“Why Such a Big Deal?”: The Didactic Function of Humor in Tibetan Buddhism
Manny Fassihi

If we try very hard to build something tremendous, really meaningful, powerful—‘I’m really searching for something, I’m really trying to find my faults,’ or ‘I’m really trying to be good,’—then it loses its seriousness, becomes a paper tiger; it is extremely ironic...If you do try to treat life as ‘serious business,’ if you try to impose solemnity upon life as though everything is a big deal, then it is funny. Why such a big deal?
-Chogyam Trungpa [1]

In Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, Chogyam Trungpa begins his inquiry into what a ‘sense of humor’ is by first examining what a sense of humor is not:

Lack of humor seems to come from the attitude of the ‘hard fact.’ Things are very hard and deadly honest, deadly serious, like, to use an analogy, a living corpse. He lives in pain, has a continual expression of pain on his face. He has experienced some kind of hard fact—‘reality’—he is deadly serious and has gone so far as to become a living corpse. The rigidity of this living corpse expresses the opposite of a sense of humor.

The ‘rigidity’ of this ‘living corpse’ is not unlike the traits identified in Vassilis Sarogolou’s research on religion and humor that characterize a ‘religious person’: “non-acceptance of nonsense in life”, “conservatism”, “respect for tradition and conformity”, “risk avoidance”, and “less openness to ideas”. It would appear that from a psychological, and especially from a personality perspective, religion negatively associates with personality traits, cognitive structures and social consequences typical to humor. Indeed, as many scholars have explored, humor has had a checkered history with religion. To laugh at religion was to invite harsh criticism, ostracism—or worse.

This ‘anathema’ is as much evident in Buddhism as it is in other religious traditions. It was, after all the gloomy pronouncement of Gautama Buddha that the First Noble Truth is the fact that we suffer. In framing his survey of comic traditions in India, Lee Siegel takes “startlingly simple yet utterly disturbing” rhetorical questions posed by the Buddha in the Dhammapada (“How can there be mirth or laughter when the world is on fire?”) as evidence that there is little, if any, humor in Buddhist traditions. Conrad Hyers identifies one of the early Buddhahistorical debates concerned:

whether the Buddha laughed, and if so in what manner and with what meaning...There were those among the Buddhist scholastics who clearly would have preferred to believe that the Buddha never laughed at all, especially after his enlightenment experience at Bodhgaya. The Buddha’s wisdom and the Buddha’s mission seemed to require the ultimate in seriousness, gravity, and solemnity. The difficulty is that some sutras seem to suggest, if not state outright, that on such and such an occasion the Buddha laughed.

To resolve the contradiction, this “laughter” of Buddha was considered to have been limited to the first (sita) of six types of laughter, using a classical scale derived from drama by Bharata, a faint smile, serene, subtle, and refined. While the Buddha may have smiled, laughter was something to steer away from. Michael Clasquin notes that for a Buddhist monk in ancient India, “to laugh out loud was an offence, a matter requiring confession and expiation in front of the entire assembly of fellow monastics.” Loud, boisterous laughter, and anything humorous that might cause it, was for the worldly, the unenlightened, the fool.

Though he may have only faintly smiled, the Buddha was not an existentialist; though the 1st and 2nd noble truths articulate a ubiquity of suffering that approximates a Sartrean nausea, the 3rd and 4th noble truths speak of a release from suffering. Buddhists throughout the centuries and across cultures have found many ways to incorporate humor into their religious lives. In the past few years, there has been growing theoretical interest into the role of humor in Buddhism, especially Zen. At a recent workshop held in Berkeley, CA (“Does Humor Belong in Buddhism?”; February 9, 2007), papers were presented on topics ranging from the unexpectedly robust comedy of the rules for monks and nuns to the often-hilarious ‘trash talking’ that would infuse the rhetoric of Tibetan Debate. But very

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few ethnographic studies have been done examining the extant role of ‘sense of humor’ as it manifests in practice. Thus, in my research, I sought to answer the following question: What purpose does humor serve in Tibetan Buddhism and what, if anything, is its social function or philosophical value, apart from giving pleasure?

Understanding the Laughter: Methodology

Associate Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart is known to have said that he couldn’t describe pornography, but he “knew it when he saw it”… One might try to say about humor that we know it when we laugh at it.

