

Estella Antoaneta Ciobanu

Glossolalia, heteroglossia and the grotesque body in the Towneley *Second Shepherds' Play*

Abstract: *The Towneley Secunda Pastorum* has arrested the critics' attention for so long as to be deemed typical of the Middle English mystery cycle tradition, much to Hardin Craig's chagrin already in 1955. A shepherds play in its own right, *Secunda Pastorum* is atypical of that tradition in one important respect: it reduplicates the shepherds' visitation story in a much larger episode that precedes and grotesquely embodies it. Notwithstanding the unique and problematic presence of two shepherds plays – "another of the same" (*alia eorundem*) – in the Towneley cycle alone, what makes this pageant compelling is the frame it provides ultimately to the Nativity: as commentators have remarked (Meredith 154-55), here the birth of the Messiah, pointing as it does to the reconciliation between God and humankind, is contingent upon a prior reconciliation amongst humans. However, the script articulates this message in a plot whose major dimension is that of irreverent reduplication of sacred texts, to the extent that it literalises and thereby threatens to cannibalise the archetypal Johannine topos of the "Word made flesh" (Jn. 1.14). My purpose here is to address the play's glossolalia (Michel de Certeau) – at once the apostolic "speaking in tongues" (cognate with Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia), and the ventriloquism of the actors of sorts that the characters turn into in self-consciously theatrical episodes – in terms that make *Secunda Pastorum* a play as much about the Nativity as about the theatre.

Key words: *mystery cycle, Bible, the other, speaking in tongues, ventriloquism, grotesque, Michel de Certeau, Mikhail Bakhtin*

*The Second Shepherds' Play*¹ appears to challenge some of our basic assumptions about medieval theatre in that, in ostending theatrical artifice, it ultimately downplays the gospel

¹ I use interchangeably the scholarly designation of this pageant in Latin, *Secunda Pastorum*, and its English translation, *The Second Shepherds' Play*, for what the manuscript identifies as *Alia eorundem* – the correlative to *Pagina pastorum* (*The [First] Shepherds' Play*). (Individual pageant titles and stage directions (where they occur) appear in the manuscript in Latin.) All *Secunda Pastorum* quotations come from Greg Walker's anthology; the glossary draws upon that provided by Walker, complemented with Peter Happé's.

episode it is centred around. Not only does the Towneley cycle² confront the modern reader (sic!) with alternative versions of the shepherds' visitation of the Infant Jesus as respectively *The First Shepherds' Play* and *The Second*, but, like in a palimpsest, rewriting and proliferation are constitutive of the inner fabric of the *Secunda Pastorum*. To reveal its inextricably intertwined religious and profane views of the subject-matter the play resorts to a double plot, a "figural diptych" (Meredith 154) which is framed, however, within the structure of the mystery cycle (yet see Clopper's reservation), itself possibly contained in *Corpus Christi*, a thanksgiving feast celebrated as a religious street procession followed by secular festivities: this multiply repeated double-articulation is not at all dissimilar from the position of any one part of the liturgy within religious service and Christian doctrine at large. Yet the diptych is of its nature an image of duplicity: its interplay of obverse and reverse, of revealing and closing, is far from engendering semiotic stability and univocity. Reduplication features large at all textual levels in *The Second Shepherds' Play*: situations parallel the Bible as well as each other; characters mimic New Testament figures as well as impersonating non-biblical ones; topographical and symbolic axes undergo multiple deflections and are parodically projected on to the horizontal surface of the acting area, so that "there" will conflate both the (implicit) underworld of the thieves and Bethlehem.

I find it instructive to look anew at this much commented play from a linguistic point of view that does justice to an otherwise neglected component of speech, the living body: Michel de Certeau's theory of glossolalia. My approach will hopefully suggest a rapprochement between the extant script that most students of Middle English theatre are confronted with and, by virtue of lack of technology, its unrecorded medieval staging, and thereby between the textual and bodily bricolage, or the body of and in the text turned into the body spectacular.

Michel de Certeau's "Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias" addresses a dramatic encounter underlying speech: (hegemonic) speech is ruptured by the secondary and embodied voice of the other. Certeau borrows here a Greek term, glossolalia, with a venerable tradition: in the New Testament, it names the apostles' missionary capacity to spread the gospel to diverse peoples in their respective languages, a "gift of tongues" bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day (Acts 2.1-4). Modern usages of the term, however, may depart from the biblical narrative to various degrees: while the German scholars, "deviating less from

² The first of the four nearly complete English mystery cycles to be published, the Towneley manuscript (c. 1500) derives its name from that of Christopher Towneley, the 17th-century Catholic antiquary and collector whose family owned the manuscript (now HM1 in the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA) at the time it came to public notice in the late 19th century. It was first printed as *The Towneley Mysteries*, edited by Joseph Hunter and James Gordon for the Surtees Society in 1836, then re-edited as *The Towneley Plays* by George England and A. W. Pollard for the Early English Text Society in 1897 (Meredith 134-37). The cycle's alternative name, Wakefield, is based on the 20th-century traditional assumption, recently challenged by David Mills, Barbara D. Palmer and Lawrence M. Clopper, that the local allusions in the script do point to the text's provenance (Meredith 142-45; Clopper 174-81). In fact, Clopper (181) surmises that the Towneley manuscript may well be a compilation from which dramas could be chosen for performance, which would therefore explain the unique existence of two shepherds' plays: the so-called cycle may never have been performed in its entirety at Wakefield or elsewhere.

tradition”, regard glossolalia as “only *the involuntary eruption of intense affective processes* with a weakening in the clarity of what is conscious” (Certeau, “Glossolalias” 29; my italics), the French define it as the “tendency to [deliberately] create new languages that become richer and more stable over time” (29). I will use in this article the biblical “speaking in tongues” to refer to glossolalia in the former sense but “to ventriloquise” for the latter, especially so as to preserve Certeau’s view of their different intentionality. Terminology notwithstanding, in either case glossolalia is poignantly a *trompe-l’oreille* (Certeau, “Glossolalias” 29), a “semblance of language” that lacks the *structure* of language irrespective of how much it appears mimetic of it (29). Equally importantly, what characterises either case is a tension to be played out on the border of the self: this self–other encounter in glossolalia pertains to *heterology*, the science of the Other.³

