangements (182). He even frequently states that it is precisely his success as a rock artist that allows him to produce his symphonic creations. The profit he makes from his "low art" frees him to create his "high art". By "dressing down" his music and intermingling high and low, Zappa follows not only the ideas of carnival, but also utilizes the theory's key terms.

Of course, intermingling high and low or infusing his music with humor does not truly exemplify the carnivalesque unless Zappa's also aims to challenge hierarchy. Zappa actually took aim at two different types of hierarchies, the figurative and the literal. Figuratively, Zappa decrowns all of stupidity. He uses the term "stupidity" to



encompass globally everything he aims to denigrate, ranging from musical expectations and constraints to governmental agencies. Virtually whatever he despised fell under the umbrella-term of "stupidity." He felt there was a lot of it. He once told a Rolling Stone interviewer that he challenges the scientific notion that the universe must be made up of hydrogen since it is the most plentiful substance. Zappa stated instead that the "most plentiful ingredient is stupidity" (Ouellette 49). While Zappa labels all of his targets as "stupid," he does aim to topple specific hierarchies. His songs often satirize his peers, especially those who were at one time considered the top of the musical hierarchy, ranging from The Beatles to Michael Jackson, Crosby, Stills, and Nash (CSN), to Elvis Presley. Yet, he also mocks all authorities who sought to control or inhibit the musical freedoms of either himself or even those artists he satirized. These hierarchical power structures take the form of religious institutions and their leaders, conservative groups aimed at protecting today's youth, and almost anyone who ever held a government office.

How exactly does Zappa challenge hierarchy using carnivalesque rhetoric? One of the most common musical

techniques he uses is to insert humor in his music in order to parody the contemporary popular music. Zappa understood that certain sounds are inherently humorous, such as the lowest registers of the bass saxophone or the slide trombone, so he inserts these during his live performances to emphasize humorous banter between the musicians (Zappa and Occiogrosso 171). He also introduces certain modules that the audience knows correlate with parody, such as the themes from the Twilight Zone, Mister Rogers, and Jaws, or the song "Louie, Louie" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 166).

Although these musical quotations are often inserted into existing compositions during live performances, he also uses these same melodies to soften scathing satire by infusing the serious message with musical laughter. For example, Zappa composed one of his most serious attacks on the controlling nature of government, "Plastic People," with the melody from "Louie, Louie" as its basis (James 41). This song will be discussed more explicitly in Chapter Three, but its use of a recognizable, but humorous module is relevant here.

Just as many of the carnivalesque writers did before him, Zappa often mocks with love. For example, he used to play Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" note for note,

until the guitar solo. His complete brass section performed the guitar solo instead (Fricke 12-13). For his own amusement, he also played "Puff the Magic Dragon" as "Joe the Puny Greaser," and "Streets of Laredo" as "Streets of Fontana" (Ouellette 50). The average audience member may not have known that these were lyrical references to his youth, but many were in on the joke. These musical parodies exaggerate then-contemporary conventions for humorous effect. But no indication exists with any of the songs cited above that Zappa intends to ridicule the original. These examples support Hutcheon's description of parody as comparison with an ironic distance, discussed in Chapter One.

However, even when Zappa has an affinity for the music genre he mocks, he often includes elements of that genre he intends to ridicule. His love of doo wop and Motown, for example, does not hinder his attack on what he views as the genres' insipid love lyrics. Thus, any song with typical love lyrics is a target for Zappa. Parodies that mock love lyrics took many forms. For example, Zappa's band inserted a parody of The Supremes' "Baby Love" at the end of live renditions of "The Duke Regains His Chop;" they performed it as "Cheesy Love" (Watson 82). However, even this song

extends an earlier parody, "Duke of Prunes." While the song's title obviously parodies "Duke of Earl," the mockery lies in the lyrics:

A moon beam through the prune

In June

Reveals your chest

I see your lovely beans

And in that magic go-kart

I bite your neck

The cheese I have for you, my dear

Is real and very new

Zappa mocks the typical moon/June rhymes by substituting June/prune nonsense. When Ray Collins, a singer for The Mothers of Invention, improvised the lyrics during the recording session, Zappa encouraged him to change "I see your tits" to "I see your lovely beans" (James 40). While either version would have mocked the banality of pop lyrics, the use of "beans" represents pop's nonsensical nature. The inclusion of "cheese" here serves the same purpose. It is worth noting that in both instances Zappa uses food imagery to mock, a carnivalesque rhetorical move.

Cruising with Ruben and the Jets, an early album of Zappa's, exemplifies parody stemming from love, but with an

emphasis on denigrating the popular song's love lyrics. He formulated the idea while listening to Stravinsky, the composer known for perverting clichés and forms of the classical era (Zappa and Occiogrosso 88). Since Zappa's first love was doo-wop, he devoted an entire album to mocking the early rock and roll style. He accomplishes this by using the same approach to harmony, timbre, and vocal styles as traditional doo-wop, and through the use of simple beats. Zappa makes Stravinsky's influence evident on the song "Fountain of Love," which includes the opening notes of his ballet Rite of Spring in the fade out (Zappa and Occiogrosso 89). He also inserts a background chant of "Earth Angel" on one of the tracks. But the parody really shines in his own lyrics. To mock the insipid love lyrics of doo-wop, he writes what he referred to as "sub-Mongoloid" lyrics on the entire album (Zappa and Occiogrosso 89). Ironically, the album is so faithful to the genre that numerous radio stations played it thinking that it was an unearthed original 1950's LP (James 67). Perhaps the album's prevalent confusion with "real" doo-wop even further demonstrates the genre's use of banal lyrics.

