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THE *PROCESSUS TALENTORUM* (TOWNELEY XXIV) AND THE CULTURE OF LAUGHTER IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH DRAMA

Atanas Manchorov
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

This article examines the manifestations of macaronic style in medieval religious drama ("The Processus Talentorum"), in particular the comic and satiric effects of that style, the hypostases as an object of ridicule, the new meaning of the designation "dominus dominorum," etc. Our thesis is that the strict canonical word loses its single-toned quality against a backdrop of medieval laughter and becomes merely one among other languages.

Key words: *The Processus Talentorum* (Towneley XXIV), macaronic style, Bakhtin, Pontius Pilate, dominus dominorum, the Holy Trinity

The transition from the initial choral dramatizations of religious ritual to the cycles of mystery plays led to some momentous transformations associated with the ongoing secularization of medieval English drama. Accordingly, we shall try to show that under the impact of the culture of laughter, which usually involves elements of low comedy and realism, the strict canonical word loses its single-toned quality and becomes merely one among many other languages.

Being unrestricted in space and time, the macaronic style provides a pan-European context and develops its huge demonologizing potential in various intrageneric systems, including that of drama. This manner of utterance has ancient roots. Behind the "unusual" cross-linguistic structures peek the faces of national tongues that emerged after the fall of the Roman Empire and the ensuing decline of its language. In any case, this was the situation in Western Europe where elements of classical and medieval Latin were in close contact with vernacular languages. Although the linguistic and stylistic roots of macaronic poetry go much further back in time, to Decimius Magnus Ausonius' verse (c. 310 – 395) in Greek and Latin, it reaches full maturity as late as the 15th century, i.e. almost concurrently with the annual performances of the Wakefield mystery plays. In order to avoid the inconvenience of mapping any possible contactological

relations between Italy and Britain, it would be more appropriate to talk about macaronic effects, in spite of the fact that some researchers tend to express no reservations about using the term, e.g. "macaronic verses" (see: Schlauch 1987: 78; Carlson 2006: 31), to refer to English drama. This phenomenon was ubiquitous in the Middle Ages and occurred in many Western European countries and in many genres. We shall cite here only a few examples: the gospel book of Munsterbilzen Abbey (c. 1130) offering a mix of Old Dutch and Latin, the *Carmina Burana* manuscript (c. 1250) – many of its poetic and dramatic texts are satirical, irreverent, and even downright bawdy, some of them being a mix of Latin and Middle High German or French, – the political poems in Middle English (e.g. "On the Rebellion of Jack Straw" preserved in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 369 and in the Bodlean Library, Oxford, MS. Digby 196, fol. 20 v.; see Krochalis and Peters, eds. 1982: 95-97), and, of course, *The Processus Talentorum* (T XXIV). There is every indication that Bakhtin conceptualizes this problem in terms of the growth of realism in literature, as is evident from his concern with the disintegration of monologic discourse in the intentionally dialogized bilingual speech patterns of the macaronic style (Bakhtin 1981: 78), the clash between Latin and the vernaculars of Western Europe (Bakhtin 1981: 79), and the significance of the lower stratum of kitchen imagery to medieval drama (Bakhtin 1984: 184). Thus, it is no accident that he discusses Teofilo Folengo's work several times and makes mention of his macaronic poem "Baldus" (1517), which is written in a blend of Latin and Italian dialects in hexameter verse and which wielded some influence over Rabelais. In the supplementary materials for his Ph.D. defense (*Russ.* "Fransua Rable v istorii realizma,"[1] Nov. 15 1946) Bakhtin clearly defines macaronic poetry as one of the manifestations of linguistic parodies (Bakhtin 2008: 997), and in "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse" he points out the contribution of linguistic satires – again macaronic poetry along with "The Letters of Obscure People" – to the "interanimation of languages, the measuring of them against their current reality and their epoch" (Bakhtin 1981: 82). The macaronic style is associated with a very deep split in the literary and linguistic consciousness of the age when there was tension between two literary communities: of scholars, clerics and students who were still using Latin, and, on the other hand, of poets, minstrels, and storytellers who were orienting themselves to vernaculars without being able to completely ignore the influence of Latin. Clarification is needed here. The narrow meaning of the term is linked to

[1] "François Rabelais in the History of Realism."

adding Latin case inflections to a national language, but its broader definition that we consider here also includes the practice of mixing Latin with other languages (cf. Morgan, comp. Preface ix). Obviously, the macaronic style is an inextricable part of the semantic field of the culture of laughter, as we are particularly interested in the fact that the elements of low comedy, such as kitchen imagery and the images of the material bodily lower stratum, are significant for morality plays, farces, and other serio-comical forms of drama (see Bakhtin 1984: 184).