Certeau sees glossolalia at work already when something is “push[ing] up through the *cracks* of ordinary conversation: bodily noises, quotations of delinquent sounds, and fragments of other’s voices punctuate the order of sentences with breaks and surprises” (“Glossolalias” 29; my emphasis). It appears that, like Bakhtin postulating heteroglossia, which I will discuss later, Certeau views utterance as a non-homogeneous entity, though, unlike Bakhtin, he investigates the linguistic phenomenon in its conspicuous *grounding in the body*. Within this corporeal disruptive intrusion upon communication, then, the “major voice, while claiming to be the messenger of meaning, appears caught up in a doubling that compromises it” (Certeau, “Glossolalias” 30): its “double” emerges as a “scattered and secondary vocalization [that] traverses discursive expression, splicing or dubbing it” (30).⁴

³ “Traditionally, heterology designates that branch of philosophy concerned with the other as that which thought relies on without being able to comprehend”; specifically, it refers to “debate concerning the relation between Same and the Other” (Buchanan 177) with a twofold expression: either “the fear that the Other, if it is already constituted, will ‘crush’ the Same”, or the fear that “the Same, if it is constitutive, as is the case in phenomenology, will absorb the Other” (177). As intellectual inquiry, heterology has had a long tradition in history; however, as a self-conscious systematic approach it may be deemed a rather novel discipline that is still only tentatively sketching its conceptual framework. In his diverse works explicitly concerned with otherness and, generally, border phenomena (viz. marginalities), Michel de Certeau has broached, though not limiting his investigation to, as much the otherness of God as the otherness of alien cultures, the otherness within one’s society and the otherness within one’s own psyche or within one’s own body.

⁴ While, according to Certeau, the discourses of discipline/s – “political, scholarly and religious discourses” – effectively shut themselves off from this secondary vocalisation, thus barring the voice rupture and keeping the “noises of otherness” at bay, oral conversation, on the contrary, allows “different voices [to] disrupt the organizing system of meaning”, so that “voices possess discourse” (30; my italics). Certeau’s poststructuralist and Freudian-inflected heterological inquiry intimates, albeit couching it in the vocabulary of demonology, that this glossolalic outpour which originates in a no-man’s land – an atopia in-dwelt by the spirit (31) – is (analogous to) the Freudian “return of the repressed”, one of Certeau’s major conceptual loan postulates: “this fragmentary ‘possession’ troubles, breaks, or suspends the autonomy of the speaker” (Certeau, “Glossolalias” 30). Glossolalia is bound to the conditions of the beginning of speech no less than of the Word, once it postulates, etymologically, the babble, jibber-jabber or stutter (Gk *lalein*) in the tongue; it is at once

Nonetheless, in the linguistic order, operated as it is by the centripetal drive to meaning, glossolalia is not – cannot be – taken on its own terms: according to Certeau (“Glossolalias” 33), glossolalia is obligated by the discourse of rationality “‘to mean’ something” – just as madness is traditionally.⁵ The hermeneutic drive “reduces ‘want to say’ (*vouloir dire*) to ‘want to say something’ (*vouloir dire quelque chose*)” so as “to restore this vocal delinquency to an order of signifieds” (33):

[E]xplanation... is foreign to glossolalic speech... because, in abstaining from all actual language, glossolalic speech abandons to commentary all control of meaning... [Glossolalia as] semblance of language presupposes the existence of positive languages, and it envisions the possibility of speaking them. It already implies the exteriority of a commentary, foreignness necessary to its own autonomization. (Certeau, “Glossolalias” 36)

Certeau suggests at this point an inescapability from the vicious circle of hermeneutics and/or rationality: glossolalia, to be acknowledged at all, has to be used at least as the foil against which structure, i.e. a neat assembly of signifieds and signifiers in Saussure’s view, defines itself, hence the positive discourse’s assumption that glossolalia *means* nothing, or alternatively, *signifies* alienation, whether mental or otherwise. Specifically, upon positing explanation as “foreign” (“external”) to, yet necessary for, glossolalia if the latter is to be regarded as autonomous at all (“Glossolalias” 36), viz. to exist, language defines itself as positive, rational, meaningful, and reinforces this self-definition by pursuing its principles of meaning-making in a territory of a mere semblance, glossolalia – hence the “*reciprocity* [of definition]... but *in the mode of equivocation*” (36; Certeau’s italics). It appears, then, that “the non-sense of glossolalic discourse sets a trap to interpretation and drives it to delirium” (34), the “delirium of repeating willy-nilly the presuppositions of interpretation” (36). While Certeau’s phrasing here suggests the fact that positive language implicitly acknowledges glossolalia as its necessary supplement (in Derrida’s sense), it rather *understates* the way in

prelinguistic and postlinguistic, “related to a silent origin or to the ‘attack’ of the spoken word” and “made from the excesses, the overflows, and the wastes of language” (33).

⁵ Since Freud, according to Wendy Harrison (86), “western madness has... become a non-language which, strictly speaking, says nothing”: “One day we will have to do justice to Freud for the fact that he did not make madness speak, a madness which for centuries was, precisely, a language (excluded language, garrulous inanity, speech running indefinitely outside of the considered silence of reason)...” (Foucault, qtd. in Harrison 86). In certain important respects, especially as regards the implicit power differential conducive to the differential possibility of knowledge, Michel de Certeau’s heterological inquiries overlap with the major concern of Michel Foucault in *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (1961): Foucault argues that the outward rationality and civilisation of western social life are underpinned by the disciplinary and carceral, themselves premised on the banishment of alternate modes of thought. It is in the impossibility of understanding or articulating madness as otherness on its own terms that Foucault and Certeau share a methodological focus of inquiry which is of interest to the analysis of medieval religious theatre, especially where the human–divine encounter is at stake.

which the former *colonises* the latter⁶ at the same time as the perceived need to make sense of glossolalia is glossolalia's ploy to "mime the mimes" (in Luce Irigaray's sense) of hegemonic rationality.⁷

Michel de Certeau's contention, in *Heterologies*, that "a written discourse which cites the speech of the other is not, cannot be, the discourse of the other", is consistent with his discussion of glossolalia;⁸ "[o]n the contrary, this discourse, in writing the fable that authorizes it, alters it" (Certeau, *Heterologies* 78). It appears that such a heterological quest, albeit avowedly an accurate rendition, is doomed from its inception to *unintelligibility* as the true discourse of the other. Yet unintelligibility here may arguably be construed as *overintelligibility*: according to Certeau (73), the speech of the other – though at this point his analysis concerns specifically the cannibal – must be removed from the *hors-texte* ("[t]exterior") in which it dwells, and its otherness must be levelled off so that the speech can be integrated into the writing of the text, or cannibalised.