## Subversion of Hierarchy

While Zappa sometimes decrowns with affection, his satire can at times be scathing. Throughout his career, Zappa satirizes the most popular musical artists to challenge the existing hierarchy. One "monarch" he dethrones is the popular hippie culture of the 1960's. Although Zappa writes many lyrics aimed at dethroning the hippies, he completely devotes the album We're Only in it for the Money to this mission. Zappa took many precautions to not be lumped in with the drug culture of the sixties and the hippie notion of peace, love, and understanding, calling hippies "assholes in action" (Slaven 61). In "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" he writes the following:

I'm completely stoned

I'm hippie and I'm trippy

I'm a gypsy on my own

...

I will love the police as they kick the shit out  
of me on the street.

Here, Zappa mocks the drug culture in a few ways. First, the rhyming of "hippie" and "trippy," ensures the drug "trips" of the subculture to be trivialized. The lyrics also use the fact that the hippie is stoned as an excuse

for "loving the police" abusing him. Lastly, he uses the carnivalesque rhetoric of vulgarity centered on excrement, "shit," to emphasize and exaggerate the point. Zappa continues this attack during "Flower Punk," a parody of "Hey Joe" by Jimi Hendrix, one of the preeminent power figures of the counterculture movement. Instead of Hendrix's question, "Hey Joe, where you goin' with that gun in your hand?" Zappa asks the following: "Hey Punk, where you goin' with that flower in your hand?"

The album continues with an attack on the group at the pinnacle of the sixties' musical and cultural hierarchy, the Beatles. The Beatles were an easy target for Zappa at the time because they had embraced the San Francisco flower power culture (Watson 21). His first step in bringing the Beatles down a peg in the musical hierarchy was to create a parody of the famous Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band album cover. On the We're Only in it for the Money album cover, his band members wear dresses instead of military garb, and the band name is written out in vegetables instead of cannabis, again mocking the drug culture. Ultimately, the record company was so squeamish the picture was long relegated to the inside album cover (James 62-63). The Beatles had recently performed "All You Need Is Love"

on TV for a world audience, so Zappa attacks this overly-romantic sentiment on "Oh No" (Watson 173-176). He references the song with the lines, "You say love is all we need." Zappa then mocks hippie ideals by writing:

You can see yourself as a prophet

Saving the world

The words from your lips

I just can't believe you are such a fool.

Here, Zappa mocks the idealistic notion that a rock musician can "save the world." Zappa labels the drug-saturated culture of the hippies, including the Beatles, as "foolish" for its oversimplification of world problems.

Zappa challenges the musical hierarchy by denigrating other sixties power figures such as Bob Dylan and Crosby, Stills, and Nash (CSN). Zappa admits to being one of Dylan's let-down fans, feeling betrayed when the protest singer made a move towards more commercial music. Dylan was thus forced to endure Zappa's satirical wrath on Sheik Yerbouti's "Flakes," in which Adrian Belew uses a Dylanesque voice to sing a protest song about not being able to find reliable auto mechanics. If Zappa was a disgruntled Dylan fan, there was no love lost between him and Crosby, Stills, and Nash, whom he loathed from their



inception as peace-loving leaders of the drug culture.

"Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," one of CSN's most famous songs, ends with Stills singing a love letter in Spanish to Judy over a string of doo doo's. Zappa uses the carnivalesque imagery of food to mock this famous refrain and denigrate the Woodstock performers:

Do-do-do-do-do,

Doot-doot-do DO!

(I'm so HIP!)

Beef Pies!

He was born next to the beef pies,

Underneath Joni Mitchell's autographed picture,

Right beside Eliot Roberts's big Bank Book,

Next to the boat

Where Crosby flushed away all his stash

And the cops

Got him in the boat and drove away

To the can

Where Neil Young slipped another disc

FROZE-ing by the PIES! ("Billy the Mountain")

While Zappa never shied away from capitalism, clearly here he calls out CSN regarding their non-commercialist claims.

Hence, he references Roberts, Young's manager and his "big"

bank account. Zappa denigrates Mitchell to celebrity status, not authentic folk singer, based on the autographed picture, and mocks Crosby for his very public drug bust. However, it is the "beef pies" that make the lyrics carnivalesque and not solely satire. By centering this portion of the song on meat, Zappa has denigrated these hippie leaders through the use of carnivalesque, even absurd, imagery.

Of course, Zappa's career outlasts the hippie movement. Therefore, he finds new targets for his satire. Who better than the two artists commonly referred to as kings: Michael Jackson, the King of Pop, and Elvis Presley, the King of Rock? Throughout his entire career, Zappa satirized Elvis. "Hound Dog" was his favorite song to parody live (James 35). This song was not an arbitrary selection. He mocks the success of "Hound Dog" because it disgusted Zappa that Elvis had distorted and sanitized the Willie Mae Thornton version (Watson 11). As a lover of rhythm and blues, Zappa disliked Elvis's use of the song and later abandonment of the style. In the mid-1980's, he targeted Michael Jackson. He writes an entire send-up of Jackson on the song "Why Don't You Like Me?" which discusses the lightening of Jackson's skin (Watson 516). He

also parodies Michael Jackson on the cover of the book Them or Us (The Book). Michael Jackson had recently popularized the wearing of one sparkly glove. Hence, Zappa wears a green oven mitt on his left hand to show the absurdity of the image. Here, Zappa not only denigrates the image by exchanging glitter and rhinestones with stained, insulated cotton, but he also uses an object associated with the base elements of food and cooking. The mitt's connections with food ensure that Zappa's book cover is not just satire, but carnivalesque satire.

Musical hierarchies definitely fed Zappa's proclivity for satire. Yet Zappa was more determined to overthrow religious power. As seen in Chapter One, religious parody was a crucial element of carnival, encouraged during many of the religious festivals of the late middle ages. Rabelais also uses religious satire extensively in Gargantua and Pantagruel. Yet, the religious satire in Rabelais's time does not aim to be vindictive. Zappa's religious satire does. His dislike of organized religion stemmed from a childhood experience. When he accompanied a friend to the World Church, three money collections were conducted. At the end of the service the minister yelled out, "Jesus just told me that you have another thousand

dollars in your pockets" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 61-63).