The pejorative overtones and heteroglot speech patterns of medieval macaronic writing often provide comic relief by depicting the object in a disgraceful light. The comic degradation of lofty ideals is particularly notable in "The Processus Talentorum" (Towneley XXIV)[2] – it is inspired by the evangelical motif of the Roman soldiers who are throwing dice during the Crucifixion for Jesus' robe (see John 19. 23 – 24). The play begins with the speech of Pontius Pilate, the first stanza being entirely in Latin, and the next few stanzas turning into a bilingual combination of Middle English and Latin verses[3]:

(2)
Stynt, I say, gyf men place / quia sum dominus dominorum!
he that agans me says / rapietur lux oculorum;
Therefor gyf ye me space / ne tendam vim brachiorum,
And then get ye no grace / contestor Iura polor*um*,
Caueatis;
Rewle I the Iure,
Maxime pure,
Towne quoq*ue* rure,
Me paueatis.

Stop it, I say! Make way, people, because I am the Lord of lords; / He who speaks against me, the light of [his] eyes shall be plucked out; / So make room for me lest I put forth the strength of [my] arms, / For then you shall have no grace, / I call the powers of heaven to witness. / Beware! / I govern according to law, / Exceedingly justly, / Town[s] and [the] country, / Tremble before me.

[2] The meaning of the title is "The Play about the Coins" or "The Play about Money", which is out of key with the play's content. Rosemary Woolf argues that it would be more appropriate to use *talorum* (dice) instead of *talentorum* (money; Woolf 403). The play's title, then, would be "The Play of the Dice."

[3] The translations are mine unless otherwise specified – A.M.

(3)
Stemmate regali / kyng athus gate me of Pila;
Tramite legali / Am I ordand to reyn apon Iuda,
No*mine* wlgari / pownce pilat, that may ye well say,
Qui bene wlt fari / shuld całł me fownder of all lay.
Iudeor*um*
Iura guberno,
pleasse me and say so,
O*mn*ia firmo
Sorte deor*um*.

[I am of] royal pedigree – / King Atus begot me on Pila. / As the law requires, I have been appointed to rule over Judaea, / My name in the native tongue / [is] Pontius Pilate, which is easy for you to say. / He who is willing to speak well / should call me 'giver of all law'. / To the Jews / [I] administer justice, / [so] please me and say so, / I support everything / By the prophecy of the gods.

(4)
Myghty lord of ałł / me Cesar magnificauit;
Downe on knees ye fałł / greatt God me *sancti*ficauit,
Me to obey ouer ałł / regi reliquo q*uas*i dauid,
hanged hy that he sałł / hoc iussu*m* q*ui* rep*ro*bauit,
I swere now;
Bot ye youre hed*is*
Bare in thies sted*is*
Redy my swerde is
Of thaym to shere now.

Caesar has exalted me as great lord; / Fall down on your knees, for the great god has sanctified me / To obey me above all like a present-day King David. / He that hath disobeyed this command shall be hanged high,[4] / I swear now, / Unless you conduct yourself prudently / In these places. / My sword is ready / To cut off your heads now.

(5)
Atrox armipotens / I graunt men girth by my good grace,
Atrox armipotens / most mighty callyd in ylk place,
vir quasi cunctipotens / I graunt men girth by my good
grace,

[4] Cf. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14.21).

Tota refert huic gens / that none is worthier in face,
Quin eciam bona mens / doiƭh trowƭh and right bi my
trew lays,
Silete!
In gen*er*ali,
Sic speciali,
yit agane byd I
Iura tenete.
("Processus Talentorum" ll. 10-46)

Fierce and strong in battle, I give freedom to people by my good grace, / [I am] fierce and strong in battle [and] called the strongest everywhere, / A man [who] seems all-powerful, I give freedom to people by my good / grace. / It is of importance to the whole nation that nobody else's face is nobler. / Yes, indeed, my good mind judges honestly and justly by my / true laws. / Silence! / With all / and each of you, / yet again, I plead [with you]/ To obey the law.[5]