Wherever the discourse of the other penetrates or rather haunts the discourse of the self, their very co-occurrence is a radical instance of what Mikhail Bakhtin names heteroglossia. Even though heteroglossia may not have been viewed by the Russian scholar in the radical terms Certeau conceives heterology, still it is the discursive feature that best dramatises the re-presentation of the other within the hegemonic discourse.

At first glance, there is little which would commend Bakhtinian heteroglossia for the study of mocking (in both senses) in *Secunda Pastorum*. In "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse", Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as "the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language" (Bakhtin, "Prehistory" 144): the inherent heterogeneity of unofficial forms within a particular language. With this postulate, Bakhtin actually pairs off the centripetal tendency of language, the drive towards homogeneity and stability that results in *monoglossia*, i.e. the national or official language,

⁶ Certeau (38-39) envisions glossolalia as laying the groundwork for the later "theater of action" (38) or "linguistic operations" (39) that positive language is. The prelinguistic quality which he associates with glossolalia makes it in many important respects comparable to Kristeva's semiotic, which she articulates as the space and condition of the abject.

⁷ According to Certeau (39), glossolalia "institutes a space of enunciation": it is an instituting function comparable to the poetic invocation of the muse to "enable the passage from one space to another". Conversely, I believe, glossolalia can also be invoked by the (self-)appointed guardians of positive language to articulate and abject (in Kristevan sense) the/a space of rupture within the rational meaning-making process in the encounter with the other; their oftentimes derisive attitude towards the other posits a non-language of barbarity in the same way the ancient Greeks did in their definition of *barbaros*. Only rarely will glossolalia be extolled as an originary joy (Certeau) – the *ebrietas spiritualis* ("inebriation of the spirit") postulated by Augustine (qtd. in Certeau, "Glossolalias" 41) – played out in a privileged though ephemeral "indefinite space [created] outside of the jurisdiction of language" (41; Certeau's italics).

⁸ In a useful explanatory comment added to a note in Certeau ("Glossolalias" n. 24), his translator, Daniel Rosenberg, points to one of the major themes recurring throughout Certeau's heterological works: his definition of the position of the other (primitive, religious, mad, childlike or popular) as a fable, where the speech of "what speaks" is actually one that does not know what it says, so much so that the implicit meaning is to be made explicit through scholarly exegesis.

yet also the hegemonic discourse before the historical configuration of a national language, with a centrifugal drive, at work both diachronically and synchronically as *heteroglossia*, i.e. an agonistic co-existence, even clash, of professional sub-languages, dialects, etc. and their respective points of view, as much diverse as differentially structured in terms of power/knowledge (with a Foucauldian notion). A related Bakhtinian concept, *polyglossia*, which designates the co-existence and “interanimation” (interaction) of several languages,⁹ appears singularly useful for describing the linguistic and cultural condition of the British Isles and of western Europe at large once the vernacular languages emerged in the central Middle Ages. Nonetheless, the single, seemingly unified monological language, viz. the hegemonic ideology – particularly with regard to the endeavours of the medieval Catholic Church to impose its ideological pre-eminence and its language, Latin – in actual fact constitutes itself as an arena for the competition of sociolinguistic points of view that correspond to the various (self-defined) social groups which comprise a particular society, hence the existence of heteroglossia.

Quite importantly, Bakhtin argues that heteroglossia characterises at once the language and any individual utterance in it. Furthermore, no utterance occurs in a communicative void, but comes in response to a prior one and elicits a response in turn, a condition – called *addressivity* – whereby the word’s or utterance’s intentionality is enacted. In effect, Bakhtin conceives of communication in dialogic terms: not only is dialogue the underlying condition of all communication, but meaning herein emerges on the boundaries of consciousness between the people, for they use words that are both socially originated (as available to different subject positions) and infused with past and future voices (rather than being mere items in a linguistic inventory). It is at this juncture that behind the many diverse sociolinguistically grounded, agonistic voices within communication and within the chain of addressivity *the human presence* keeps lurking, and with it an awareness both embodied (the corporeal) and positioned (the socio-political).

To revert to *The Second Shepherds’ Play*, the co-existence and reciprocal definition of the two plots indicates at least a conspicuous instance of heteroglossia. I would like to argue that heteroglossia here appears grafted in the dialogue – and heteroglossia is by definition dialogic – between discourses and the body (or bodies) voicing them. Furthermore, such

⁹ Bakhtin relates heteroglossia to polyglossia, which, at its narrowest, refers to the interaction of two or more national languages and their world views within a particular culture, as in the case of Greek culture within the ancient Roman culture. The notion of polyglossia captures a linguistic and cultural self- (and other-) awareness within and in opposition to what used to be a (self-styled) stable monoglossia. Achieved thanks to the centripetal or centralising tendencies of language, monoglossia itself is more of a fiction than reality; Bakhtin argues that “monoglossia is always in essence relative.... [O]ne’s own language is never a single language: in it there are always survivals of the past and a potential for other-languagedness...” (“Prehistory” 143). In its capacity as (awareness and experience of) other-languagedness, polyglossia can further refer to the condition under which monoglotic language, viz. language as absolute dogma, can be transformed into a “working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality”, as is the case with parody (140).

discourse/body dialogue is specifically and unabashedly foregrounded as the sign of the theatre or rather theatricality, to employ a 20th-century concept.¹⁰