Clearly, this experience correlates to the lines in "Rollo" from the Yellow Snow tour. He discusses the money that will go "To some asshole with a basket/ Where it goes we dare not ask it."

While "Jesus Thinks You're a Jerk" and "When the Lie's So Big" from Broadway the Hardway both aim at religious leader Pat Robertson, other songs decrown religious ideology, such as "Dumb All Over" and "Heavenly Bank Account" from You Are What You Is. Lines from "Heavenly Bank Account" include, "He's got twenty million dollars/ In his Heavenly Bank Account.../ All from those chumps who was/ Born Again." Throughout his songs, he lampoons the practice of religious leaders who justify extorting funds from their followers by claiming that Jesus tells them to do it. Yet, he also ridicules those who fall for this religious extortion: "That's right, remember there is a big/ Difference between kneeling down/ And bending over...." Here, Zappa uses the carnivalesque image of "bending over" to denigrate followers of religious ideology. As Zappa's central target for satire is stupidity, his lyrics mock the gullibility of those who follow corrupt religious leaders. "Father O'Blivion" is

arguably his most scathing attack on organized religion. In addition to the character's name, implying the stupidity and ignorance Zappa loves to target, this particular reverend represents the many real-life religious leaders who con their followers. In a very long, drawn-out story--remember, satirists revel in loquacity--the church leader knowingly sells breakfast at St. Alfonso's pancake breakfast that contains the semen of a leprechaun, who had "stroked it" and masturbated into the batter. This story, for Zappa, illustrates the manner in which many religious leaders take advantage of their followers in the pursuit for money.

Separate from his attempts to topple the hierarchies of popular culture and express his contempt of the corruption he saw as rampant in organized religion, Zappa also directs his satire at mainstream America. Zappa regarded himself as an "American composer", and in fact often wrote this statement as his entire biography. He took the label of "American" seriously and assumed responsibility for keeping American culture in check. He abhorred "blind patriotism" which enables most Americans to be ignorant of the social inequalities around them (Slaven 11). He subverts a genre's conventions as a way to

challenge mainstream America. For example, in his movie 200 Motels, Zappa has a Native American sing a traditional "cowboy" song, ironically juxtaposing the plight of the Native Americans with formulaic conventions found in a western movie. Zappa also attacks the public's willingness to elect "idiots" into office. In "Agency Man," Zappa ponders an America "wherein Ronald Reagan is elected to the presidency because nobody took the time to stop him." In 1968, Zappa intended this line to be ludicrous--to demonstrate how ill-informed many of the public's choices are. Of course, Zappa had no idea that his lyrics would prove to be so prophetic a little more than a decade later. "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," discussed in Chapter One, also challenges listeners to question who exactly the public places at the pinnacle of the hierarchical structure. These explicit lyrics detail the sexual perversion of a public servant, bent on fooling the voting public.

#### Carnavalesque Rhetoric in Zappa

Zappa's lyrics and sound provoke listeners to challenge existing hierarchies, temporarily allowing for an overturning of those hierarchies. While thus far much attention has been paid to the specific power structures

that Zappa has subverted, special consideration must be paid to how he incorporates the various elements of carnival into his music. The elements of food, excrement, phallic symbols, and sexual acts not only serve to denigrate those in power, they also provide the impetus of humor in much of the lyrics.

One such element is food, and the sausage in particular. Food plays a vital role in Zappa's lyrics. His album titles include Lumpy Gravy, Uncle Meat, and Burnt Weeny Sandwich. His most extensive ode to the sausage is in "Dong Work for Yuda" from Joe's Garage. While most of the song glorifies the sausage and the character's consequent farting, the lyrics also play on its sexual connotations:

He sucked on the end  
'til the mustard squirt  
He said, "Y'all stand  
Back 'cause you  
Might get hurt."

The sexual connotations are impossible to ignore here. The song uses the sexual imagery of the sausage to denigrate those who commit what Zappa calls crimes of music. The lyrics are not sexually explicit in order to shock, although that might be a positive side effect from Zappa's

perspective. Instead, he uses the sexuality to degrade those in power. Schenkel's cover art for Over-Nite Sensation is another especially carnivalesque of the sausage. It depicts an intertwining image of sausage morphing into penises, uniting mouths with other bodily orifices.

Bakhtin offers the nose as another phallic symbol in carnival, and Frank Zappa also plays with this idea. For example, in the story of Uncle Meat, a victim receives a radium treatment for a sinus complaint. The treatment causes the brain to swell, causing his nose to enlarge and become erect. This story is reminiscent of Rabelais's use of the erecting nose in his work. Additionally, the erect and exaggerated nose can be seen on two album covers, Cruising with Ruben and the Jets and Ahead of Their Time. However, it should be made clear that Zappa had no reservations about discussing the penis directly. "Penis Dimension" from 200 Motels serves as his most notorious celebration of the penis. He performed this complicated orchestral piece live numerous times, but Zappa always altered the show in order to side-step obscenity laws. The anatomically correct lyrics discuss how the size of a man's penis correlates to his self-worth. Hence, he always played



the song instrumentally, without the words, or for non-English speaking audiences (Kostelanetz 4). Official printed versions of the lyrics are not even available.

Zappa's work prominently focuses on the sexual. However, Zappa labeled his frequent use of explicit language in regards to sex and female body parts as ambivalent, recalling Bakhtin's assertion that the sexual form is not negative. For example, songs such as "Titties and Beer" celebrate the female form. Of course this particular title explicitly discusses the breasts in conjunction with another carnivalesque element, excessive alcohol consumption. However, when Zappa centers on the themes of sex, he does not intend to denigrate women. Although Zappa writes in "Dinah-Moe-Hum" from Over-Nite Sensation about stimulating Dinah's "sugar plum" and that she can't "cum," he is not intending to offend. Instead, he uses laughter to challenge our boundaries and hierarchies because boundaries do not exist in carnival. "Dirty Love," from the same album, is also often cited for its explicit themes of sexuality. Once more, Zappa challenges the rules of propriety. Due to his focus on the female form, he often had to answer questions about being a misogynist. His stock answer: "Most of [my] songs are about stupid men" (Zappa

and Occiogrosso 225). Dinah and the object of the narrator's lust in "Dirty Love" are not portrayed as promiscuous, overly raunchy, or negative in any way. Instead, Zappa mocks the narrators' perceptions of sexual grandiosity. Zappa does not degrade women here; he denigrates men.

