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Identifying the Virgin Mary

Disarming Skepticism in European Vision Narratives

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Abstract. – The initial failure to identify the Virgin Mary in an apparition, a widespread feature of Marian vision narratives in Europe, may well have psychodynamic implications of the sort advanced by Michael Carroll in his classic study, "The Cult of the Virgin Mary" (1986). However, in this article we argue that it also serves an important rhetorical role in Catholic knowledge structures that circulate both regionally and locally. Drawing principally upon our analysis of vision narratives from southern Spain, as well as other sources, we argue that the misidentification element is a central component of a general schema of human-supernatural interaction in the culture of European Catholicism. *[Spain, popular Catholicism, Virgin Mary, miracles, apparitions]*

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By quite some margin Roman Catholicism is the most successful religion in human history, at least if one judges success in the mundane terms of its number of adherents, amount of resources controlled, longevity, and – perhaps of greatest interest to anthropologists – its worldwide geographical distribution. The singular contribution that ethnographers have made to the study of Catholicism has been to work against the religion's stereotype as a slow-moving, monolithic enterprise that imposes orthodoxy at all costs and from the top down. Anthropologists have excelled at demonstrating the social adaptability and cultural complexity that actually characterize the religion as it is practiced in the widest range of social arenas (Murphy 2008). Ethnographers and social historians have documented that in any given Catholic setting there are usually at least three interacting layers of religious culture in circulation. There are so-called *universal* constructions of Catholic culture that ultimately emanate from the Vatican and the "official" church and which the clergy introduce and promote among the laity. There are also *regional* Catholic practices and devotions that characterize entire nations, such that we can without too much effort distinguish Irish Catholicism from its counterparts in Haiti or the United States. Just as easily one can usefully differentiate Andalusian from Basque Catholicism or an Iberian Catholicism from a Melanesian version of the religion since regional distributions of Catholic culture may be found within nation states or they may cut across political and social boundaries. Finally, there are *local* expressions of Catholic culture that distinguish the beliefs, practices, levels of participation and enthusiasm of one community (broadly conceived) from others within a regional tradition.[1]

1 Of course, the actual distribution of Catholic culture varies greatly from place to place with each setting requiring its own analysis.

Anthropologists have also demonstrated how the historically shifting intersections and divergences of these distributions of Catholic culture are driven both by the periodic efforts of the clergy to bring the laity into line with changing ecclesiastical preferences and by the reciprocal resistance of lay people to this pressure to conform. Moreover, the different institutional entities of the church, its *religious regimes* as Mart Bax (1985) puts it, selectively seek to promote or suppress the cultural models and devotional complexes of the different strata of Catholicism in their efforts to outmaneuver one another and to influence the laity. Devotional practices and beliefs move back and forth across the landscape and in and out of favor with various Catholic lay and ecclesiastical constituencies.

It is unfortunate that when anthropologists bring psychodynamic interpretations to bear on this religion they so rarely factor in this considerable social, cultural, and symbolic complexity. This is particularly true in the case of the cult of the Virgin Mary, despite the fact that, for rather obvious reasons, it has long attracted psychodynamic analysis. Errors in these interpretations inevitably result when the complexities and nuances of Marianism suffer the parody of descriptive reductionism, in which pesky details of cultural distribution and organization are ignored or simply go unobserved.

This problem often entails one of two misadventures. The first is misapplying broad ethnographic generalizations to local circumstances to which they do not apply. The second is invoking local, or even personal, conditions to explain widespread phenomena. In his landmark work, "The Cult of the Virgin Mary," Michael Carroll (1986) commits both of these ethnographic errors in his otherwise fascinating psychological interpretations of Marianism; this is particularly true when he turns his attention to southern Spain (Murphy and González Faraco 2007).

In asking the interesting question – Why is Marianism stronger in some parts of the Catholic world than in others? – he turns to the exemplary ethnographic work of David Gilmore (1983; Gilmore and Gilmore 1979) and Stanley Brandes (1985) in Andalusia, a region so renowned for its devotion to Mary that it proudly bears the title, "La tierra de María Santisima" (The Land of Mary the Most Holy). Carroll makes particular use of Gilmore's work on *machismo,* or hyper-masculinity, in the community of Fuenmayor to construct his own hypotheses about why Marianism is so intense in southern European societies, concluding that "the association of the Mary cult with southern Italy and Spain can … be traced to the prevalence of the father-ineffective family in these regions" (Carroll 1986: 61). Both exaggerated masculinity and intense devotion to the Virgin Mary, argues Carroll, are produced by the weak presence of fathers in the lives of their young sons, which results in a strong but repressed desire for the mother that is effectively expressed in and managed by Marian devotionalism. Without going into the details of Carroll's essentially Kardinerian argument, let us simply point out that intense Marianism is simply not present in either of the two communities studied by his *only* ethnographic sources from southern Spain – Gilmore and Brandes. For example, one will look in vain for a listing for the Virgin Mary in the indices of Gilmore's (1980, 1987) first two monographs on Fuenmayor and it is precisely data from that community that appears to have provided Carroll with his best evidence for his father-ineffective family hypothesis. Most of the working-class people of the town pointedly avoid the typical processional rituals associated with the cult of the Virgin and they show no particular enthusiasm for her private devotions. Indeed, the only popular working-class devotion to be found there is one centered on the "Christ of Calvary" and it is pursued almost exclusively by women (Gilmore 1980: 150 ff.). Thus, Carroll puts himself in the awkward position of summoning up the ethnography of this particular town to illustrate the general conditions that he alleges give rise to hyper-Marianism when that community itself is distinguished from its neighbors for its relative lack of interest in the cult of the Virgin.[2]