Briefly, the first plot unfolds as the story of three shepherds (*pastors*), Coll, Gib (Gyb) and Daw, who in the second plot turn out to be the visitation shepherds of the Lucan narrative (Lk. 2.8-18); their number, symbolic salience apart, is likely suggested by the gifts brought to the Infant Jesus by the “wise men of the East” in Matthew (2.11), for otherwise neither the number of shepherds nor that of the so-called Magi Kings is ever mentioned in the respective gospels. There are various tensions, which the Towneley shepherds eagerly evoke in their respective initial complaints, both within this pastoral trinity and between its individual members and society or family; these tensions, however, will soon be embodied onstage under the guise of Mak, a notorious thief in the region, who schemes to stay with them overnight so as to steal a sheep. A master of disguise and impersonation, Mak vacillates between social personae in a sustained effort to put the shepherds’ forebodings to rest, and resorts to magic when impersonation fails. After grabbing a fat ram and bringing it home, Mak still cannot alleviate his hunger: his wife and accomplice, Gill (*Uxor eius*; Gyll), devises an ingenious ploy to conceal the beast as their allegedly new-born baby for the moment when the suspicious shepherds will come to search their house. And right she is: craftily swaddled in the cradle, the sheep fools the shepherds into believing Gill and Mak’s story, and moreover convinces Daw to return to the cottage with a gift of money. It is precisely the (traditionally sanctioned) generosity of the poorest of the shepherds which outsmarts the thieves and exposes their fraud: Daw tries to uncover the baby to kiss it only to see the true ‘face’ of this “son of man”.¹¹ At a loss how to keep their ‘baby’ (or rather dinner) without facing the law

¹⁰ Briefly, theatricality asserts the material dimension and the presentness of theatre, which abides by what Jean-Pierre Sarrazac (62-63) calls the “literalness principle”: by highlighting the physical presence of the specific elements of theatre (e.g. the actors’ bodies, costumes, sets and props, etc.), this principle renders the sensible the theatrical signifier, and therein it always links meaning to its locale. In fact, drawing upon Erving Goffman’s studies of framing in everyday role-playing and social interaction, Josette Féral boldly postulates the theatricality of the quotidian (97), which renders stage-related theatricality only one expression of transcendent theatricality (98-99): the actor’s body becomes a system of signs which semiotises everything around it, while acting itself “is the result of a performer’s decision... to consciously occupy the here-and-now of a space different from the quotidian, to become involved in activity outside of daily life” (Féral 101; my italics).

¹¹ Even a cursory look at the *Secunda Pastorum* and its diverse biblical sources notices how much the former actually ventriloquises the latter: the parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18.10-14) and the metaphors of Christ as both the Good Shepherd (Matt. 2.6; Jn. 10.11) and the Lamb of God (Jn. 1.29) are but the most conspicuous instances where the script grotesquely literalises the Scripture. Thus, the farce “prepares the way of the Lord” (Matt. 3.3) by having Gill show Mak how best to stage their practical joke on the shepherds, while their deferred feasting inverts Jesus’ indictment of exhibitionist fasting. The farcical identification of the ram as their child and the shepherds’ later derision of Mak’s ‘heir’ (l. 604) plays on the biblical “son of man”: in the New Testament, the phrase emphasises Jesus’ human nature and references him exclusively, thus continuing the veterotestamentary implication of human frailty and weakness; in the Old Testament, apart from being a general epithet of humankind the phrase is used twice to prophesy Jesus (Ps. 80.17; Dan. 7.13), but it also references Ezekiel in the book of that name, e.g. as the appellative used by Yahweh (Eze. 29.2).

nor the shepherds' likely revenge, the 'parents' make up a tall story as to their progeny's outlandishness: theirs is unfortunately a changeling, viz. a bewitched baby. The shepherds will no longer buy such tales, though, and determine to take the law into their own hands; accordingly, they sentence the woman to watch the punishment of her husband and the thief... to be tossed up in a blanket. So much for the typical medieval punishment meted out to thieves: (self-mutilation at) the pillory, and, upon repeating the crime, the gallows. Once the shepherds leave Mak's house an Angel appears to them to announce the birth of the Messiah; in fact, this brief episode acts as the hinge between the two plots, and Coll's comically failed attempt to imitate the Angel's song – which provides the last instance of buffoonery in the play – will be echoed, sublimated, at the very end. Hailing the Infant Jesus in the Bethlehem stable as Redeemer, the shepherds offer him humble, though symbolically rich, gifts, and listen to Mary's brief account of the gospel events from the Annunciation to the Virgin Birth; when she bids them to spread the good news to the world, the shepherds will take their leave from mother and child and set off, singing *together*. As the extant script has it, the pseudo-visitation is chronologically the first, and in terms of length solely, obviously the more substantial story: while it takes about 900 lines to depict humanity before the Epiphany, the lines up to 1088 condense the Adoration of the Shepherds proper and the Nativity's promise of redemption.

The so-called Wakefield Master, the anonymous hand behind this and the *First Shepherds' Play*, reputedly borrowed farcical devices from English folklore, *sotties* and *diableries* alike (Meredith 152-54): his loans appear to be cognate with Certeau's "poaching",¹² for the Wakefield Master takes up fragments of discourse and creatively reassembles them to suit his purposes. In this bricolage, Mak and Gill's practical joke on the shepherds – an episode with folkloric affinities – is *prima facie* evidence of the thieves' social inadequacy, particularly Mak's (cf. ll. 224-25; 310-14); moreover, the woman's shrewdness, manifest in her masterminding of the ploy to disguise and hide the sheep as their "hornyd lad" (l. 601) – horned, hence demonic – is as much predicated on the late medieval demonization of woman as it viciously reinforces it, surmising that a domineering wife cannot but lead a man to perdition. Unsurprisingly, then, their foolery and unruly conduct is quite appropriate a tool to press the point that they and their topsy-turvy world do require a

¹² In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau famously reappraises "reading as poaching" by contending that the reader – and likewise any consumer of cultural goods (from TV programmes to merchandise) – does not passively take in the author's 'intended' meaning: the reader "invents in texts something different from that 'intended'. He [sic] detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings" (Certeau, *Practice* 169). Certeau's interpretation debunks the traditional privileging of the "'true' interpreter" – the elite reader, whose mastery of the cipher of the (literary or cultural) text is the product of institutionalised schooling into legitimate literacy (171) – over the general public and students, who are denied any freedom of interpretation but rather are forced to pay lip service to the legitimate interpretation produced by the former category (172). As Certeau rightly argues, in fact reading "is situated at the point where social stratification (class relationships) and poetic operations (the practitioner's constructions of a text) intersect" (172; Certeau's italics).

Redeemer – who will indeed come, if only thanks to the last-minute travesty of vengeance as playfulness.