In addition to sexual imagery, both carnival and Zappa widely use the elements of excrement and defecation. The view of excrement as an element of renewal proves Zappa's frequent use of the image as significant. Scatology is rampant in Zappa, with noteworthy songs titles include "Hot Poop" and "The Illinois Enema Bandit." "Call Any Vegetable" praises the vegetable's ability to keep one regular. He writes, "Call any vegetable/ And the chances are good/ That the vegetable will respond to you." Although Zappa never explicitly discusses excrement in the lyrics, the scatological inferences are ever-present. Zappa further celebrates defecation in a heavily reprinted photo entitled Phi Zappa Krappa, which shows him sitting naked on a toilet (Kostelanetz 19). While the above examples are ambivalent, if not positive, in nature, he usually uses this type of imagery to decrown those in power. In one such instance, Zappa sought to decrown Surgeon General Doctor Koop by

discussing the "poop" he was "scoopin'" regarding second-hand smoke in "Promiscuous" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 236-7). Zappa had become enraged upon hearing Koop label second-hand smoke as the most dangerous thing Americans face. While Zappa was a smoker, and might have taken these comments personally, he was more offended that Koop ignored the impact of AIDS as a more serious threat to mainstream America. This example illustrates that while Bakhtin asserts the ambivalent nature of scatology, its use as a rhetorical move often denigrates those in power, thereby allowing for a possible restructuring of hierarchy.

Arguably, vulgar language may be viewed as the most prevalent element in carnivalesque rhetoric. First, many writers find it difficult to illustrate the phallic nature of the sausage, the act of sex, or the nature of intestinal functions without using graphic language. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the profanities themselves allow for renewal. From the inception of Zappa's career, he celebrated what Bakhtin calls "the unprintable word." For example, before Zappa's first major album release, audiences often could not identify with his brand of music. The band took to insulting audience members from the stage with vulgarities. Interestingly, the band began to build an

audience based predominantly on those who came solely to be insulted (Slaven 44). As profanity has been ever-present in Zappa's work, Zappa's greatest challenge has been to overturn the hierarchy of censors.

### Censorship as a Four Letter Word

Zappa likens the control exerted by publishing executives to the very forms of hierarchy that Rabelais fought to subvert. "Once upon a time, it was the king or Pope So-and-So. Today we have broadcast license holders, radio programmers, disc jockeys and record company executives--banal reincarnations of the assholes who shaped the music of the past" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 187). The record executives at MGM forced his group to change its name before even releasing the first album. Executives, afraid of the correct assumption that "Mothers" was short for "Motherfuckers," pressed the band to change its name to "Mothers of Invention" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 78). MGM subjected each album release to censorship and unauthorized alterations. "Harry, You're a Beast" from We're Only in it for the Money mirrors the infamous Lenny Bruce routine, "To Is A Preposition, Come Is a Verb." Executives removed the repeating lines of "Don't come in me, in me" from the song

before the album's release, mirroring the censorship of Bruce (Kostelanetz 9). Zappa was even forced to modify seemingly innocent songs because of the fear that they could be interpreted as obscene. One example of this kind of alteration occurred in "Let's Make the Water Turn Black." Zappa originally wrote, "And I still remember Mama/ with her apron and her pad/ Feeding all the boys at Ed's Cafe." An MGM executive thought the waitress served sanitary pads to her customers and changed this harmless line without Zappa's permission (Zappa and Occiogrosso 84). The record company also changed the lyrics on the libretto for "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," from the ironically titled Absolutely Free. Instead of Zappa's lyrics, "I'd like to make her do the nasty of the White House lawn," MGM published, "I'd like to make her do the crossword puzzle on the back of the TV Guide" (Slaven 78). Zappa also encountered numerous difficulties releasing the album Uncle Meat because of its use of the word "fuck," which eventually led to Zappa forming his own record company (James 80).

Zappa has endured persecution due to his use of obscenities throughout his career. He served time in prison in the early 1960's for the creation of pornographic

materials. His sentence stemmed from an undercover sting operation in which a policeman requested that his company make an audio tape of sexual sounds. He and a female employee simulated the sounds on record, resulting in his incarceration (Zappa and Occiogrosso 59-60). More than a decade later he was brought to trial in England over the allegedly obscene rehearsal he conducted for 200 Motels. During the rehearsal, the band sang the lyrics to the section of "Penis Dimension" known as "Bwana Dik." The narrator calls his "dick" a "monster," "dagger," and "reamer." During the trial, Zappa explained that the section satirizes the silliness of rock musicians competing for the title of "Bwana Dik," or he who "entertains" the most groupies on tour (Zappa and Occiogrosso 124). The British courts cleared him of obscenity charges. However, as mentioned earlier, Zappa never performed "Penis Dimension" live in its entirety anywhere.

Because of his constant struggle for free speech, he devoted much of his music and time to both mocking and challenging censorship. His 1966 song, "Who Are the Brain Police?" rants against censors and eerily foreshadows the fight he would have with the Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC) in the 1980's (Fricke 72). In response to the Senate

hearings at which Zappa spoke against censorship, he created his own PMRC-like sticker. It satirizes the sticker used by the PMRC, while also calling them "socially retarded" and against "our First Amendment Rights" (Zappa and Occiogrosso 279). Zappa uses language to express the idea of freedom: freedom from hierarchy and freedom from censorship.

