

## The Role of Music in Medieval Shepherds' Plays<sup>1</sup>

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Music, song and, to a certain extent, dance, feature in all medieval shepherds' plays, even if they are not musical dramas proper. A series of English, French, and Spanish<sup>2</sup> Nativity plays, composed and/or put into writing in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which shepherds feature as relevant characters, are here studied in order to ascertain the role that music plays in them. The following dramas are analyzed: The Chester *Painters' Play*; the Towneley *First and Second Shepherds' Plays*; The Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant*; The York *Chandlers' Play*; Arnould Gréban's *Le Mystère de la Passion de Notre Sauveur Jésus-Christ*; Marguerite de Navarre's *Comédie de la Nativité de Jésus-Christ*; Fray Íñigo de Mendoza's *Vita Christi*; Juan del Encina's *Égloga Representada en la Mesma Noche de Navidad*; Lucas Fernández's *Égloga o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Redemptor Jesucristo* and *Auto o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Señor Iesu Christo* and Gil Vicente's *Auto Pastoril Castellano*, *Auto de los Reyes Magos*, *Auto de los Cuatro Tiempos*<sup>3</sup>. The authors of these plays employ musical turns for a series of purposes; mainly, to mark the climax and determine the pace and development of each drama, to define the moral quality of characters, and to help explain the spiritual changes undergone by certain characters.

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<sup>1</sup> List of abbreviations: anon.: anonymous; c.: century; ca.: circa; comp.: composed; esp.: especially; i.e.: id est; MS., MSs.: manuscript(s); n.l.: no line number; *OED*: *Oxford English Dictionary*; pres.: preserved; prob.: probably; pub.: published; trans.: translation.

<sup>2</sup> Three of Gil Vicente's plays are included in this study as well. This author wrote in both Portuguese and Spanish, and even in a mixture of both languages. For a critical analysis on his work see Fernández García & Pociña López.

<sup>3</sup> Some basic information on the authors (if any), plays and editions, arranged by language: 1) English: Chester *Painters' Play*, (anon., prob. comp. late 15<sup>th</sup> c.; pres. in late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> c. MSs.: Lumiansky & Mills; Towneley *First and Second Shepherds' Plays* (anon. prob. comp. late 15<sup>th</sup> c.; pres. in a late 15<sup>th</sup> c. MS.): Stevens & Cawley; Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant* (anon., prob. comp. late 15<sup>th</sup> c., pres. in a 19<sup>th</sup> c. printed text): King & Davidson; York *Chandlers' Play* (anon. prob. comp. late 15<sup>th</sup> c., pres. in a late 15<sup>th</sup> c. MS.): Beadle. 2) French: Arnould Gréban (ca. 1425-ca.1495). *Le Mystère de la Passion de Notre Sauveur Jésus-Christ* (ca.1452), Combarieu du Grès & Subrenat; Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549). *Comédie de la Nativité de Jésus-Christ* (ca. 1530), Skrzyszewska & Tylus. 3) Spanish: Fray Íñigo de Mendoza (1425-1507), *Vita Christi* (first pub. in 1482), *Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes*. Juan del Encina (1469-1529), *Égloga Representada en la Mesma Noche de Navidad* (first pub. in 1496), *Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes*. Lucas Fernández (1474-1541), *Egloga o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Redemptor Jesucristo* and *Auto o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Señor Iesu Christo* (c. 1500, pub. in 1514), *Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes*. 4) Luso-Spanish: Gil Vicente (1470-1536), *Auto Pastoril Castellano* (1502), *Auto de los Reyes Magos* (1503), Proyecto TESORO, Universidad Carlos III, Madrid; *Auto de los Cuatro Tiempos* (1516), *Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes*.