Why do the three shepherds release their grip on Mak and Gill, thus frustrating the audience's expectation that the couple are just about to be judged and punished? Like elsewhere in the play and in the Towneley cycle at large, this episode is not gratuitous at all: on the contrary, the shepherds' capacity to forgive their transgressors – obviously in accordance with the Pater Noster instruction (Matt. 6.12; Lk. 11.4) – thereby provides a model to the medieval audience as to what makes righteous Christian conduct, and no anachronism is deemed unusable if it can drive this point home convincingly. In fact, judging the thieves in earnest would look too much as if the shepherds were playing at God, though they arguably do so. The very number and introductory speeches of the shepherds recall the Holy Trinity in a thinly disguised way; what the script intimates here is a parodic heteroglossia of theological and non-canonical discourses alike that make up the first plot's theft–discovery–reconciliation pattern, miming the biblical fall–curse–redemption, necessary for the inception of the cycle's grand reconciliation story. Coll's social complaint caricatures God the Creator's complaint about sinful humankind in the Towneley *Noah* play (itself preceded by Noah's judgemental speech!). Slightly later, Gib's matrimonial complaint not only grotesquely intimates a very carnal Son of God indeed, once the Trinitarian analogy is accepted, but also mimicks Noah's (in the above-mentioned play) and anticipates Mak's (here); though the complaint pertains to the medieval tradition of decrying the evils of marriage, here it works as misogynistic displaced abjection of woman. As to Daw being the victim of his fellows-cum-masters' neglect, this condition renders him a sorely suppressed (un)holy ghost – ghostly, indeed, in his unquenched hunger and thirst – that proceeds, in demoted (servant) form this time, from the Father (Coll) and Son (Gib), parodically in accordance with Catholic dogma.¹³ If, at one level, the shepherds appear to reduplicate and embody the lot of ordinary (medieval) people, less ordinarily they parody the Holy Trinity also in the very discourse/action ratio. First comes speech, as Genesis 1 has it; theirs is, however, not the divine fiat of Creation, but the expository speech of people unable to (re)order their already constituted social world; then comes action, albeit not right away, since these humble folk first endure disownment and only later react to it; finally comes evaluation, here by implication alone, when the shepherds prepare to have a nap on the green after having tossed Mak in the blanket to their exhaustion. In many respects, then, the shepherds' parts, especially in view of their diverse interactions among themselves and with the others, show heteroglossia at its ripest as well as intimating its unconscious roots.

Conversely, Mak is adept at ventriloquism: as soon as he sees the shepherds, the thief strives, by airs and accent alike, to persuade them he's a southerner, a royal envoy (ll. 201-

¹³ The Latin phrase *processio spiritus sancti ex patre filioque* ("the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son") was a turning point in the history of Christianity and a major factor in the schism between the Byzantine and Latin Churches. While, as Maas argues, it cannot be ascertained who first added the *Filioque* ("and from the Son") to the Creed, the notion of double procession of the Holy Ghost from Father and Son as one Principle was declared to be a dogma of faith inside the Catholic Church in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the Second Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1438-1445).

207).¹⁴ His outfit, the cloak mentioned in the stage direction (l. 189+) preceding Mak's first speech,¹⁵ is deployed rather like a prop so as to conceal his true identity and with it his evil design on the shepherds' flock. Deride as they may Mak's unconvincing disguise, the shepherds are still rightly suspicious of its motivation, thus voicing the medieval distrust of both the other, whether the representative of the authorities or a stranger, and of dissimulation at large:

I PASTOR. Why make ye it so qwaynt? (Why are you putting on such airs / behaving so strangely?) Mak, ye do wrang (wrong).

II PASTOR. Bot, Mak, lyst ye saint? I trow that ye lang. (Do you want to play the saint? I guess you long to do so.)

III PASTOR. I trow the shrew can paynt (I think the rascal knows how to put on false colours). (ll. 208-10)

Nonetheless, 'voicing' a stranger is only the first part of the three enacted by this actor of sorts; undeterred by his initial failure, Mak soon changes tack. Intent as he is now to picture himself as the average husbandman unable to make ends meet, work and strive as he may, the thief bemoans his matrimonial fate: his is the burden of providing – or failing to do so adequately – for a grotesquely large family of insatiably hungry children and a sexually predatory wife.¹⁶ Slightly later, this time under the direction of his wife, Mak will play rather the concerned husband and father. There is no danger of overstating that Mak's is the hypocrite's part: as in the original Greek usage, here the dissembler is at the same time the interpreter of the medieval (con)text.

That the first two moments of ventriloquism stop short of producing the desired effect on the shepherds does not make Mak any less skilful, but only suggests that his ad-hoc audience is very practical-minded. Threatened by the undecidability engendered by Mak's ventriloquism, i.e. feigning in both verbal discourse and body language, and possibly also angered at his initial warning that he will complain against their misbehaviour (ll. 211-12),

¹⁴ In fact, Mak's pretence of being a messenger dispatched "from a greatt lordyng" (l. 202) – God's? a lord's? his wife's? his hunger's? – comically anticipates the Angel that will later herald the Nativity.

¹⁵ "Tunc intrat Mak in clamide se super togam vestitus" (then shall Mak enter with a cloak [hung] over his tunic).

¹⁶ Throughout the article I use grotesque and derivatives thereof in accordance with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory in *Rabelais and His World*. Briefly, to the orderly, static, well-defined and self-sufficient classical body (Rabelais 320), Bakhtin opposes the grotesque body which defies or rather exceeds limit(ation)s, and which is never completed but rather always in process both within and without. Accordingly, the grotesque "is looking for that which protrudes from the body" (316), e.g. bulging eyes, bulbous noses, gaping mouths, bowels, anuses and phalluses, and likewise for hyperbolically rendered processes of eating, digestion and excretion, copulation and pregnancy, dismemberment and cannibalisation, i.e. all those acts "performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body" (317).

the shepherds in turn threaten the impostor with thrashing, though allying it with its carnivalesque counterpart, cursing:

II PASTOR. Mak, the Dewill in youre ee (*eye*)! A stroke wold I leyne (*give*) you!