I contend that while Zappa is a prime example of the carnivalesque in the late twentieth century, the very power structures he challenges endure permanent upheaval during his life time. This permanency contradicts many of the tenants of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and the predominant theories of satire. Bakhtin's theory of carnival emphasizes the temporary nature of the disruption to hierarchy. The theories behind parody and satire predominantly also favor this view. In contrast, Rabelais created his carnivalesque masterpiece during a time rife with hierarchical change. As Rabelais lived during sixteenth-century France, the feudal hierarchy of the middle ages is in its very latter stages. Bakhtin also hints at the idea that Rabelais's work emerges precisely because of the tenuous futures of the very hierarchical structures he challenges. Certain theories of satire also suggest that satire results in some permanent

change or disruption. In Zappa's case, particular songs as well as particular subversions inspired long term change that possibly Zappa did not even foresee. Yes, the music industry has been permanently marked by Zappa's music, and his influences culturally are numerous. However, his influence on the Prague underground movement demanding freedom from Soviet-ruled Czechoslovakia would have been difficult to predict. Further, his work against censorship has left an indelible mark in the music industry and popular culture at large. Chapter Three will explore the enduring nature of the carnivalesque, as seen in Zappa's work in particular.



### CHAPTER THREE

#### FRANK ZAPPA MEETS THE MOTHERS OF PREVENTION

In the test of pornography,  
One of the things to look at  
Is that it does not have any redeeming  
social value.

...

But in all candor I would tell you  
it's,

It's outrageous filth.

So I'll be looking from this senator's  
standpoint

Not just to bring pressures,

But to try to see if there is some  
constitutional provision

To tax, or procedure can be used on the  
congress

To limit this outrageous filth.

--Frank Zappa "Porn Wars"

Most any listener of Zappa's music, or any reader of  
the previous two chapters, would find it difficult to  
believe that these lyrics appear on one of his albums.

However, as with most of Zappa's work, nothing is as it appears. Zappa did not write the lyrics above, featured on the album Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention; the "lyrics" are the comments of Senator Fritz Hollings (D-South Carolina). The song "Porn Wars" mocks the senate hearings on record labeling, as Zappa overdubs the statements of the presiding senators in conjunction with the testimony of rock artists protesting the changes proposed by the Parent's Resource Music Center (PMRC). The album serves as a carnivalesque masterpiece as it juxtaposes the testimony from the hearings protesting the "obscenity" of contemporary music with other Zappa compositions celebrating sex and vulgarity.

The PMRC, Zappa's testimony at the senate hearings, and his subsequent album release exemplify Zappa's career-long fight against censorship. How did a fringe artist, albeit an extremely influential and prolific one, become one of the primary voices objecting to the type of censorship proposed by the PMRC? Has Zappa's particular brand of carnivalesque satire ensured his place in history as an agent of freedom? If so, does his devotion to freedom have a lasting, permanent impact on social hierarchy, even though the very nature of the carnivalesque is temporary?

## Censorship in Zappa's Early Career

Chapter Two provides a fairly extensive review of some of the types of censorship endured by Zappa. However, an intensive look at his album We're Only in It for the Money will clearly illustrate how prevalently MGM record executives succeeded in censoring his work. Although censors subjected most of his early work to alterations in some form or another, We're Only in It for the Money serves as an interesting case. Since many censored versions of the album exist, some labeled "censored" and others "heavily censored," not until Zappa released his own version in 1986 could the extensive amount of censoring finally be seen. Previous chapters already account some alterations: the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band cover parody allocated to the inside cover, the lyrics ludicrously thought to be about sanitary pads in "Let's Make the Water Turn Black" excised, and the line "Don't come in me" deleted from "Harry You're a Beast." Additionally, record executives cut an entire section from "Hot Poop," originally written as:

Better look around before you say you don't care  
Shut your fucking mouth 'bout the length of my  
hair

How would you survive

If you were alive

Shitty little person?

While excluding lyrics because they feature Bakhtinian examples of "table talk," such as "shitty" and "fucking," in a song entitled "Hot Poop" may seem absurdly ironic, it becomes even more ludicrous in "Mother People." On this track, MGM executives allowed Zappa to use the exact same excerpt above in a technique called "backmasking," or the intentional playing of music lyrics backward. However, "fucking" has the distinction of being the only word omitted from the backmasking. Even though the word "gnikcuf" would be unrecognizable as an obscenity to a listener, executives still insisted on its exclusion. Additionally, the heavily censored version deleted the line, cited in Chapter Two, "I will love the police as they kick the shit out of me," from "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" Note that with the possible exception of the cover's Beatle parody--possible in that many of the cover elements mocked were still carnivalesque, the terms deemed offensive by the record executives correlate to what Bakhtin terms "the lower bodily stratum." In all, We're Only in It for the

Money contains approximately a dozen censored elements, depending on the version (Miles 150-162).

By the end of the 1960's, Zappa formed his own record label to escape the censorship of major label record executives. Social expectations also changed over the next decade. In 1970, Zappa dropped "of Invention" from his group's name, and all non-solo albums from this point onward are listed as Frank Zappa and the Mothers. Zappa's lyrics show how the artist continued to revel in carnivalesque rhetoric, arguably climaxing in 1973's Over-Nite Sensation. Yet, despite the unrestricted control over his music and the less inhibited atmosphere of the decade, Zappa continued to face threats of censorship and witnessed the incessant restriction of his fellow artists.