A comparative approach seems to be particularly appropriate in the case of medieval drama, for, as Richardson argues, "... it allows us to distinguish what may be seen as variants on a universal given theme as the result of certain local conditions of place, associations, or tradition..." (259). Shepherds' plays mostly consist of spoken dialogues, and therefore songs and music make up only a short section of the dramatic action. Music however, seems to be essential in all types of drama, particularly those performed in the late Middle Ages, perhaps because the earliest known dramatic texts originated within the solemn liturgy of the Church, which invariably involved the chanting of prayers and hymns. The numerous *Officium Pastorum* tropes, composed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which rapidly spread throughout Europe, were in fact sung antiphonally as part of the liturgy of the mass or the canonical hours. Those tropes, which basically enacted St. Luke's shepherds' episode<sup>4</sup>, followed in the footsteps of the *Visitatio Sepulchri* which, in turn, had developed from the *Quem Quaeritis*, first recorded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that all English Nativity plays include three shepherds may simply point to the fact that they originate in the three Marys, found both in the original *Quem Quaeritis* and in the subsequent *Visitatio Sepulchri*, even if some scholars suggest that they may derive from the three Magi, present in the *Ordo Stellae*.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, 'three' stands out as a significant number in the Bible, the tradition of the Church and medieval culture in general: there are three persons of the Holy Trinity, three theological virtues, Noah had three sons, there are three ages of Man, three parts of the known world, three enemies of the human soul, and so on and so forth.<sup>7</sup> Luke's unnamed, unnumbered, undetermined shepherds served as particularly useful tools in the hands of playwrights who tried to turn them into representatives of mankind, thus enabling the audience to identify with them. For instance, in Fray Íñigo's<sup>8</sup> *Vita Christi*, the shepherds, who are intended to relate to the audience,<sup>9</sup> introduce a comic relief to make the work more attractive:

...pues razón fue declarar  
estas chufas de pastores  
para poder recrear,  
despertar y renovar  
la gana de los letores (stanza 157)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Luke 2: 8-22.

<sup>5</sup> For an account of the origin and development of *Officium Pastorum* and Liturgical drama see, for instance, Young, II, 2-28; Chambers, II, book III, Donovan, and Castro.

<sup>6</sup> See, Lumiansky and Mills, II, 102, and also Young, II, Ch. XVIII.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion on the symbology of number three in medieval times, see Wailes 112-9, 132-37 and 146-53.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on Fray Íñigo's Christmas plays, see Stern.

<sup>9</sup> Fray Íñigo's work was in fact a dramatic poem.

<sup>10</sup> Trans.: "the reason to design/ These pastoral pranks/ was to entertain/ quicken and renew/ the readers' interest." (All translations into English by the author).

One of the devices meant to enhance the appeal of those plays is no doubt music. Dutka, when studying the English Mystery Plays, found that "... [music] is used in conjunction with the three components of drama: to delineate character, to establish setting, and to advance action" (6). The musical turns are also employed as a means to draw a line between the unredeemed postlapsarian world and redeemed mankind. A similar distinction operates with regards to characters, for the shepherds, who stand for fallen man<sup>11</sup>, undergo a substantial transformation concerning their musical skill after their encounter with the angel (in the English and French plays) or when they hear of Jesus's birth via another character (in the Spanish plays).<sup>12</sup> In this sense, all dramatic shepherds present a dual nature; on the one hand they are European herdsmen—the numerous references to locations, daily routine, clothing and accouterments indicate that it is so—and therefore a contemporary audience would have most likely considered them real shepherds of their own time. On the other hand, they also stand for biblical, though fictitious, shepherds who live in a postlapsarian world.

In most cases, music virtually divides each play into two nearly symmetric halves, thus contributing to a sense of scene division which otherwise would not have been evident. As a matter of fact, the musical turns help solve the problem of the passing of time, and at the same time function as markers for entrances, exits, the coming down of heavenly creatures, and even the conclusion of the stage business itself. Since Heaven is usually described both in medieval drama and in the tradition of the Church as a musical place,<sup>13</sup> angels, as its direct representatives, sing "heavenly"—that is, harmonious—songs, thus turning their scenes into musical episodes.