2 In Gilmore's "Carnival and Culture" (1998), he does mention the importance of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Andalusia, but he does not describe it for Fuenmayor *per se*, because by all indications it is conspicuously undeveloped there. Although Brandes (1980: 181) describes the Virgin Mary as "important" for the townsmen of Monteros, it is clear that a brotherhood organized around devotion to Christ is of much greater significance for the townsmen. It is ironic that Brandes and Gilmore, impeccable ethnographers who also exhibit great insight into psychodynamic issues, elected to study communities in Andalusia that are unusually tepid in their embrace of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Carroll (1986) simply ignores this fact while Breuner (1992) takes this serendipity to be an indication that perhaps Marianism is not a central focus of male religiosity in the region. Although Breuner quite correctly uses the lack of Marian enthusiasm in Carroll's only sources from southern Spain to question his central thesis, she commits the reciprocal error of unwarranted overgeneralization. The briefest perusal of the ethnographic literature in Spanish for Andalusia (for recent overviews of this work, see Cantero 2005; Rodríguez Becerra 2006 and 2007) should disabuse one immediately of the notion that Andalusian men are indifferent to the cult of the Virgin, but neither Carroll (1986) nor Breuner (1992) cite a single ethnographic source in Spanish.

In what follows, we will shift attention from the least Marianist town in Andalusia that we know of – Gilmore's Fuenmayor – to Almonte, the community that is home to the largest, most emotionally intense cultus in the region, if not in the entire world. Although Almonteños are alternately praised and condemned for it, no one doubts the extraordinary fervor of their devotion to their patroness, *La Virgen del Rocío*, "The Virgin of the Dew." We will draw upon some details of Almonteño devotionalism to engage another, more subtle, ethnographic weakness that we find in Carroll's work: invoking local, even personal, conditions to explain more widespread phenomena. His psychodynamic interpretation of a feature of foundational Marian apparitions – the initial failure of seers to identify the Virgin Mary in their visions – will be placed in a wider ethnographic context in order to argue that this recurring element of Marian vision narratives serves an important rhetorical role in addition to any psychological significance that it may bear. After considering Carroll's views on this phenomenon in 19th-century France, we will discuss some important features of popular Catholicism in Andalusia before describing Rocío's cultus. With that background to both regional and local expressions of Marianism as context, we will relate and interpret three of the many miracles attributed to Rocío by Almonteños and others. Along the way we shall demonstrate how the delayed identification element figures in various cultural models (of both local and regional distribution) of human contact with the sacred. Our argument is simple, what Carroll regards as a recurring personal detail that reveals much about the psychodynamics of seers is simultaneously an important element of a general Catholic schema of human contact with the supernatural. Moreover it is an element that is deployed specifically to allay the culturally constructed skepticism that attends apparitions of sacred personalities in Roman Catholicism.

Identifying Mary

In "The Cult of the Virgin Mary" Michael Carroll (1986: 148–172) argues that the young French visionaries associated with the famous apparitions at Paris (1830), La Salette (1846), and Lourdes (1858) did not initially understand the female figures in their visions to be the Virgin Mary (see also Carroll 1985). Rather, he proposes, others suggested her identity to them and only subsequently did they come to believe that they had failed, at first, to recognize the Virgin. Carroll uses this thematic convergence in these cases to support his contention that the apparitions appearing to these seers were projections of ambivalent, sometimes multiple, maternal figures from their personal psychohistories and that only later did other people encourage them to frame their experiences in a culturally appropriate and socially salient manner. They saw "Mother," Carroll suggests, and others convinced them that she was really the "Virgin Mary." Because of their strictly personal relevance to the seers, those elements of this initial confusion that proved puzzling or problematic to other devotees were either overlooked or consciously edited out of succeeding devotional accounts of these famous 19th century miracles (e.g., Carroll 1986: 153, 155 f., 157, 168).[3]