#### Joe's Garage: A World without Music

Two decades into his musical career, Zappa envisioned a world in which rock music is banned, completely. In 1979, he released the three-disc concept album Joe's Garage: Acts I, II, and III, a carnivalesque attack on organized religion, the Church of Scientology, rock and roll's obsession with groupies, and, above all, censorship. The concept album runs the length of nineteen songs, averaging

over eight minutes each. The album's narrator, called the central scrutinizer, represents everyone who has attempted to censor Zappa at one time or another. In Joe's world, music has been banned, and the central scrutinizer opens Act I, explaining the ills music can bring:

This is the CENTRAL SCRUTINIZER . . . it is my responsibility to enforce all the laws that haven't been passed yet. It is also my responsibility to alert each and every one of you to the potential consequences of various ordinary everyday activities you might be performing which could eventually lead to The Death Penalty (or affect your parent's credit rating). Our criminal institutions are full of little creeps like you who do wrong things . . . and many of them were driven to these crimes by a horrible force called MUSIC!

Our studies have shown that this horrible force is so dangerous to society at large that laws are being drawn up at this very moment to stop it forever! Cruel and inhuman punishments are being carefully described in tiny paragraphs so they won't conflict with the Constitution (which,

itself, is being modified in order to accommodate THE FUTURE).

I bring you now a special presentation to show what can happen to you if you choose a career in MUSIC . . . . ("Central Scrutinizer," ellipses in the original)

The central scrutinizer acts as Zappa's sarcastic response to institutionalized censorship and those who, in his opinion, propose legislation working against the First Amendment of the Constitution. He addresses the claims that music and its raunchier themes incite listeners to act in ways they otherwise might not by invoking the threat of the death penalty. He also hints, as he often does, that the true motivators for restrictive legislation in reality lie in greed.

The central scrutinizer interrupts many of the songs on Joe's Garage to describe the sin that accompanies music. For example, the central scrutinizer interrupts the song, "Catholic Girls," to explicate the ways in which music has tainted Joe's relationship with Mary. He begins by depicting Mary as the ever-pure, religious girlfriend:

[Mary] used to go to the church club every week  
They'd meet each other there

Hold hands

And think pure thoughts.

However, the central scrutinizer claims that her love of music has corrupted her. Since the character Father Riley encourages all of his female students to "blow all the Catholic boys," she now uses her oral sex skills to "get a pass/ to see some big rock group for free" ("Catholic Girls"). While Zappa makes it clear that Mary has been corrupted by far more menacing forces than music, such as Father Riley and the organized religion he represents, the central scrutinizer uses music as a scapegoat for all of society's ills. It is her love of rock and roll that prompts Mary to perform lewd acts.

Joe suffers a similarly corrupt fate. He quickly goes from leading an underground garage band to being a delinquent. He suffers from an addiction to music and is imprisoned for his habit. The central scrutinizer laments that "he used to be a nice boy...he used to cut the grass...but now his mind is totally destroyed by music" ("He Used to Cut the Grass," ellipses in the original). In the world of Joe's Garage, society and its governmental representatives deem rock and roll responsible for the corruption of young innocents. In this imaginary world,



music is banned totally. Little did Zappa know that within a few years he would fight actual concerned parental groups aiming to restrict access to music, and sounding eerily similar to Zappa's created central scrutinizer.

### Frank Zappa and the "Porn Wars"

Less than a decade after Joe's Garage's release, a group of women formed the Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC), with an agenda similar to Zappa's central scrutinizer. The PMRC aimed to protect children from music's negative influences, taking upon itself the "responsibility to alert each and every one of you to the potential consequences" of music's obscenities (Zappa, "Central Scrutinizer"). Outraged by the sexual content of rock music, the group selected Prince's "Darling Nikki" as its initial target. Additionally, the PMRC was disgusted by the excessive violence evident in both lyrics and album covers, such as W.A.S.P.'s artwork depicting a woman with a saw blade between her legs. In 1985, the group sent a letter to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) demanding a rating system for rock records similar to the one used by the Motion Picture Association of America for films. Records exposing "the youth of America

to 'sex, violence, and the glorification of drugs and alcohol'" would receive a warning label (Zappa and Occiogrosso 262). In a move eerily reminiscent of the musical ban in Joe's Garage, the president of the National Association of Broadcasters then warned more than 4500 radio stations that if they played rock music with questionable lyrics, their licenses could be revoked (Zappa and Occiogrosso 262).

Within a few months, the Senate Commerce, Technology and Transportation Committee held the highly publicized hearings discussing the degeneracy of the rock music industry and the solutions offered by the PMRC. One indication of the hierarchical structure musicians faced was that five of the Committee's members' wives were actually members of the PMRC (Zappa and Occiogrosso 267). The Committee allowed three musicians to make statements at the hearings: Zappa, Dee Snyder of Twisted Sister, and John Denver. Although all three artists objected to the labeling system suggested by the PMRC, even the innocuous Denver, it is Zappa's statement that has lived on most in infamy. A simple Google search for his statement resulted in more than 500 websites. His statement begins with a reading of the First Amendment of the Constitution, using the basic

right to freedom of speech as the basis for his argument against labeling rock albums. He accuses the Senate committee hearings of being an extension of the Blank Tape Tax and linked with the "anti-piracy legislation" in the Senate at the time, essentially reducing the issue not to the protection of children but to money. He argues for parents--not any governmental agency--to exercise their freedom to decide what is and is not proper music for their children to hear and purchase. He explains why record labeling would not correlate to the rating system used by the movie industry. He claims that warning labels on records stigmatize the artists themselves since they are solely responsible for the work, while in contrast a movie's R-rating, for example, does not stigmatize any of a film's multitude of participants. Finally, he offers the solution of listing all lyrics on all albums so that consumers can decide for themselves.