In nearly all the plays analyzed, shepherds cease their quarrels about earthly issues as soon as they hear the angel's celestial chanting, after which they gradually turn their minds to heavenly matters and express their yearning to visit and worship Baby Jesus, finally becoming the spokesmen of Christ's salvific message. In those texts in which the angel does not feature as a character, shepherds begin to sing as soon as they learn—through other characters—that Jesus is born. Singing, therefore, marks the beginning of a journey—both physical and spiritual—which ends up turning those rough, ignorant, "European" contemporary rustics of the beginning into biblical converts who travel to Bethlehem. Both the singing and the trip

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<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, the shepherds are not Christian when the plays open because Jesus has not yet been born.

<sup>12</sup> The only Spanish dramatic work in which the angel appears is Fray Íñigo de Mendoza's *Vita Christi*.

<sup>13</sup> The Tridentine preface to the mass includes the following recurring formula: "Et ideo cum Angelis et Archangelis, cum Thronis et Dominationibus cumque omni militia caelestis exercitus himnum gloriae tuae canimus, sine fine dicentes" (301).

usually trigger the creation of a new atmosphere, leading up to the enactment of the Nativity episode proper, for which the preceding action has been a mere introductory sequence or induction. As a matter of fact, in Marguerite de Navarre's text, a choir of angels sing to a group of shepherds and shepherdesses who, according to a stage direction, "... *s'en vont chantans*" (l. 671). On the other hand, the shepherds of the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors*' are said to sing a folk song on their departure: "There the scheppadis syngis 'Ase I Owt Rodde'" (l. 263). In the same manner, the Chester *Painters*' indicates: "Tunc cantabunt et postea Tertius Pastor (Here singe 'troy, loly, loly, loo.')" (l. 447). In Fernandez's *Égloga o Farsa* the shepherds suggest: "Pues ¡sus!, ¡todos a cantar/ con voluntad muy graciosa! (ll.599-600)<sup>14</sup> and in his *Auto o Farsa* they say, "Cantemos/ y más aquí no paremos" (ll. 531-32)<sup>15</sup>.

In all cases music marks the conclusion of the play. In the Spanish texts, shepherds mention a trip to Bethlehem even if they do not travel and never actually meet Jesus, but still exit the stage while singing a *villancico*.<sup>16</sup> In the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors*', the shepherds leave the stage and then a group of prophets appears, a fact indicated by music: "There the sheppardis syngith ageyne and goth forthe of þe place; and the ij profettis cumyth in..." (l. 312). The Towneley *First Shepherds*' ends thus: "With myrth and gam, / To the lawde of this lam / Syng we in sight" (ll. 722-4). Similarly, one of the shepherds says in the Towneley *Second Shepherds*' "To syng ar we bun-- / Let take on Loft!" (ll. 1087-8) before the play ends, and the Chester *Painters*' "Amen, all singe you; good men farewell yee" (ll. 691-2) also extends a final invitation to sing. In Marguerite de Navarre's *Comédie* an angel asks all other angels to join in ("Chantons, car tous est consommé et fait" ; l. 1274) after which they all sing a French religious song, thus bringing the nativity episode to its conclusion. In Vicente's *Auto de los Reyes Magos* the last stage direction indicates that all characters sing after the Magi have offered their gifts: "Y cantando así todos juntamente, ofrecen los reyes sus regalos. Y así muy alegremente cantando se van" (n. l.)<sup>17</sup>.

Most Shepherd's plays consists of two clearly defined sections, namely a first comic or farcical episode and a final Nativity play proper (see Happé, 2002: 29-43). This division is particularly evident in the two Towneley plays, but is also apparent in Lucas Fernandez's *Égloga o Farsa* and *Auto o Farsa*, and in Fray Íñigo's *Vita Christi*, in which one or several

<sup>14</sup> Trans.: "and so, let us all sing / with a very good will;"

<sup>15</sup> Trans.: "Let us sing now endlessly."

<sup>16</sup> A Spanish and Portuguese type of folksong. "The music...was...used in a species of dramatic interludes in the vulgar tongue, which were sung, not acted, at certain intervals of the service. These pieces had the name of *Villancicos*, from *Villano*, a Clown, shepherds and shepherdesses being the interlocutors in these pastorals." (OED).