III PASTOR. Mak, know ye not me? By God, I couthe teyn (*could hurt*) you. (ll. 217-18)

Real threat for Mak or none as yet, the shepherds' promise not only dialogically responds to Mak's or rather apes it but also foreshadows his later 'punishment' – itself much more their self-inflicted pain than the thief's chastisement.

As I have suggested, the initial encounter between Mak and the shepherds looks rather inauspicious for either party, not least because of the thief's apparent ventriloquism. Nonetheless, my use of the term is bent more on highlighting Mak's deliberate mimicking of discourses – which, in a manner of speaking, appears to *stage* heteroglossia – and less on implying discursive unintelligibility.¹⁷ Should any unintelligibility be at stake here, I believe it has more to do with the addressees' puzzlement over Mak's true intention in resorting to impersonation rather than with his literal message. In this respect, the audience response differential between Coll and Daw is quite illuminating, especially when the latter literally un-covers Mak, according to the stage direction (l. 200+):

I PASTOR. Who is that pypys so poore (*cries so poorly*)? [...]

¹⁷ There are moments in the *Secunda Pastorum* when it is hard to distinguish between the two poles of glossolalia, ventriloquism and speaking in tongues, other than in terms of intentionality. When Mak goes to sleep, he recites a prayer half in Latin: "Fro my top to my too (from my top to toe), / Manus tuas commendo, / Poncio Pilato; Cryst Crosse me spede" (ll. 265-68). What Mak ventriloquially entrusts for care is not, like in Jesus' final words on the cross, his spirit (Lk. 13.46), but his body, and the care-giver addressed is not God the Father but the notorious judge of Jesus who, upon 'commending' the latter's body to the soldiers for crucifixion, washed his hands clean of any responsibility for having had innocent blood spilt (Matt. 27.24). At the other end of the glossolalic continuum, the first shepherd appears to be speaking in tongues when he wakes up nearly starved: "Resurrex a Mortuis! Have hald (hold) my hand. / Judas carnas dominus, I may not well stand!" (ll. 350-51). If "he rose from the dead" (in corrupted Latin) is a Christic formula – descriptive of Lazarus no less than of the Resurrection – that just as well points to Coll's awakening, the second Latin occurrence reads literally "Judas flesh lord". Whether David Bevington's suggestion that the unintelligible formula might be a corruption of *laudes canas domino* ("sing praises to the lord", qtd. in Walker 49 n. 30) is correct, or whether the three words should be taken simply as a shorthand corruption of the gospel narrative and transubstantiation dogma, what is at stake here is an instance of heteroglossia that transcends the individual's subject position – as ordinary layman with a smattering of (corrupted) Latin formulae acquired through church-going – and points to the still sleepy man being taken possession of linguistically, presumably by his hunger rather than by the Holy Ghost. Hunger and reminiscences of liturgical words creep out through cracks in his not yet fully conscious mind, and it is our relentless will to meaning that forces this glossolalic instance to signify.

III PASTOR. Is he comen? Then ylkon take hede to his thing! (*Has he come [here]? Then everyone keep close watch on their things/possessions.*)

Et accipit clamidem ab ipso (And he [III Pastor] shall take the cloak from him [Mak]). (ll. 195, 200, 200+)

The first shepherd's ironic remark as to Mak's poor voice may suggest at once the impersonator's unconvincing performance and the actor's rather inadequately trained voice. In fact, such a metatheatrical onstage/offstage (or fictional world/real world) tension often occurs in medieval drama and may have been intended for more than eliciting the audience's smiles: self-referentiality is an outstanding feature of medieval theatre (Twycross), though its meaning varies with the context.

On the other hand, Mak's cloak – the actor's most readily available 'tool' for creating fictional (and fictitious) identity – will soon be echoed in Daw's vision of Mak in a wolf skin, which complements Gib's dream of Mak stealing a sheep. Not only does the skin, which swaps the proverbial sheep's clothing of the thief for a wolf's, render the stranger a fearful predator, but it also spells out his role as a master of disguise, a threatening 'wild man', viz. the denizen of the beyond-the-world-of-civilisation.

III PASTOR. Me thoght he was lapt (*covered*) in a wolfe skyn. [...]

II PASTOR. When he had long napt (*napped*), me thoght with a gyn (*trick*),

A fatt shepe he trapt, bot he mayde no dyn.

III PASTOR. Be styll:

Thi dreme makes the (*thee/you*) woode (*crazy*):

It is bot fantom (*but a phantom / an illusion*), by the Roode. (ll. 368; 370-74)

Daw's hint at the inappropriateness of belief in unwarranted (prophetic) dreams displaces the patristic injunction against idolatrous belief in dreams no less than it intimates the very dream's evil capacity to possess the person and drive him (*sic*) crazy. That such a notion echoing a hot debate for theologians ever since Augustine¹⁸ should be voiced by an illiterate

¹⁸ Augustine's ambivalence towards dreams is encapsulated in his enduring – throughout the Middle Ages – hierarchical trinitarian classification of human vision in *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Book II (qtd. in Hahn 171-74): on the lowest rung, the debased corporeal vision referred to the sensuous input of the sight organ; next, and largely informed by the recollection of the data gathered by the "eyes of the body", spiritual vision comprised the images occurring in dreams and in the imagination, whose reliability depended on their spiritual source, divine or demonic. The exclusive preserve of the intellectual soul, intellectual vision was the only site for the perception of divine truths: ironically,

shepherd is unbelievable by medieval standards unless we take into account the theory's likely dissemination and vulgarisation by preaching priests and friars, yet it is already predictable, even necessary, by the play's heteroglossic standards. Nonetheless, the phantom character of Gib's dream paves the way for the exploitation of a gold mine, then as now, since Daw the late medieval dream interpreter and Freud the early 20th-century pioneer of transference share *signifying* common ground in the figure of the Christian theologian, and all three deal in discursive trafficking, from heteroglossia to glossolalia. Furthermore, if in Freudian psychoanalysis dreams are but the travestied return of repressed unconscious content, then deliberately concocting one certainly amounts to ventriloquism, which gives vent – in jest – to one's bodily grounded fears and desires. When he feigns waking up with the shepherds, Mak claims he has just dreamt of his wife giving birth to a boy, thus parodically mimicking Joseph's dream¹⁹ of the Virgin Birth:

MAK. Mekill thanks syn yister even (*since last night*),

Now, by Sant Stevyn,

I was flayd with a swevyn (*I was terrified by a dream*),

My hart out of sloghe (*my heart [jumped] out of [my] skin*).