- Tom Armstrong

Perhaps the first question is what ‘humor’ exactly means in the context of my paper. When theorists have studied humor, they have sought to outline necessary and sufficient conditions that are constitutive of humor (e.g. laughter), offering typologies that identify different motives for humor. For instance, Hobbes emphasized the use of humor to demonstrate our superiority over others. Theorists also point to humor’s postmodern virtues of ‘indefinite-ness’ and transgression.

Although such approaches are interesting, they are beyond the scope of this essay.

Rather than working with or attempting to adduce a ‘general theory of humor’, I chose to recognize humor as inherently relational and context-dependent—no event, person or thing is intrinsically humorous. As Lafollette and Shanks argue, “it depends upon the circumstances, the teller (if any), the current beliefs of the listeners (or viewers) and the relationship (if any) between the teller and the listener.” Humor tends to be audience specific, and is conditioned by cultural assumptions and commonplaces. The question of how or why things come to be funny is similarly defined by culture. “If you’re dealing with yaks all the time,” Wendell, a 5th year student at Sarah College remarked, “you’re gonna find ways to laugh at them.”

Nevertheless, humor proved to something eternally elsewhere during the early stages of my study. It was surely there, in all the smiles of the lamas and laughter of the Momo Ama-las of McLeod Ganj—but it could not be found when I wanted it. A pattern that was to solidify during my stay began to emerge during my initial interviews with people at my hotel: if I asked whether humor belonged in Buddhism, I was told ‘Yes, 100%’; if I asked what was humorous, I was told there was a vital comic pulse to all of life, and nothing more. Yet in all the bookstores in Bodhgaya, Dharamsala, and Bir, I could find no humor section or humorous books. “There is no money in writing humor books,” one vendor informed me. “People are too busy. A man might read a joke book standing in the shop, but if he is going to spend good money on a book, money that he has worked hard to earn, it must be a book that helps you better yourself.”

All throughout McLeod Ganj, I began to be received by the eponym of the ‘boy looking for humor’—as if it provided a clue to my character—which prompted a smile in some, a quizzical, I-guess-you-can-study-anything-in-the-West look by most, and an ‘ahhhhh…yes’ by tulkus. And it soon dawned upon me (as it surely dawned upon Lee Siegel), that a study of society’s humor, done by an outsider, is too meddlesome a project, too invasive, too threatening: “it may appear to be but a masked attempt to study the society’s pettiness and ignorance, its cruelties and indecencies.”

It is plainly unfair to ask someone to tell you a joke and give you an example of something that’s funny, especially with the subject of dirty jokes. Tibetans are not a bawdy bunch. They may have a few neurotic obsessions about sex, and seem to enjoy ‘guy talk’ as much as the next culture, but they have a strong sense of shame. Tibetan ladies would look askance at the ‘liberated’ western girl, and blush at the mere mention of a sex joke. The Shechen Monastery lamas (in Bodhgaya) inordinately were embarrassed by even the milder Drukpa Kunley jokes that involved consumption of ‘chang’ or the deflowering of a dakini with his 12-foot penis. Donjrup conveyed that even laymen, who enjoy the sexual humor hugely, have an acute sense of time and place for these jokes, much of which comes from being inside a ‘circle of intimacy’.

Furthermore, the once-bubbling Tibetan humor appears to waning in the face of modernity. “Tibetan humor was something that was very strong,” Choegyal Rinpoche reminisced, “but it is now dissipating.” When she first arrived at Tashi Jong in 1964, Tenzin Palmo was struck by the humor pulsing in the refugee camps: “Though they were extremely poor and traumatized, having lost everything, they was a lightness streaming through their eyes; they were just so jolly, not bitter, and laughing all the time.”

But now, with the onslaught of globalization, the new generation
seems to have lost this ‘sparkle’: “This generation has changed a lot. They are adapting to a modern world, and as such they have become confused: they can’t go back, it’s hard to go forward, and where they’re standing, there’s no meaning.” Moreover, the living lineage that used to characterize the oral transmission of folktales and jokes has begun to fade with the rise of information technology: “it used to be teacher to student…now it’s man to computer, computer to man.”