<sup>17</sup> Trans.: "And so while they all sing together the Magi offer their gifts. And while singing so happily they all leave."

shepherds first appear as clownish figures; they are very keen on eating, drinking and swearing, and are easily carried away by brawls and quarrels, thus giving rise to several farcical scenes. Mak's exploits in the Towneley *Second Shepherds'* is a well-known example of a comic episode, but Bonifacio is also rather clownish in Lucas Fernandez's *Égloga o Farsa*.<sup>18</sup> Such types are usually characterized by their lack of redemption; that is why in Fray Íñigo's *Vita Christi* the angel refers to the shepherds as "pobrezillos pecadores"<sup>19</sup> (stanza 122), while in Vicente's *Auto de los Reyes Magos* the "Caballero" (Knight) regards them as beasts: "¡Qué linage tan bestial,/ animal,/ este bruto pastoriego!"(n.l.).<sup>20</sup> In Lucas Fernandez's plays the shepherds even exhibit certain pagan traits, as their comments on magic and witchcraft reveal, a fact that enhances their unredeemed state<sup>21</sup>

Music and/or harmony—or rather the lack of it—feature as essential elements that somehow help describe the stage business in the farcical induction. Among other things, music stands out as a useful device to distinguish between good and evil. Thus, unredeemed characters and hellish creatures tend to appear as having a poor musical skill (they are terrible singers and/or players) or as totally unmusical characters. In this sense, Gréban alternates in his play between biblical and hellish scenes, each one of the latter called by the author "scène infernale." Needless to say, Lucifer and his hellish crew feature prominently in them. Actually, those devils play instruments and sing, but their performance is very poor when compared with that of the angels. In fact each "scène infernale" is characterized by "bruit infernal" that is, cacophonous sound and sheer noise. Satan himself complains about this lack of musical inclination:

Qu'est-ce que c'est que tout ce remueménage ?  
 Lucifer, roi des démons, quand vous voulez chanter ou rire, on croiret  
 entendre les hurlements d'un loup affamé... Quant à mes rires et à mes chants, c'est le  
 malheur qui son plus que difformité ; mon chant et devenu lamentation ; mon rire, désespoir ;  
 ma lumière, insondable ténèbre...(Gréban 100).

Astraoh, another devil, tries in vain to find the right tune when playing a trumpet: "Ça, c'est la note pour me donnez le ton!" (Gréban 101), thus revealing that his ear is unmusical. A trumpet is also employed by the demons of this play to call their meetings: "Gare a la danse des bâtons! La trompette sonne, couron voir: quelque réunion d'enfer doit se préparer" (Gréban 101). However, the noise produced is such that it becomes unbearable: "Cerbèr: La

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed study of the figure on the clownish shepherd in Spanish literature before Lope de Vega see Brotherton.

<sup>19</sup> Trans.: "Poor little sinners"

<sup>20</sup> Trans.: "what a beastly/ and animal-like/ lineage, that of these brutish shepherds."

<sup>21</sup> See *Égloga o Farsa* l. 166, and *Auto o Farsa* ll. 203-6.

convocation me casse les oreilles! Ne peut on se faire represente?” (Gréban 101). A wind instrument is similarly used in the Chester *Painters’* for the summoning of shepherds, since Primus Pastor first yells his mate’s name and when he fails to appear resorts to his horn: “...Thow maye not here excepte I blow, / as ever have I heale” (ll. 47-8). When they try to call Tudd’s attention, the third shepherd, Primus Pastor remarks that Tudd is deaf and may not come at once. A few minutes later he blows his horn again to call their boy-servant Garcius (ll.159-156) who refuses to attend the meeting since he bears a grudge against his masters.

There has been some controversy as to whether or not Garcius actually sings, since the Latin stage directions in the various manuscripts preserved contradict each other, but line 205 suggests that the song is performed by Garcius himself, who in turn hints that the other three shepherds are unmusical. That might well be another reason why he refuses to attend his masters’ summoning: “...your sose, your sowse, your saverraye, / your sittinge without any songs ! / One this hill I hold me here.” (ll. 204-6).<sup>22</sup> Eventually, Primus Pastor admits that his musical skill is not as good as the angel’s, and describes all heavenly creatures as wonderful singers: “He had a mych better voyce then I have, / as in heaven all other have so” (ll. 406-407).