I thought Gill began to crok (*cry out*) and travell (*labour*) full sad (*hard*),

Welner (*well-nigh*) at the fyrst cok (*cock-crow, i.e. at midnight*), of a yong lad

For to mend (*increase*) our flok. Then be I never glad;

though, it fell outside the scope of actual (optical) vision. As to the capacity of seeing demons, it has had a long history in Christianity: hagiographers, for instance, tended to blur the distinction between the ability to see invisible demons and that to spot visible ones in disguise, so that the notion of phantasmata denoted the devils' capacity of adopting various chimerical disguises, including invisibility, adept as they were at mischief and abominations, according to Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God 2.10, 2.25, 8.14-22). The later Middle Ages still upheld the Augustinian view of magic as theurgy that concerned wonders wrought by demons (The City of God 8.18-22, 10.9-10).

¹⁹ Mak's rather demonic misuse of the prophetic dream is all the more subject to derision as it recalls the cycles' Joseph: the Towneley Annunciation, like similar episodes in the other English cycles, especially the York Joseph's Trouble about Mary, overwrites the canonical gospel Joseph with the apocryphal Joseph of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and makes him cognate with the old jealous husband of the medieval fabliau. In the mystery cycle tradition, Joseph appears very much troubled to have been cuckolded by his young fiancée in his absence and forcefully demands to learn the identity of the child's father.

I have tow on my rok (*flax on my rock/distaff, i.e. trouble, mouths to feed*) more then ever I had.

A, my heede (*head*)! (ll. 382-90)

The fear Mak purportedly felt in his dream, exaggeratedly somatic (l. 385) though it may appear, cannot obscure the bricolage his ‘dream’ makes of typically biblical imagery – from invoking the first Christian martyr saint to alluding to the curse upon Eve and womankind – as well as of ‘pagan’ beliefs, domestic imagery and popular medieval tradition.²⁰ I am not arguing here that Mak deliberately *stages* this heteroglossic discourse; rather, he is ventriloquising the medieval tradition of Joseph’s dream and, unawares, his speech becomes an arena for the interplay of discourses, whether religious (Christian/pagan, canonical/non-canonical) or typical of the popular tradition; not least of all, Mak is self-ventriloquising his early complaint about his wife’s exceeding fertility.

Mak’s resort to magic – the only successful hoax on the otherwise alert shepherds – is intended to catch them in a magical circle and thereby control their sleep:

MAK. Bot abowte you a serkyll (*circle*), as rownde (*round*) as a moyn (*moon*),

To (*until*) I haue done that I wyll, tyll that it be noyn (*noon*),

That ye lyg stone styll to that I haue doyne (*that you lie stone still until I have done/finished*),

And I shall say thertyll of good wordys a foyn (*few*).

“On hight

Ouer youre heydys my hand I lyft,

Outt go youre een (*eyes*), fordo (*forestall*) your sight.”

Bot yit I must make better shyft,

²⁰ Eve’s curse is intimated in the labor cum dolor underpinning Gill’s faux childbirth. Traditionally, midnight is reputedly the time when the worldly and the preternatural can communicate. In the Middle Ages “the distaff” referred metonymically to women; it was jocularly canonised as Saint Distaff’s Day, ‘celebrated’ on 7 January when women returned to their domestic chores after the Christmastide revelry culminating in the Feast of Epiphany or Twelfth Day, 6 January (Spicer 20). Robert Herrick (1591-1674) gave currency to the mock saint’s day in the poem “Saint Distaffs Day, or the Morrow After Twelfth Day”, included in *Hesperides and His Noble Numbers* (*Hesperides: Or, The Works both Humane and Divine*, 1648, available from <<http://herrick.ncl.ac.uk/Hesperides%20and%20His%20Noble%20Numbers.txt>>).

And it be right.

Lord! what thay slepe hard! That may ye all here (*hear*); (ll. 278-87)

Unlike shortly before, when he said his prayers in Latin, now Mak uses only plain English and a simple gesture – lifting his hand over the shepherds' heads after drawing the magical circle, in an inverted blessing – to bind their sleep. It is noteworthy that the anonymous playwright should have resorted here to English rather than to a glossolalic hotchpotch (e.g. macaronic Latin): was he attempting to demystify magical practice or, conversely, was he just making magic more intelligible than the (Latin) liturgy, thus deriding the latter's pomp?

Mak's dabbling in magic will soon be subject to self-ventriloquism in the horned-lad hoax: when the baby/ram fraud is exposed, to save their faces and especially to forestall the sheep's rightful return to its owners, Mak and Gill strive to reinscribe the ram's body in the cradle as the baby prey to elf magic. In doing so, the two play at questioning the shepherds' natural trust in their eyes (Gill) as well as the Christian belief in transubstantiation, the Latin Church's dogma (since 1215) which states the terms of regarding (both seeing and construing) Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. Such derisory ventriloquism of the Church – and of himself as an expert in magic – is all the more apparent when Mak claims he has learnt the truth about their baby from no lesser authority than a "clerk" (i.e. a cleric or priest):

MAK. I tell you, syrs ... Hark! his noyse (*nose*) was brokyn.

Sythen (*later*) told me a clerk that he was forspokyn (*bewitched*).²¹

UXOR (GILL). He was takyn with an elfe;

I saw it myself.

When the clok stroke twelf

Was he forshapyn (*transformed*). (ll. 612-13; 616-19)

Both explanations mock the authoritative Christian pronouncement that the parental sin of the flesh will be visited on the offspring. Though the horns of the couple's "knave" (l. 554) – "son", but also "rascal" – may well intimate paternal inheritance (cf. l. 604), implicitly rendering Mak a victim of cuckoldry (and thus recalling the cycle's Joseph) if not the devil incarnate, he and the audience know it all the better. Yet the sin of the father – here, theft – in the eye of the shepherds is indeed visited upon his 'son' once the latter is horned and has a

²¹ The intimation of malediction offsets and ultimately cannibalises the apocalyptic "Word made flesh", the creative Logos.

snout (cf. ll. 591-92): the baby has been defaced, viz. 'stolen' his human face. In fact, confronted with the non-human creature in the cradle, Coll is at a loss for words, and his surprise, like Daw's, 'stages' the medieval audience's response:

III PASTOR. What the dewill is this? He has a long snowte.