So after a few days of ‘anthropological litmus-testing’, I began to accept my shortfall—that I would not be able to get as holistic a picture of humor that I wanted—and instead opted to examine the didactic function (if there was one) of humor as it manifested in four teachers (all Tibetan Buddhist): one literary, the patron-saint of ‘humor’ for Tibetans and beloved trickster Aku Tonpa; and three from whom I received teachings (Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Mingyur Rinpoche, and H.H. the Dalai Lama). Thus, the study will be both descriptive, in its survey of the literary genres and forms which have lent themselves to the manifestation of the comic sentiment, as well as functional, inasmuch as I give consideration of the potential teleological, social and psychological functions of the experience of humor. From this, I hope to examine the underlying nature of their humor, a phenomenon historically and scholastically marginalized, and see if it bears a close relationship to authentic spiritual understanding.

Tibet’s Little Rascal: Aku Tonpa
You will not find a Tibetan who does not grin luminously when you simply mention the name ‘Aku Tonpa’-Rinjing Dorje

Trickster figures seem to express contradictions in the societies from which they spring, their meddling, nonsensical or outrageous behavior, the result of competing cultural demands intersecting in the figure. In some cultures, the trickster has religious significance which manifests a didactic form. William Hynes sees the trickster as a necessary by-product of the social order: “Systems normally busy generating firm adherence to their beliefs also maintain within those belief systems, somewhat contradictorily, a raft of tricksters who perpetually invert and profane those same beliefs. In myth and ritual, tricksters seem to be officially sanctioned exception clauses by which belief systems regularly satirize themselves.” Tricksters, then, provide an integral check on beliefs to prevent people from becoming too secure in themselves. There is no order too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high, no profanity too scatological that it cannot be broached or inverted by a Trickster. For Tibet, the most popular trickster of this variety is Aku Tonpa. Not only is Aku Tonpa a trickster who came to make Tibetans clever—he is considered to be the earthly manifestation of Lord Avalokiteshvara (the same status, that is, as H.H. the Dalai Lama).

Anybody who believes that Tibetans have nothing but their religion, that they are a somber and inscrutable meditating bunch, obviously has not heard of Aku Tonpa. Rinjing Dorje’s above statement holds true in McLeod Ganj: the mere mention of ‘Aku Tonpa’ brought laughter and smiles of recognition to everyone, whether high lama or yak herder. Whether this may have been due to the welcome surprise of hearing an ‘outsider’ have awareness of one’s own cultural icon is a moot point. Tibetans cherish “this wily character that easily pokes fun at the rich, the miserly, and the gullible.” ‘Aku’, a Tibetan avuncular term of endearment, reflects how close he is to the hearts of those who know, tell, and hear his stories. His ribald tales add a humorous folkloric dimension to a richly entertaining storytelling tradition.

Storytelling is a hugely important aspect of traditional Tibetan oral culture. Up until recent times in Tibet, Rinjing Dorje writes, “there were professional storytellers who traveled from village to village to tell stories and recite epics.” However, ever since the invasion of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China, and the subsequent diaspora of the Tibetan people to far flung places across the globe, the old oral traditions have begun to slowly disappear. Assimilation into new cultures has forced exiles to adapt accordingly: “Since they’re in India now, and they’re forced to learn three languages just to get around, they just start to forget the old proverbs and use Indian ones.”

While some collections of Tibetan tales have been recovered in both the West and China, “many story cycles remain uncollected” and some have been “forever lost”. But through all of this upheaval and aural erasure, the ribald tales of Aku Tonpa endure for posterity. This is due largely in part to the efforts of Rinjing Dorje, whose Tales of Aku Tonpa stands as the first English edition of Aku Tonpa’s tales; and more recently Kalsang Khedup, whose three books (Aku Tonpa Goes to a Nunnery; Aku Tonpa and the Golden
Seed; Tales of Aku Tonpa) on Aku Tonpa, all bilingual (English and Tibetan) renderings, were written to promote language skills among younger generations: “If you want to excite people about reading, you want to do it with humorous stories… and every Tibetan loves Aku Tonpa.”