The association of noise/poor musical skill with the devil also features in Marguerite de Navarre’s play.<sup>23</sup> Satan’s presence is in fact described as “noisy” by the second angel: “Qu’est devenu son bruit, sa renommée? / De son Cuyder n’est devenu que fume” (ll. 1260-1). In Gréban’s drama *Lucifer* commands the devils to sing a “silete,” a term derived from the Latin “sileo” which literally means to become silent. If the devils’ musical performance amounts to a “silete” that would reinforce their own lack of musical skill<sup>24</sup> (“Avant de continuer, diables, rassamblez-vous et chantez / moi en chœur un silete qui soit digne de vous;” l.102). Similarly, in the Towneley *Second Shepherds’*, Mak’s illegitimate actions —i.e., stealing the sheep— match his poor qualities as a singer; hence Primus Pastor’s comment “Who is that pypys so poore?” (l. 283). A few lines later Mak intends to sing a lullaby but is immediately discouraged by the other shepherds: “hard I neuer none crak / so clere out of toyne. . .” (ll. 688-9). Mak is actually associated with the Devil and even with the Antichrist in the course of the play as can be seen in Secundus Pastor’s utterance “Mak the dewill in

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<sup>22</sup> For this discussion see Lumiansky and Mills, vol. II, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> Dutka points out that according to Satan and other devils music is regarded as a mere din or noise in a series of English Mystery plays (11-13).

<sup>24</sup> For the meaning of “silete” see De Combarieu du Grès and Subrenat, 471.

youre ee!” (l. 313).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in the Chester *Painters*, Primus Pastor, after hearing the angel sing, admits that he is not as skilled a singer as the angel: “He had a mych better voyce then I have, / as in heaven all other have so” (ll. 406-407).

A character’s inability to sing thus hints at his fallen, unredeemed spiritual state as in Vicente’s *Auto de los Cuatro Tiempos*, in which angels clearly sing (stage directions indicate “cantiga” or “canta,” i.e. “sings or chants”) while shepherds simply speak (“fala” according to a stage direction). Likewise, in Marguerite de Navarre’s play, there is a sharp contrast between the singing shepherds who have just worshiped Jesus in Bethlehem and the Devil, unable to sing, who tries to talk them into thinking that what they have seen is a mere delusion (ll. 964-91). Satan does not sing when he tempts the shepherds; furthermore, the shepherds’ own songs seem to shield them from any evil:

SATHAN.

Voilà un chant qui me rend tout transy.  
Quelle nouvelle est-ce qu’ilz ont ouye ?  
Leur compaignie en est fort resjouye ;  
Y auroit il point pour moy quelque Si ?

LES BERGERS, en chantant.

Une Vierge qui est mere,  
A un beau Filz enfenté  
Qui n’ha nul que Dieu pou Pere,  
Ce mot soit bien hault chanté (ll. 976-83).

Satan is eventually aware of his defeat and accepts the fact that Jesus is Savior. Finally, God the Father asks his angels to descend to the earth and encourages them to sing: “Anges, chantez, en voyant eslevé / Rien en son Tout, et Sathan reprouvé...” (1254-55); angels sing and praise their Creator (ll. 1275-9).

The aforementioned non-musical devils are not the only instances to be found in medieval drama. In Hildegard von Bingen’s *Ordo Virtutum* (“The Play of the Virtues”) a 12<sup>th</sup> c. musical morality play, Anima, a soul, is tempted by the Devil but is ultimately saved by the Virtues. All characters in the play sing, with the exception of Diabolus, whose speeches are written in prose and are spoken, not sung.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Stevens & Cawley, v. II, 501.

<sup>26</sup> See Dronke, esp. ll. 159-269.