I PASTOR. He is merkyd amys (*marked amiss, i.e. deformed*). We wate ill abowte (*we do wrong to pry*). [...]

What dewill shall he hatt (*what the devil shall he be named*)? [...] (ll. 585-86; 604)

This is not to say that it takes the shepherds long to recognise their stolen ram in the misshapen 'changeling' (ll. 593-601). Daw, the most pragmatic of the three – somewhat, though paradoxically, like the Holy Ghost, the 'active' principle (or Person) of the Godhead in the world – knows the creature for what it is by its earmark (l. 611).

Even though early in the play Mak proved adept at magic, now he tries to appear rather as its victim when, alongside his wife, he confects the story of an anti-Eucharistic magical transformation or rather *debased transubstantiation*. In their mock oaths the 'baby' falls prey to 'parental' cannibalism:

MAK. As I am true and lele (*loyal*) to God here I pray,

That this be the fyrst mele (*meal*) that I shall ete (*eat*) this day. (ll. 521-22)

UXOR (GILL). A, my medyll (*middle*)!

I pray to God so mylde,

If euer I you begyld,

That I ete [*should*] *eat* this chylde

That lygys (*is lying*) in this credyll. (ll. 534-38)

If, in the lines 616-19 previously quoted (though occurring later in the plot economy), the script intimates a parodic transubstantiation in the rueful parent's witness to the transformation of her child, here both parents profess to eat their baby should they be proved untruthful: dissimulated as their son, the fat ram is a gross reinscription of the Lamb of God. However, as the latter metaphor underpins the notion of the Eucharistic *meal*, what the *Secunda Pastorum* suggests here is nothing short of (mis)construing the salvific feast as

literal cannibalism, thus ventriloquising another long-standing controversy in Christianity.²² Furthermore, since the medieval Church claimed that only through sacerdotal ritual action matter could be transformed into something quite different, a repository of supernatural power (Rubin 13), Mak and Gill's farce confiscates the exclusively priestly power to confect the Eucharist for the benefit of the laity, or strictly of the thieves, and consecrates drama as a potent ritual within the grasp of even the lowliest: ventriloquism helps the meek exalt themselves.²³

Significantly, commentators often denominate the pseudo-visitation episode in the *Secunda Pastorum* a farcical *subplot*. It is this dismissive designation which I have taken issue with in this paper in the first place by recourse to Certeau's theory of glossolalia. In the overall economy of the Towneley cycle, this episode may indeed seem to be a subplot that runs parallel with that conflating the Nativity (*not* devoted a pageant of its own in the Towneley cycle) and the Adoration of the Shepherds – but this is not a unique case in the English mysteries. *Sub-* in this usage is often intended to relegate the episode to the 'inferior' status of 'low' and 'bawdy' as over-embodied. Surely enough, the grotesquerie of the play's double-plot structure becomes apparent where the 'substance' of each nativity episode is concerned: a theatricalised dissimulation ploy of a stolen fat ram versus the biblical and patristic narrative of the Lamb of God and Son of Man. Nonetheless, it might be argued that since birth is the way of all flesh, a triumphant integration of a duality, i.e. the mother and the father, but also the mother and the child, and since God has chosen to body forth His own Son through birth from the Virgin Mary, it is hardly inappropriate to centre the mystery of

²² Throughout the Middle Ages the Eucharist designated both sacramental communion as food (i.e. eating God, cf. Jn. 6.51-52) and a ritual recapitulation of Crucifixion (i.e. suffering and death as the ultimate experience of the Christian deity's human nature). Paradoxically, the Eucharistic body of Christ would connote in the central and later Middle Ages, as Kathleen Biddick (146-49) has cogently remarked, both the classical body, elevated (spiritually and physically) and therefore monumental, and the grotesque body, broken and bleeding (the Crucifixion as *crucor*, according to Bynum), hence liable to defilement. The Eucharist's rather understated grotesqueness had to do with its food quality in both senses, as wafer baked by a woman and as extraordinary aliment prepared by the priest (in a potent role reversal) for the communicants. Eucharistic communion, therefore, amounted to eating Christ's flesh, an instance of "transcendent cannibalism" (viz. theophagy as the path to deification) wont to stir the Christians' aversion and the non-Christians' ridicule (Rubin 360; Bynum n. 8) ever since early Christian times. Hence the theologians' paradoxical explication, intended to obviate a visceral response to the "horror of the blood" (Berengar of Tours), that in the Eucharist only the elements (species) were broken or masticated and underwent digestion, putrefaction and excretion, not the reality (*res*) of Christ's body, which in fact provided for deification (Pelikan 198). Drawing on Ambrose, figures as different as James of Vitry, John of Peckham and Roger Bacon extolled the benevolence of the divinity in veiling the awesome view of flesh and blood. Any alleged flesh and/or blood(y) apparition – whether assessed as genuinely Christian or heretical, God-sent or a token of demonic possession – would by no means go unnoticed, all the more so as it seemed to run counter to, by paroxistically playing up, the 12th-century theology of sacramentality.

²³ "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5.5 NKJV); "And whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23.12; Lk. 14.11).

the Nativity on the body giving birth – which, though never shown as such, is grotesque all the same – and even to reduplicate it, thereby focusing on the body with all its worldly mishaps and (dis)order. Only when the old scores have been settled one way or another, can ordinary mortals perceive the hierarchical sublimation of supreme, spiritual order and harmony, and the Angel can point downwards to the Nativity in Bethlehem. Ironically, though, trying to account for the ‘naturalness’ of the body issue in a Nativity play can arguably uncover an unwarranted meaning of the term “subplot”: the prefix *sub-* retains its *subversive undertone* and may intimate how the plot it describes *undermines* some of the official culture’s assumptions framing this text. By bringing to the fore the underside of hegemonic language (the Christian discursive formation), *Secunda Pastorum* not only parodically over-embodies the medieval doctrine of analogies and correspondences in its countless reduplications and perverted biblical allusions, but does so by staging (*dis*)*ordo familiae* in its various (*dis*)*guises* and thus ventriloquising the very discourses which call it to order.

Ovidius University Constanta, Romania

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