These efforts to preserve the trickster stories from both inside and outside of Tibet also speak to the appeal of the Tibetan trickster, independent of culture. Wendy Doniger, for example, has reflected:

*What charms me most about these stories is the way in which they flicker back and forth between the uniquely Tibetan and the universal. One such scene is when Aku Tonpa ‘says he is named ‘Vagina,’ anticipating the moment when his victim will want to call for help and will be misinterpreted and hence ignored (‘Vagina is hurting me’)’ akin to the scene in Homer’s Odyssey in which Odysseus says he is named ‘Nobody,’ anticipating, in the same way, the moment when Cyclops would call for help and be misinterpreted and hence ignored (‘Nobody is attacking me’). [...] I suspect that what we’re dealing with here are some very basic human themes that cannot entirely be explained by historical contacts, even though they may have been enhanced by such contacts.*

But how well do these stories travel? I decided to see test Doniger’s claim during ‘Open Mic Night’ (November 23rd, 2009) at Khanna Nirvana restaurant in McLeod Ganj (and, at the same time, bring the oral tradition back). Obviously, something was being communicated that bores repeating. I chose one of the racier stories, “Aku Tonpa sells penises to a nunnery” (taken from Rinjing Dorje’s Tales of Aku Tonpa), and read it (in English) to an audience that included Tibetans, as well as Americans, Swedes, Russians, and Chinese people, mostly visiting for the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (which began the following day). Briefly, the story consists of Aku Tonpa finding a farmer despairing because his cursed field did not produce its normal crop—but rather a thousand penises! Aku Tonpa turns the situation into a highly profitable one by arranging to sell the penises to a Tibetan nunnery. Although it is forbidden for a nun to sleep with a man, nowhere is it written that she may not sleep with a penis.

Having registered for my talent as ‘Aku Tonpa’, the MC (who was from New York) seemed somewhat baffled in his introduction (“I don’t know what this is, but I love your stage name (‘Mannyfesto’)) and it was clear that the Western members of the audience weren’t sure what to expect. The Tibetans were already in-the-know; as with my previous experiences and informal interviews, just mentioning that I was going to read ‘Aku Tonpa’ produced a warm set of smiles and giddy giggles from the Tibetans in the crowd. When I announced the title, a shockwave rippled through the crowd—some grimaced into silence, some laughed, and some struggled to maintain their repose at the obscenity. There were, of course, nunneries not too far from the restaurant (though, I hope, not an earshot away!). So I began to read, and with every mention of the word ‘penis’, two Americans (likely in their mid-20’s) erupted into uproarious laughter. The Tibetans’ faces remained locked in the smile, unphased by the unabashed dirtiness of the plain sexual language.

At the conclusion of the story (when the nunnery’s abbess dies from shock), the smiles around the room communicated the near universal appreciation of the story (the MC even wisecracked that “[I] was going straight to the hell realms for that one”). After the open mic, multiple foreigners approached me to express their amusement with the story and asked where I’d found such a ‘naughty’ book. Some Tibetans in the area recognized me days after the reading, and would from then on refer to me as ‘Aku Tonpa’ whenever they spotted me in my academic gag show of a display.* This popular appeal and cross-cultural applicability was not only limited to the ‘unenlightened’; all of the Rinpoche’s, for example, recognized ‘Aku Tonpa’s’ name with a hearty laughter. One, Chokyi Nyima, requested that I recount a story another, Mingyur, actually narrated one for me—and one rife with scatological effrontery no less.* In the story, Aku Tonpa tosses a frozen pile of excrement, dusted with lime, on a king’s (who was a ‘greedy tyrant’) lap, the dubious missile carries a so-called miraculous inscription which Aku Tonpa reads a lot to the illiterate king: “The shit is from Heaven. He is the luckiest king when it drops in his lap.” Immediately the pious king touches the excrement to his forehead in a gesture of respect, then nibbles a piece before placing the rest on his altar. As opposed to the seamier side of his nunnery shenanigans, this is the side of Aku Tonpa who “is the advocate for justice, who uproots social
oppression and subdues landlords.” His bold gesture lays bare, more than political argument, the disparity between peasant and king.

While this appeal may have been universal in McLeod Ganj, one population was identified that seemed slightly repulsed by Aku Tonpa’s ‘sex’capades—feminists. It’s not hard to believe that many feminists are not amused by the total disregard for the feelings of the women whom Aku Tonpa rapes. In an interview with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, one of the leading Buddhist feminists, expressed her gentle disgust (and I emphasize gentle) at the sight of one of the Kalsang Khedup books (“Aku Tonpa goes to a nunnery—God help!” she jokingly commented). While she could appreciate the ‘stiffness’ parodied by tricksters like Aku Tonpa, she constrained that she cared little for such phallogocentric stories “written by men for men.”