Scholars have often pointed out the sophisticated approach to music in the Towneley *Second Shepherds*<sup>27</sup> an approach that is particularly evident in the assignation of parts when the shepherds decide to sing in order to pass the time:

- 1 Pastor. Lett me sing the tenory
- 2 Pastor. And I the tryble so hye.
- 3 Pastor. Then the meyn fall to me.  
Lett se how ye chauntt.<sup>28</sup>

A similar assignation of parts may be found in Gréban's play, at the moment in which the devils have a meeting to arrange their temptations on earth:

Astaroth : Vous allez entendre ce dont nous sommes capables en fait  
de chansons et de motets. Toi Satan, tu feras la basse, et je te soutiendrai ;  
Belzébuth, chantera la partie haute avec Bérich qui le doublera. (ll.102-103)

Unlike the English shepherds, the French devils are not good singers. A somewhat similar arrangement is evident in Del Enzina's *Égloga o Farsa*: "...y dos a dos cantiquemos / porque vamos ensayados" (ll.178-9).<sup>29</sup> Both Gréban's and the Towneley *Second Shepherds*' plays incorporate a great deal of precise musical terminology which is missing in other shepherds' plays (for example, it is not present in the Towneley *First Shepherds*').

It has already been pointed out that the English shepherds perform a "descant" in the Towneley *Second Shepherds*', which, according to Cooke Carpenter, is a sort of folk song (698). The type of song performed is also significant from the point of view of characterization: a shepherd always sings popular or folk songs in the vernacular, whereas an angel tends to perform solemn religious songs or chants in Latin, with the exception of the French plays in which angels also employ the vernacular. In de Navarre's play an angel sings "Gloire soit au Dieu des dieux, / Et d'icelle tout remplisse..." (ll.612-23; in the Spanish plays shepherds invariably sing a *villancico*, or folk song (see above, footnote 15). In the English plays, apart from the aforementioned "discant," there are several popular songs as well. For example, in the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors*' the shepherds are said to sing "Ase I Owt Rodde;" (l. 263), and in the Chester *Painter's* they sing "troyly, loly, loly, loo," (l.447) both of which point to a popular origin.<sup>30</sup> In Vicente's *Auto Pastoril Castellano*, Gil sings a rather plain song as he comes onstage: "Menga Gil me quita el sueño, que ño

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<sup>27</sup> See Dutka 110-12, and Carpenter.

<sup>28</sup> In a polyphonic composition, *tenory* is the lowest voice, *tryble* the highest and *meyne* the middle part. This clearly indicates that musically-trained actors must have been used for the performance (Stevens & Cawley, v. II, 499-500).

<sup>29</sup> Trans.: "Let us sing in pairs / so that we rehearse before we get there."

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of the non-religious songs contained in the English Mystery Plays see Dutka, 65-81.

duermo” (n.l.).<sup>31</sup> In Gréban’s work for instance, the shepherds sing popular music in the vernacular too; they include a formula –“Chanton Noël, etc”– which is sung chorally a number of times (ll. 673, 690, 695, 700. 705,710,715, 720).

Even though the actual lyrics sung by Angels in the English plays are not specified in the texts, some of the stage directions suggest that they sing Latin songs derived from the liturgical services. This is particularly evident in the Chester *Painters*’: “Tunc cantet Angelus: Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis” (l. 337). Similarly, in the Towneley *Second Shepherds*’ a direction indicates that “Angelus cantat ‘Gloria in excelsis...’” (l. 919). The angel, as God’s representative, stands for heaven’s harmony, whose high-quality vocal music is even acknowledged by the rude shepherds themselves: in Lucas Fernández’s *Égloga o Farsa Marcelo* says “¿No vos digo que no ha vn hora / que vn ángel vino a desora, / cantando por dulces artes? (ll. 373-5).<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in the *Auto o Farsa*, Juan rejoices in the following manner: “¡Quán alegre estoy! ¡Quánto / desde que oý aquel dulce canto! (ll. 260-70).<sup>33</sup> In Vicente’s *Auto Pastoril*, Gil declares after the angel has sung “¡Oh, qué tónica acordada de tan fuertes caramillos!” (n.l.).<sup>34</sup> In the York *Chandlers*’ the angel’s song is described as a “noble noyse” (l. 71)<sup>35</sup> while in Fray Íñigo’s the angel is said to sing “con çelestial dulçedumbre.”<sup>36</sup> In the Coventry *Shearmen and Taylors*’, Pastor III summons the other herdsmen so that they may “... here there armony” (l.253). Pastor I is also impressed by “the swettness of þer songe” (l.255). In the Towneley *First Shepherds*’, it is the heavenly music that finally convinces the shepherds that they have seen a celestial creature, namely an angel:

I wold that we knew  
Of this song so fre  
Of the angell;  
I hard by hys steuen,  
He was send downe fro heuen (ll. 588-92).