Pilate shows disrespect for heavenly matters on various levels. He debases the concept of "law" as formulated in the Holy Scriptures: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4.11). His stream of invective may also be considered downright sacrilege since it affects some basic assumptions of Christianity: "And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12.32; cf. Luke 12.10). The rant of this medieval Pilate is a travesty of The Gospel of Matthew and is, therefore, blasphemous in that an ordinary man, even if it is a Roman governor, dares to associate himself with the Holy Ghost. The above quotation, which combines language horizons of different cultural traditions, clearly shows how the bilingualism of the macaronic style undermines official ideology and energizes the culture of laughter. Pilate's image, involved in a tricky area such as the parodying of biblical style, is made up of several distinct semantic layers: the life of Jesus, the gospel stories about him, the agreement on the content of the New Testament, and the Roman's portrayal in medieval drama. The first three are part and parcel of the long history of the canon since the New Testament was put into writing by about A.D. 150, and, judging from the earliest surviving document from 367,

[5] For all four stanzas I have consulted the English translation of Cawley and Stevens (1986).

consensus on its constituent parts was not achieved until late in the fourth century – it was then that St. Athanasius, in his annual message to the Egyptian Churches, described the twenty-seven New Testament books (Lindberg 15), as he used the word "canonized" (*κανονιζόμενα* – Brakke 395) with regard to the two main parts of the Bible. When these semantic layers are constitutive of an ideologically-laden anachronistic blend, the latter will become a battleground of opposing language forces and the gambling for Christ's coat will be given ambivalent, i.e. (non)canonical, treatment. Pontius Pilate assumes great responsibility as judge of God's Son: all four gospels (Matt. 27.11-26; Mark 15.1-15; Luke 23.1-7, 13-25; John 18:29-19:16), regardless of the differences in some details, portray the Roman procurator in a manner consistent with the impending tragedy of the Crucifixion. Quite understandably, just as the New Testament accounts are not even remotely relevant to any comic treatment whatsoever, so medieval culture fails to preserve Pilate's single-toned representation intact beyond the realm of canonical discourse. However, his personality in the Middle English mystery plays does not remain the same but changes in accord with the thought patterns of the day. Particularly, in the Wakefield pageants he is not only "cruder" and "stronger" but also "evil" and "malicious" (Davenport 27), which is at variance with the accounts of the four Evangelists.[6] Therefore, depicting his point of view in drama puts religious dogma to the test on multiple levels. The obvious tension between the "sacred" and the "secular" as a result of the combination of the canonical word and the style of Pilate's utterance intensifies the dialectical contradiction in the hybrid construction and creates a comic effect that lowers the threshold of interpretation and attracts the audience's attention.

The sacredness of the New Testament event is held up to ridicule by adding the linguistic worldview of Pontius Pilate's macaronic speech to that of the Passion Week narrative. How does the two-leveledness of discourse come to fruition in macaronic poetry? In the latter's subtly organized linguistic parodies two opposing forces meet in the manner of the Latin-Italian hybrids in the macaronica verba of the Ciceronian purists

[6] Cf.: 1) "When Pilate saw he could prevail nothing . . . he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*" (Matt. 27.24); 2) "But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy" (Mark 15.9-10); 3) "Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let *him* go" (Luke 23.22); 4) "Pilate therefore went froth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him" (John 19.4) and "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him" (John 19.12).

(Bakhtin 1981: 81), namely the "high," "sacred" Latin language and a debasing profane vernacular. Taking advantage of the authoritative and authoritarian biblical word, the playwright weaves it into the speech of a person of another (pagan) cultural and religious background to confer "dignity" and "respect" on him. According to Bakhtin, the sonnets at the beginning of *Don Quixote* loose their true generic nature because of the parodic ambience of their framing context. And since in such cases "what results is not a sonnet, but rather the *image of a sonnet*" (Bakhtin 1981: 51), biblical discourse, on occurring in its receiving context, is likewise enclosed in quotation marks (cf. Bakhtin 1981: 69-70) which, regardless of the degree of their inherent intentionality, turn the imported verbal material into an ambiguous and two-leveled representation. The resistance of monologic discourse against entering the plane of another language cannot but lead to stylistic "transgressions" and cannot remain unnoticed. Pilate is a prominent figure in the gospel narratives, but his world is, as it were, an "alien body" in them: it is the product of another cosmogonic model and another culture, his mind is unreceptive to the reformist religious movement and, therefore, his point of view is also alien. Opposition in this instance does not come from the Latin language – both Roman civil servants and the authors of the "high" religious literature used it – it comes from the antagonism between pagans and Christians. The decision to absorb another's discourse in a non-specific context, i.e. by refracting the ideological idiom of the New Testament through the mind of a Roman man, seems improper and unacceptable from a theological perspective. Pilate calls out excitedly:

> He *who speaks against me*,
> the light of [his] eyes shall be plucked out;
> (*Processus Talentorum* l. 11; italics added)

> *Speak not evil one of another,*[7] brethren. He that speaketh evil of *his* brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. (Jas. 4.11)

As a result of the interanimation of linguistic worldviews, whether it is conscious or not, the Son of God's opponent begins to sound like the very Son of God, thereby offering an avowedly debased bilingual version of religious rhetoric.

