

## SINGING SHEPHERDS, DISCORDANT DEVILS: Music and Song in Medieval Pastoral Plays

*Vicente Chacón Carmona*

Music features prominently in almost all medieval Shepherds' Plays, even if they are not musical dramas proper. This essay examines and compares the role of music, song, and dance in a series of biblical Shepherds' Plays from England, France, and the Iberian Peninsula. A comparative approach seems to be particularly appropriate in the case of late 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'.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this work is to determine the main dramatic, narrative, and theological functions of musical elements in the aforementioned national traditions in order to ascertain their similarities and differences.

The dramas under analysis are fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century English, French, and Luso-Spanish Nativity plays in which shepherds feature as relevant characters.<sup>2</sup> These plays are: the Chester Painters' Play;<sup>3</sup> the Towneley *First and Second Shepherds Plays*;<sup>4</sup> the Coventry Shearmen and Tailors' Pageant;<sup>5</sup> the York Chandlers' Play;<sup>6</sup> Arnould Gréban's *Le Mystère de la Passion de Notre Sauveur Jésus-Christ*;<sup>7</sup> Marguerite de Navarre's *Comédie de la Nativité de Jésus-Christ*;<sup>8</sup> Fray Íñigo de Mendoza's *Coplas de Vita Christi*;<sup>9</sup> Juan del Encina's *Égloga Representada en la Mesma Noche de Navidad*;<sup>10</sup> Lucas Fernández's *Égloga o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Redemptor Jesucristo*,<sup>11</sup> and *Auto o Farsa del Nacimiento de Nuestro Señor Iesu Christo*;<sup>12</sup> and finally, Gil Vicente's *Auto Pastoril Castelhana*, *Auto dos Reis Magos*, and *Auto dos Quatro Tempos*.<sup>13</sup>

The unnamed, unnumbered, and undetermined shepherds of Luke's Gospel 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.<sup>14</sup> There are several substantial differences between the English, French, and Luso-Spanish plays. To begin with, the Luso-Spanish works seem to be isolated pieces and, in addition, few of them have survived. This may point to the fact that the dramatic activity in Portugal and Castile was scarce during the Middle Ages. Actually, the majority of the playwrights included in this study keep up the medieval tradition of biblical drama, although their craft is closer to that of the