In the Towneley *Second Shepherds*’, Primus Pastor describes the angelic music as “a meruell” (l. 935), and the shepherds are able to describe the sophisticated nature of the angel’s song by means of rather technical jargon:

Say, what was his song?  
hard ye not how he crakyd it,

<sup>31</sup> Trans.: “Gil awakes me and I don’t sleep.”

<sup>32</sup> Trans.: “Haven’t I told you that not even an hour ago/ An angel suddenly appeared/ singing sweetly and artfully?”

<sup>33</sup> Trans.: “How happy am I/ Since I heard that sweet chant!”

<sup>34</sup> Trans.: “What a chordal tonic comes out of those strong flutes!”

<sup>35</sup> The actual moment when the angel sings the Gloria is missing in manuscript. This part must have contained the angel’s Gloria and his spoken message. See Beadle 130.

<sup>36</sup> Trans.: “with heavenly sweetness.”

Thre brefes<sup>37</sup> to a long?  
Yee, Mary, he hakt it:  
was no crochett<sup>38</sup> wrong  
nor no thying that lakt it (ll.946-51).

Nooke Carpenter argues that such dwelling on musical terminology on the part of the shepherds serves to link the farcical section with the nativity section (697). As a matter of fact, the coming of the angels brings about in all the plays both a new atmosphere and a gradual spiritual awareness in the shepherds. For instance, Fray Íñigo's Minguillo comments "¿No sientes fuerte plazer / en oír aquél cantar? (stanza 146).<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Shophron in de Navarre's play is deeply moved by the choir of angels: "Mon Dieu, quest ceci que j'ay veu? Qu'ay-je ouy? Qu'ay-je receu?" (ll.624-5) and then Philetine says "Au commencement peur j'avoye, / Mais après j'ay receu grand joye" (ll. 630-31).

The influence of heavenly music on the shepherds is such that they get carried away by its harmony and gradually cease their discord and quarrels. Any previous grotesque elements tend to disappear as they express their desire to meet Baby Jesus and learn about his salvific message; in the York *Chandlers' Play* after the angel's song, a stage direction indicates "*Et tunc cantant*" (l.64), and when Pastor II proposes "And make myrthe and melody, / With sange to seke our savyour" (ll. 84-5) it is indicated that "*Et tunc cantant.*" In Fernández *Égloga o Farsa* the stage directions specify "(Aquí se han de fincar de rodillas todos cuatro y cantar en canto de órgano:) *Et homo factum est; et homo factum est; et homo factum est.*"<sup>40</sup> In the *Auto o Farsa* Juan suggests "Pues devemos levantar / vn cantar con que llegemos" (ll.525-6),<sup>41</sup> to which the other two agree. They later call Minguillo and a *villancico* is both sung and danced (541). In the Coventry *Shear Men and Taylor's*, the shepherds sing after they hear the angel's song (l. 263). Uriel, in Gréban's play, asks all shepherds to join in as he sings: "Chantons en chœur un chant doux et harmonieux" (123) and a stage direction confirms that "*Alors tous chantent en chœur.*" Similarly, in Marguerite de Navarre's play the shepherds set off for Bethlehem and sing "Partons, chantons, tous ensemble d'accod" (l.670), after which they sing "Dansons, chantons, faisons rage" (l.672). In Vicente's *Auto Pastoril Castellano* the author clearly uses the act of the angel singing to highlight the shepherds' transformation. When they present their gifts to Jesus in a somewhat

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<sup>37</sup> A *breve* has one half or one third the time value of a *long* (Dutka, 95, 101).