So what can we learn from Aku Tonpa’s deployment of humor? Both within specific cultures and world-wide, the humor and laughter evoked by trickster myths “are never exhausted in a single telling.” Why? As Hynes argues, “beyond the surface humor, there is a deeper type of insight, irony and transformation at work in the trickster myths.” We may laugh, but a deeper unfolding is at work; one that, on reflection, I began to see in teachers I had (and would later) encounter.

References and Notes
2. Vassilis Saroglou. “Religiousness, religious fundamentalism, and quest as predictors of humor creation,” International Journal of Humor Research (9.10 2002): 177-88. It should be noted that the participants of this study were 72 adults, all living on the campus of the Catholic University of Louvain in France, though this did not necessarily correlate to any religious affiliation. Religiousness was assessed by a self-report questionnaire, with questions that included “the importance of religion in personal life” and humor creation was assessed by such scales as the “coping humor” scale.
3. Ibid. p. 177: Sarogolou lists these as being: incongruity, ambiguity, possibility of nonsense, low dogmatism and low authoritarianism, playfulness, playfulness, spontaneity, attraction to novelty and risk, lack of truthfulness and finality, affective and moral disengagement, loss of control and order as implied by emotionality and finally transgression, especially transgressions of prohibitions related to aggression/dominance and sexuality. Ibid. p. 177
4. See, for example, Umberto Eco, The name of the Rose; Jacques Le Goff, A Cultural History of Humor: From antiquity to the Present Day; and Conrad Hyers, And God created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy
5. Todd Leopold, “Is ‘religious humor’ an oxymoron?”
6. Telephone Interview with Lee Siegel, 30 Nov. 2009; In an interview with Lee Siegel, I was encouraged to “consider the sacred and the comic anathema to each other and believe that the degree to which you are religious you have no sense of humor, and that to the degree that you have a sense of humor you can’t be religious”
7. Conrad Hyers, The Ancient Zen Master as Clown-Figure and Comic Midwife. Philosophy East & West (1970, 10) pp. 3-18
8. Sita is a common Pali word for ‘a smile’. The specific usage here as an almost imperceptible smile may have been restricted to Buddhist monastic circles. Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “What’s so funny about the laughing Buddha?” Proc. of “Does Humor Belong in Buddhism?”, University of California, Berkeley (2007)
11. Conrad Hyers (Zen and the Comic Spirit, 1975) seems to be the pioneer on this front.
12. See G. Schopen “The learned monk as a comic figure: on reading a Buddhist Vinaya as Indian literature” and S. Clarke “Locating Humor in Indian Buddhist Monastic Law Codes: A Comparative Approach”.
13. See G. Dreyfus, “We Will See Who Laughs Last: Dialectic and Rhetoric in Tibetan Debate and the Role of Humor”.
15. Such an ‘incongruity theory’ of humor is traced by Simon Critchley, following John Morreal’s lead, to Francis Hutcheson’s Reflections upon laughter from
1750, through such influential thinkers as Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard.
17. Personal Interview with Wendell Hartford, 5th year student at Sarah College, McLeod Ganj, November 26. 2009.
18. I interviewed five recognized tulkus (reincarnated enlightened Buddhist masters): Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Choegyal Rinpoche, Tai Situ Rinpoche, Karman, and Mingyur Rinpoche. All reacted to the revelation of the object of my study in the same unmistakable (and uncanny) way.
19. Lee Siegel’s project of finding humor in India (as it manifested in the Classical Sanskrit Literature as well as the then-contemporary India) in the 1980’s formed the primary inspiration of this study. Lee Siegel, Comic Tradition in India (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 414.
20. Personal Interview with Samten Dondhup, The Assistant Director of Tibetan Opera at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (and Aku Tonpa actor), McLeod Ganj, November 25, 2009.
21. Ramaswami Mahalingam categorizes Tibet as an ‘honor culture’, in which he identifies three psychological factors that characterize it: (a) low tolerance of insults; (b) high value on honor and shame; and (c) salience of chastity. “Culture, ecology, and beliefs about gender in son preference caste groups.” Evolution and Human Behavior (28.5 (2007)), pp. 319-29.
22. Drukpa Kunley, also known as “The Divine Madman of the Dragon Lineage”, was a great master of Mahamudra. He was well known for his crazy methods of enlightening other beings, mostly women, which earned him the title “The Saint of 5,000 Women”. He taught his teachings in exchange for chang. See Keith Dowman, The Divine Madman.
23. Personal Interview with Choegyal Rinpoche, Tashi Jong, India, November 28, 2009.
25. Ibid.
26. Personal Interview with Choegyal Rinpoche, Tashi Jong, India, November 28, 2009.
27. For example, William Congreve remarked that, “Men are to be laughed out of their vices in comedy.... the business of comedy is to delight as well as to instruct.”
28. Due to length restrictions, I will limit this survey to Aku Tonpa alone.
29. From Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo’s perspective, the stages of spiritual development represent a deep refining of the capacity for humor: “I’ve always thought sense of humor should be the 7th Paramita”. The Paramitas, traditionally six in Mahayana Buddhism (generosity, conduct, diligence, honesty, concentration, and wisdom), are cultivated as a way of purification and helping the aspirant to live an unobstructed life on the way to enlightenment. Personal Interview Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Director of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, Tashi Jong, India, November 27, 2009.
34. Of all the tricksters surveyed by Kevin Stuart, Aku Tonpa was the only one unanimously recognized. Dge legs, kun mchod, dpal ldan bkra shis, and Kevin Stuart, “Tibetan Tricksters.” In Asian Folklore Studies (58.1 (1999)), p. 6.
35. Curiously, Choegyal Rinpoche disputed Aku Tonpa’s tulku status, claiming that a teacher and textual legitimacy would be necessary for such a claim to be made. Personal Interview with Choegyal Rinpoche, Tashi Jong, India, November 28, 2009.
37. Marilyn Stabelein in Rinjing Dorje, Tales of Uncle Tompa: The Legendary Rascal of Tibet. (San Rafael, CA: Dorje Ling, 1997), p. 3
38. Ibid., p. ix.
39. Ibid, p. x
40. Ibid, p. xi
42. Personal Interview with Kalsang Khedup, author of
children’s Aku Tonpa books, McLeod Ganj, November 24, 2009.