[7] Italics added. Literally, "speak not against" – cf. the Middle English expression in the play: "he that agans me says" ("Processus Talentorum" l. 11).

The generic language of "The Processus Talentorum" is notable for is valorized temporal multi-leveledness: it is not confined to the Middle Ages, but goes back to Antiquity to come into contact with the verbal-ideological world of texts included in the biblical canon. The reason is that this has not yet become the language of contemporary drama, but of *religious* drama which sets the biblical concepts of the early Christian era in a purely medieval context. It is typical of each parodic stylization to depict another's language; however, at issue here is a particular problem: if we compare some extracts from the play with *The General Epistle of James*, it will become apparent that the biblical word loses its objective representational self-sufficiency and acquires an entirely opposite meaning in its receiving context since the Roman procurator's[8] speech is a desecration of divine law and divine hierarchy. Essentially, the fusion of separate languages and separate apperceptive backgrounds, in this case – of the canonical gospels, on the one hand, and on the other hand, of Rome's administration and military contingent in the Middle East, destroy the verbal-ideological centralization of the represented world and its unitary language. This brings about contradictoriness and multi-leveledness which begin to irreversibly disintegrate the conceptual system of the imported language. Another notable feature of Pilate's threatening speech to the multitude of people is that it is also outright blasphemy since it is aimed at debasing the conception of the unity of the hypostases that are vital to Trinitarian theology, and since it implies the completely erroneous and intolerable idea of "equality" between a pagan and the Holy Spirit. The universally valid tenets of the Christian faith, whose semantic field is infinite, leave no room for rival views:

> And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come. (Matt. 12.32; cf. Luke 12.10)

While clashing with another's language, however, these tenets put on another's clothes which places them in a framing context that relies on conceptual contradictions and benefits from them. The mutual illumination of languages against the backdrop of polyglossia leads to a clash of valorized temporal contexts, as the authoritative word is brought out of the

[8] According to the inscription on the so-called Pilate's stone in Caesarea, discovered in 1961, his title was "prefect" (praefectus). Cf. more detailed descriptions (e.g. Carter 43 ff.).

completely finished-off world of monologic truth in order to be included in intentional hybrids.

A most formidable challenge to the monologic religious worldview is the parodying and travestying energy within the framing context of the designation "dominus dominorum". This expression, sometimes used alone and sometimes added to the traditional descriptive phrase "rex regum et dominus dominorum" ("King of kings and Lord of lords"), occurs in a wide range of religious writings, from canonical and dogmatic to apocryphal and, therefore, grafting it onto another cultural pattern must have been clearly perceptible to any Christian denomination. What characteristics do divine designations acquire when they appear in mystery plays or, in other words, how do the strictly canonical word and the serio-comical speech style of the marketplace interrelate? The Book of Revelation says: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is *Lord of lords*, and *King of kings*" (Rev. 17.14; emphasis mine). This usage of the phrase in Christian eschatology, along with other definitions in the Bible, forms a monologic apperceptive background that encounters an alien linguistic worldview. If the language of drama remains entirely on the plane of formal theology, it would truly reflect religious doctrine, but it would be incomprehensible and unattractive to viewers. Conflict is both predictable and inevitable. From a theological standpoint, Pilate's usurpation of divine authority is an intolerable abuse of language pushing the dramatic action toward low comedy and farce. In fact, this usage is by no means without precedent: such occurrences appear in "Herod the Great" – in it Nuntius says about the eponymous hero that "He is king of kings, kindly I know, / Chief lord of lordings, chief leader of law" (Fitzgerald and Sebastian, gen. eds. 175)[9] – and also in "Mankind," a macaronic play, in which the demon Titivillus announces his supreme status:

> "Ego sum dominus dominantium,[10] and my
> name is Titivillus." (Fitzgerald and Sebastian, gen. eds. 365)

In order to give a more accurate picture of the verbal-ideological deviation from the canon while ascribing the title of "dominus dominorum" to Pontius Pilate, we shall introduce a few quotations from the Old and New Testaments that bring its traditional meaning into sharp focus. Here is what we read in some places of the Latin Vulgate approved by the Council of Trent:

[9] Other scholars have also taken note of this language usage (see Cawley and Stevens 122).