<sup>38</sup> This is the earliest use of the term *crochette* in English with musical connotations besides its appearance in *Promptorium Parvulorum* (c. 1440). It suggests that the play was not composed before 1400, since the term, although recorded before, was not established until 1400. For a whole discussion on the terms and their origins see Traver.

<sup>39</sup> Trans.: "Don't you feel a deep pleasure / When you hear him singing?"

<sup>40</sup> Trans.: (Here the four of them should kneel down while singing a song accompanied by an organ) *Et homo...*

<sup>41</sup> Trans.: So we must start/ a song when we get there."

moving ceremony, the boisterous, selfish shepherds have been completely transformed.

The characters then sing and dance in front of the Holy Family:

Zagala santa bendita,  
graciosa y morenita, nuestro ganado visita,  
que ningún mal no le venga (n.l).<sup>42</sup>

The harmonious singing of the angels also makes the shepherds identify themselves with heavenly creatures; one of the means to achieve such a transformation is the gradual use and/or understanding of Latin. That may be the reason behind the fact that Fernández's shepherds sing a "*Et homo factum est*" (l.460). On the other hand, one of Fray Íñigo's *pastores* tries to imitate Latin without actually mastering it:

Aún tengo en la mi mamoria sus cantos,  
asmo que creo unos gritavan vitoria,  
los otros cantavan groria otros indaçielçis Deo,  
otros Dios es pietatis,  
otros et in tierra paz homanibus vanitatis,  
otros buena voluntatis... (stanza 155)<sup>43</sup>.

Pastor II in the York *Chandlers' Play* explains "Glore glorea in exselsis"— þat wase þer song." (l.258), and Pastor I specifies "...And that we ma syng in his presence / "Et in tarra pax omynibus" (ll.361-435). In the Chester *Painter's*, the shepherds discuss the angel's apparently incomprehensible lyrics until they finally make out that they are "Gloria in excelsis Deo." The shepherds in the Towneley *First Shepherds'* not only manage to imitate Latin but even attempt to recite Virgil since, according to Church tradition, the Roman poet may be regarded as one of the "prophets" who had foretold the birth of Christ: "Virgill in his poetré / Sayde...: Iam noua progenies cello demittitur alto..." (ll. 556-9).

Although the use of Latin falls outside the scope of this paper, it is worth noticing that it enjoys a significant dramatic function in medieval plays, for not only was Latin used for stage directions but it often appeared in the speeches (or songs) of holy and virtuous characters to signify their compliance with the official doctrine of the Church.<sup>44</sup> The singing of the Latin "Gloria" for instance, becomes a recurrent element in most shepherds' dramas. In Vicente's play, Gil even cites the "Song of Songs," thus making evident his command of Latin as

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<sup>42</sup> Trans.: "Holy blessed girl,/ sweet and dark haired, our flocks she visits/we wish her well."

<sup>43</sup> Trans.: "I still have his chants in my mind,/I believe that some of them were about victory,/ the others about glory and some others said "indaçielcis Deo"/ others mentioned "Dios es pietatis,"/ others "et in tierra paz homanibus vanitatis,"/others "buena voluntatis..."

<sup>44</sup> See Ridruejo & Portillo, esp. pp. 153-8

he addresses the Virgin Mary with such compliments as “columba mea ferrosa” or “tota pulchra arnica mea” (n. l.). His fellow shepherds are astonished by his sudden sophistication: “SILVESTRE: Con eso hablas Latin,/ tan a punto que es placer (n. l).”<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, music, apart from playing a very important aesthetic role in all medieval shepherds' plays, also serves a series of significant dramatic, moral and ideological purposes. It certainly helps make the action progress, it divides the stage business into several sections or scenes, it helps in the characterization, and illustrates the profound conversion undergone by a number of earthly rustic shepherds who eventually become redeemed devout Christians. As such, music has both a theatrical and a theological function in the medieval shepherds' plays.

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<sup>45</sup> Trans.: “Thus you speak Latin/ in such a delightful way.”

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