Zappa's statement at this hearing may be his most direct challenge to hierarchy. However, merely challenging power structures does not characterize the carnivalesque. His statement also serves as a prime example of carnivalesque rhetoric. He claims, "The complete list of PMRC demands reads like an instruction manual for some

sinister kind of 'toilet training program' to house-break all composers and performers because of the lyrics of a few. Ladies, how dare you?" (United States) In this case, Zappa describes the proposals as a way of treating musicians as dogs who require house-training and degrades their demands by linking them with defecation. Along these same lines, he mentions the PMRC's example of "anal vapors" at every possible opportunity throughout his speech. In another example of carnivalesque rhetoric, he responds to the committee's repeated references of rock music as encompassing "song lyrics, videos, record packaging, radio broadcasting, and live performances" (United States). He states, "These are all different mediums, and the people who work in them have the right to conduct their business without trade restraining legislation, whipped up like an instant pudding by the wives of Big Brother" (United States). Zappa invokes the carnivalesque topoi of food as symbolic of the group's plan. The label "instant pudding," as opposed to a home-made dessert, supports his claim that the PMRC's demands are absurdly simplistic and inadequate. Zappa's reference to George Orwell's Big Brother also ensures that his audience--television viewers as well as

the senators conducting the hearing--understands that all Americans, not just rock musicians, risk being oppressed by the government.

By the end of the same year, Zappa released Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention. Although some of the album's songs ostensibly deviate from the themes debated at the Senate hearings, all of the album's lyrics comment on the matter. "I Don't Even Care" exemplifies America's apathy towards the issue of censorship, and seemingly everything else, with the title line repeated nearly thirty times. Another album track with lyrics, "Yo Cats," details the very explicit elements that so enraged the PMRC:

Your girl, Arlyn's, what's the diff  
What's the service that you're with  
So long as you can suck the butt  
Of the contractor who calls you up  
Your career could take a thud  
Unless you kneel and scarf his pud  
And when the dates come rolling in  
You can wipe your lips and flash a grin  
That tells them all at the jingle date  
That you enjoyed what you just ate

This track serves as an attack on musical contractors who

have a strangle-hold on music production with their power to hire only unionized workers. The lyric's references to oral sex and scatology challenge the musical hierarchical structure through the use of carnivalesque rhetoric. More notably, though, the song acts as the lead-in to the track directly addressing the Senate hearings. Hence, the vulgar lyrics almost seem to taunt, "Oh, you want to control what I can write? Let me show you how obscene it can be."

The next song on the album, entitled "Porn Wars," consists entirely of recorded testimony from the senate hearings. Zappa overdubs some of the testimony unaltered, but manipulates most of it to create innuendo, nonsense, and, of course, the carnivalesque. The following two passages demonstrate how Zappa distorts the hearing's statements for humorous effect.

Senator Paula Hawkins, R-Florida: Do you make a  
profit from sales of rock records?

Zappa: Yes.

Hawkins: So you do make a profit from the sales  
of rock records?

Zappa: Yes.

Hawkins: Thank you. I think that statement tells  
the story to this committee. (United States)

In this, the original transcript from the senate hearings, Senator Hawkins heavily implies that Zappa's sole motivations for testifying at the hearings stem from greed. Zappa alters this exchange in the following lyrics from "Porn Wars:"

What is the reason for these hearings...

Sex!

Well...

Sex!

Thank you, I think that statement...

Sex!

...tells the story of these many...

Listen you little slut...

What is the reason for these hearings...

Sex! (ellipses in the original)

Instead of responding directly to Hawkins, Zappa alters the testimony to promote the idea that the hearing's true purpose was to arouse and distract the American public by discussing sex. As he says in his actual testimony, "The only way to sneak it through is to keep the public's mind on something else: 'porn rock'" (United States). The "it" refers to two different governmental actions: censorship and tax legislation. Zappa's contention in both his

statement and in the song "Porn Wars" is that the PMRC, these "mothers of prevention," aim to be the sole deciders of "good taste," while also distracting the American public so that their husbands' tax legislation will be passed without publicity.

To further mock the demands of the PMRC, Zappa created his own "warning label" that reads partially as follows:

This album contains material which a truly free society would neither fear nor suppress. In some socially retarded areas, religious fanatics and ultra-conservative political organizations violate your First Amendment Rights by attempting to censor rock & roll albums. We feel that this is un-Constitutional and un-American....The language and concepts contained herein are GUARANTEED NOT TO CAUSE ETERNAL TORMENT IN THE PLACE WHERE THE GUY WITH THE HORNS AND THE POINTED STICK CONDUCTS HIS BUSINESS... (Zappa and Occigrosso 279).

With this sticker, Zappa disrupts the hierarchies of organized religion and neo-conservatives by labeling them "socially retarded." He also uses humor to remind his audiences that listening to any music, even the explicit



lyrics contained on his own albums, will not cause eternal damnation, as the PMRC so often implied during the senate hearings.

### "Plastic People" and the Velvet Revolution

Although Zappa is unquestionably a cultural icon, many know of him through one of two events: the PMRC hearings discussed above and the novelty song "Valley Girl," with lyrics written and performed by his daughter Moon Unit. His testimony at the Senate hearings has had a sustained effect on the way artists discuss freedom of expression and censorship issues, and the statement has most recently been invoked in discussions centered on the rating of videogames. Admittedly, "Valley Girl," while definitely satire, made no strides in subverting the hierarchies that control contemporary culture, but much of his music has allowed for real change. One song in particular, "The Plastic People," would aid in the overturning of an oppressive government and become an anthem of freedom and democracy if not in the United States.

When Zappa released Absolutely Free in 1967, "Plastic People" was not a "hit" in the United States nor did it receive much radio airplay. The song begins by introducing

the President of the United States, who happens to be sick and experiencing flatulence. The lyrics then liken the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Nazis, and that "we" are all plastic people suffering from governmental oppression:

(And there's this guy from the CIA and he's  
creeping around Laurel Canyon . . .)

...

(I hear the sound of marching feet . . . down  
Sunset Blvd. to Crescent Heights, and there, at  
Pandora's Box, we are confronted with . . . a  
vast quantity of PLASTIC PEOPLE.)

