

Estella Ciobanu¹

The Scatological End of Eschatology in Mankind, or the Grotesque Body of/in the Text

Abstract: “[Y]owr body ys full of Englysh Laten,” New Guise insults Mercy in the Middle English play Mankind. Symbolically one of the four Daughters of God, yet here also an embodiment of the confessor-priest and, given his preacherly penchant, of the preacher so ubiquitous in the later Middle Ages, Mercy – the representative of the ecclesial hegemony – is perceived by his worldly-minded detractors as pompous in language and pre-eminently corporeal. New Guise’s is an irreverent metaphor for the cleric as the corporeal container of hybrid language, which ultimately makes Mercy a body/language hybrid. Mankind thrives as much on theatricality as on linguistic abuse, especially of Latin, whether as macaronic Latin or in parodic reduplication. Frequent recourse to Latin renders the play a specimen of both the overall polyglossia of the many-language culture and discursive formations of the time – in late medieval England as well as the Catholic church – and of the heteroglossia at work in any utterance, from phrase to discourse, which medieval religious theatre in the vernacular hinges upon. This paper aims to unravel the grotesque intertwining of scatological and eschatological discourses in a self-reflexive play centred on the body used and abused both physically and linguistically, and argues the inadvisability of “censoring” its irreverent heteroglossia.

Key words: Mankind (Middle English play), the grotesque, carnival(esque), heteroglossia, glossolalia, ventriloquism, poaching, Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau

¹ Ovidius University of Constanța, Romania