43. Ibid.


45. This matches the Tynes trickster trait of ‘situation inverter’: “By profaning or inverting these beliefs, the trickster brings them into sharp relief to show how much society values them.” Wiliam J. Hynes, Mythical trickster figures contours, contexts, and criticisms. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1993), p. 172.

46. Samten Dhondup attested to this ‘plainness of sexual language’ as a common property of Tibetan jokes’, a feature that seems quite odd in light of the apparent ‘neurosis’ they carry. Personal Interview with Samten Dondhup, The Assistant Director of Tibetan Opera at the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (and Aku Tonpa actor), McLeod Ganj, November 25, 2009.

47. With my notepad, blue folder, large backpack, Team Tibet Jacket, and ‘Om’ Hat, my appearance was a truly burlesque and farce-like imitation of an anthropologist.

48. I recounted the story of ‘Aku Tonpa goes to a Nunnery’, which Chokyi Nyima promptly corrected for detail and insisted that it was Drukpa Kunley who perpetrated the ‘violation’.

49. The question that prompted this retelling was: “Do you know Aku Tonpa?”

50. Personal Interview with Mingyur Rinpoche, Sherab Ling, India, November 31, 2009.

51. Stuart identifies two sides of Aku Tonpa; “One is the advocate for justice, who uproots social oppression and subdues landlords and tyrants. This Aku Tonpa assists the powerless populace and provides a role model in terms of resisting social oppression and striving for justice. The other side of Aku Tonpa is destructive towards religion and a clever swindler.” Dge legs, kun mchog, dpal ldan bkra shis, and Kevin Stuart, “Tibetan Tricksters.” In Asian Folklore Studies (58.1 (1999)), p. 9.

52. In the story referenced by Doniger, Aku Tonpa ultimately rapes the girl he has been coveting while she nonsensically cries “Vagina is raping me! Vagina is raping me!”


55. Ibid. p. 132

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