Take a day

And walk around

Watch the Nazis

Run your town

Then go home

And check yourself

You think we're singing

'Bout someone else . . . but you're

Plastic people! (ellipses in the original)

While the CIA inhabits the upper echelon of the hierarchy, Zappa equally blames the lower classes for not challenging

the power structure. Those who notice "the marching feet," but "then go home," enable those in power to oppress them.

In 1967, when the album was released, Czechoslovakia was firmly under Soviet control. The Communist government banned virtually all Western cultural elements, including music. Czechoslovakia's black market began importing not just mainstream rock and roll records, but in particular those artists who challenged authority and promoted freedom. Both Zappa and the Velvet Underground gained huge followings in the Czech underground. In 1969, a group of daring, law-breaking musicians formed a rock group and named themselves The Plastic People of the Universe, after Zappa's song (Payton).

The Plastic People of the Universe became a popular, if underground, band in Czechoslovakia. Initially, as they gained popularity playing Zappa and Velvet Underground covers, alongside their own atonal compositions, the Communist government ignored the band. Griffin, in his Satire: A Critical Reintroduction, claims that those in power often ignore satire in its initial stages. Since satire tends to appeal to individuals, not entire groups, the work is not viewed as threatening (154-155). However, as the band gained in popularity, its use of satire became

more dangerous to the Communist government. This threat stems from the speculation for which long-term satire allows (Griffin 158). Although the Czech government hoped to squelch the satire and any accompanying uprising, the band members' imprisonment had the opposite of the intended effect. Instead of The Plastic People of the Universe dissolving into obscurity, their incarceration attracted more of the Czech citizenry to join the underground movement, called the Velvet Revolution. Soon thereafter playwright Václav Havel co-founded Chapter 77, a movement urging the Czech government to free the Plastic People and challenging its authority at every instance of oppression (Payton).

Not only does Chapter 77 succeed in forcing the government to free The Plastic People of the Universe, but after more than a decade of activism and the fall of the Soviet Union, Havel became the new president of Czechoslovakia. His administration, which lasted from 1989 through 2003, included rock musicians and music journalists (Miles 354). Within the first year of Havel's presidency, he invited Zappa for a state visit. Havel told Zappa he owns many Mothers of Invention albums and confessed to also

being a fan of Captain Beefheart, a musical colleague. Zappa later states, "So there I was in the Oval Office or something and the President is talking about Captain Beefheart and rock 'n' roll and I'm thinking, 'Is this The Twilight Zone or what?'" (Miles 357).

Since Zappa's "Plastic People," along with his entire musical catalogue, inspired the overthrow of the Czechoslovakian government, Havel requested for Zappa to serve in an official capacity. When Zappa left the Czech Republic, he had a "contract to issue five albums and CD's [which had never before been officially released in Czechoslovakia]...and for his company Why Not? to be a consultant for the Czech government in matters of trade, tourism and cultural exchange" (Miles 359). A rock star, a master of satire, had now become an agent of actual hierarchical change.

This historical anecdote serves as a reminder of the power of satire. However, while the Czech Republic had made great strides towards free speech and democracy, the United States seemed to be regressing. Czechoslovakia had just emerged from decades of Communist oppression. One of its principal aims was to promote cultural freedom and one of its inspirations for democracy was the United States. Yet,

it was this very country that prohibited Czechoslovakia's choice for its Western consultant on trade and culture. As a believer in free speech, Zappa made disparaging remarks about then Vice-President Quayle during a luncheon with Havel. Soon thereafter, then Secretary of State James A. Baker "literally [laid] down the law to the Czechoslovakian government. He [said] you can either do business with the United States or you can do business with Zappa. What'll it be?" (Miles 361). Despite Havel's commitment to art, his choice ultimately had to be practical; the Czech government revoked Zappa's position. However, Zappa remained "proud that his music had helped to topple Communism" (Hackel 352).

### Conclusion

Zappa's brand of satire earns him a place in history as an emblem of freedom and change. Like Rabelais before him, Zappa subverted every expectation and challenged both those in power and those who follow leaders unquestioningly. In a 1988 interview, Bob Marshall asked Zappa, "Is there an idea to your work?" Zappa answered with an oft-repeated maxim, "That's simple. It's that the Emperor's not wearing any clothes, never has, never will."

When prompted by Marshall as to who or what the emperor symbolizes, Zappa laughingly replies, "Fill in the blank." This sentiment echoes Bakhtin's description of Rabelais: "Rabelais did not implicitly believe in what his time 'said and imagined about itself'; he strove to disclose its true meaning for the people, the people who grow and are immortal" (439). Both Rabelais and Zappa prompted, provoked, and challenged people to actively question existing hierarchies on their own, to not passively accept what the "truth" is said to be.

However, Zappa also understood that the seriousness of his message required a certain amount of levity to be palatable to his audience. Hence, Zappa always infused his most serious attacks with carnivalesque humor. No criticisms of organized religion or government institutions were without laughter. Bakhtin writes that Rabelais also understood this necessity: "And although he spoke seriously of such things, he knew the limits of this seriousness. Rabelais' own last word is the gay, free, absolutely sober word of the people" (453). Zappa and Rabelais both appreciated the humor associated with the "material bodily lower stratum"--or, as Zappa famously said during many of his concerts, "I can gross out anyone in this room." While

profanities laced with humor often made Zappa and Rabelais targets for their critics, both artists understood that these very vulgarities simultaneously provide levity and degrade--the embodiment of carnival.

In Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin writes, "[N]ot every period of history had Rabelais for coryphaeus. Though he led the popular chorus of only one time, the Renaissance, he so fully and clearly revealed the peculiar and difficult language of the laughing people that his work sheds its light on the folk culture of humor belonging to other ages" (474). As Bakhtin wrote in 1965, he envisioned future readers looking back on the work of Rabelais through the lens of his own theory of carnival, and gaining a deeper understanding of their own satirists. While it can surely be stated that Rabelais illuminates Zappa's work, the work of future humorists, especially in the world of music, will be further elucidated by Zappa's unique brand of satire.



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