[10] "I am the Lord of lords."

Quia Dominus Deus vester ipse est Deus deorum, et Dominus Dominantium, Deus Magnus, et potens, et terribilis, qui personam non accipit, nec munera. (DT 10.17)

For the LORD your God *is* God of gods, and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. (Deut. 10.17)

The New Testament also contains texts in which this title conveys the same meaning and forms the backbone of monotheism:

Hi cum Agno pugnabunt, et Agnus vincet illos: quoniam *Dominus Dominorum* est, et Rex regum, et qui cum illo sunt, vocati, electi, et fideles. (APC 17.14)

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful. (Rev. 17.14)

Besides the narrow meaning of "dominus dominorum" in its immediate sentence context, we need to show how, by shifting the perspective of the four gospel accounts, the linguistic image of Pilate is "identified" with that of the Savior. There are numerous metaphors, comparisons and homiletic tools placing emphasis on different character traits of Jesus – a rod out of the stem of Jesse (Isa. 11.1-9), the suffering servant (Isa. 52.13-53.6), the husbands who should love their wives (Eph. 5.25-33), the head of the body/church (Col. 1.15-20), the cornerstone (1 Pet. 2.4-8), the light of men (John 1.1-9), the bread of life (John 6.25-51), the Good Shepherd (John 10.1-18), the true vine (John 15.1-8), the Lamb of God (Rev. 5.6-14), etc.[11] Christ's image in "The Revelation of John" is of central importance to us: Pilate's arrogance and aggressive behavior in the Wakefield Cycle of Mystery Plays is the very antithesis of the Lamb of God (Agno) whose self-sacrifice – the epitome of purity, innocence, and humility – underlies the Christian creed. And since the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New Testament and form the continuity of the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, we will select a couple of good examples from the Holy Scriptures:

Immolatoque agno, de sanguine ejus ponet super extremum auriculae dextrae illius qui mundatur, et super pollices manus ejus ac pedis dextri… (LV 14.25)

[11] See a general classification in: Larsen and Larsen (2006).

And he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and put it upon the tip of the right year of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot . . . (Lev. 14.25)

Tamquam ovis ad occisionem ductus est: et sicus agnus coram tondente se, sine voce, sic non aperuit os suum. (ACT 8.32)

HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER; AND LIKE A LAMB DUMB BEFORE HIS SHEARER, SO OPENED HE NOT HIS MOUTH . . . (Act 8.32)

As already mentioned, "dominus dominorum/dominantium" can be found in hymns, prayers, and even in a sermon by Peter Chrysologus:

So then, both the servant recognizes what he owes God, by serving a human being in that fashion, and a master is shown, by the authority that he holds, what kind of servitude he owes to the Master of masters…[12] (Chrysologus 3: 284)

As for the adoption of the original phrase in insular theological writing, we will cite two of the sources: the 10th-century manuscript of the pontifical of Egbert, archbishop of York (732-736), and the translation of the prayer "Domine deus Omnipotens" from the Latin into Old English, preserved in the British Library, London, MSS. Cotton Galba A. xiv and Nero A. ii:

Item benedictio ad omnia in usum basilice.
Dignare, Domine, Deus Omnipotens, Rex Regum, et Dominus Dominantium … (Greenwell, ed., 43)

Another blessing for the use of all persons in the basilica.
Deign, O Lord, Almighty God, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords …

DOMINE Deus Omnipotens, Rex regum et Dominus Dominantium …
(Muir 21; qtd. in Keefer 108)

Æla þu drihten, æla þu ælmihtiga god, æla cing ealra cynynga ... (Keefer 108)

O LORD God Almighty, King of kings, Lord of rulers …

[12] The translator of the sermon adds as a footnote that the Latin word in the source-text is *dominum* ("Lord of lords") (Chrysiologus 3: 284).

Comic effects come to life mainly because of the noticeable gap between two contradictory styles. Contact with contemporary life and the introduction of topical issues and imagery is possible exactly in the gap area between two languages. With their fusion, the theological content of biblical stories adapts to popular notions, serio-comical versions of the high religious narrative come into existence, and the monologic Word of God begins to lose its integrity in the intrageneric field of medieval drama. All these changes contribute to the mutual illumination of languages and the gradual shift to the typological pattern of dialogic discourse.

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