Carroll's resourceful method of analysis includes scrutinizing just those details of the original accounts that eventually suffered deletion or modification in order to uncover clues for his psychodynamic interpretations of these important events in European Catholicism. For example, Carroll (1986: 149–156) argues that while Maximin, the principal seer of the apparitions at La Salette, asserted that he did not know if the lady he had seen in his vision was the Virgin Mary or not, others came to the conclusion that she was the Mother of God and interpreted her extraordinarily apocalyptic utterances accordingly. Yet, they did not accept Maximin's claim that the lady told him that her son had beaten her. Not only did most early commentators dismiss this as an error on Maximin's part, but modern accounts have tended to delete any mention of it altogether. Carroll (1986: 153) seizes on this anomaly to argue that, "… what Maximin first saw and heard was a mother who complained of being beaten by her son." Only later, after the vision had been discussed with others, did it come to be defined as an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

After examining the facts known about Maximin's childhood, Carroll (1986: 154) concludes that the boy suffered grievously from physical abuse at the hands of his stepmother and that his hallucination was actually the fulfillment of an unconscious wish to strike back at her. Carroll (1986: 154 f.) argues further that his psychodynamic interpretation helps to make sense out of some features peculiar to the visions at La Salette, particularly the unusually harsh tone of the Virgin's message and the fact that she is depicted as weeping. Offering similar

3 Carroll also discovered the same pattern – an initial failure by principal seers to identify apparitions as the Virgin Mary followed by accounts that delete discrepancies – in the visions at Fatima (1986: 177) and Pontemain (1986: 196, 200). See also Carroll (1983, 1985).

interpretations of the details of the apparitions at Lourdes and Paris, in each case Carroll finds the female figure in the hallucination to be an unconscious projection of a problematic maternal figure from the principal seer's life whose identity as the Virgin Mary was not immediately apprehended but rather suggested to the visionary by others.

His detailed analyses of Marian visions provide us with instructive examples of how the emotionally charged and highly personal experiences of individuals are both promoted by the specific social circumstances shaping their lives and incorporated into an ongoing religious system. This latter process has been characterized by Obeyesekere (1981: 50) as the "conventionalization of personal symbols," by Zimdars-Swartz (1991: 19) as "the movement from private experience to public meaning," and by Slater (1990b: 109 f.) as the "exteriorization of private experience." At least one result of the sociocultural tailoring of these young seers' psychological projections (i.e., the apparently retroactive coding of "Mother" as "Virgin Mary") has been the creation of highly cathected foci of religious veneration upon which millions of Catholics have organized and elaborated their emotions as well as their theologies.

The contemporary power of the Marian vision-pilgrimage complex is revealed in the comprehensive survey of Christian pilgrimage in Western Europe conducted by the Nolans (1989). Their work indicates that the thousands of shrines located in Western Europe annually attract at least 100 million visits by pilgrims and religious tourists (Nolan and Nolan 1989: 1 f.). Fully 65% of the 6,150 shrines in their sample are dedicated to one of the Virgin Mary's many different advocations (Nolan and Nolan 1989: 9). Often these Marian shrines have emerged in the context of miraculous events, including apparitions of the sort studied by Carroll. In the profound religious experiences of a select few, many millions continue to find rich symbolic material to invest their feelings into and articulate their religious thinking around.

William Christian (1984: 240), a painstaking and insightful investigator of Spanish apparitions, has astutely observed that a large, but inherently indeterminate, number of people have visions, but only very few of these dramatic supernatural encounters ever succeed in becoming matters of sustained public interest. An important task for students of these and related phenomena, therefore, is the specification of those sociocultural processes that cause some visions to inspire the multitudes while the vast majority do not. The success of any particular epiphany in initiating or sustaining a widespread religious devotion depends upon much more than how well the private emotions of the seers resonate with the collective psychological concerns of their society. If visions are to be accepted by a wider social audience, thereby becoming useful screens for the projection of vivid sentiments, they must meet some minimal, and culture-specific, standards of credibility. Writing about a very different sort of religious tradition (Taiwanese sectarian societies), David K. Jordan (1990: 99) pinpoints the psychological basis of this requirement,

> At least some religious customs … require a more or less constant system of legitimation by which the believer can justify his belief to the nonbeliever … and by which he can specifically neutralize the nonbeliever's objections and reduce dissonance for himself.

In other words, visions must pass cognitive muster, both to self and to others, if they are to establish or sustain a cultus.

Of course, emotional resonance and intellectual suitability may be necessary but they are not sufficient conditions for the phenomenal success of some visions.[4] Christian's groundbreaking work in Spain (1972, 1976, 1981a, 1981b, 1987, 1989, 1996) has greatly illuminated the often complicated mix of ecological, political, economic, and cultural forces that must converge to lift some few apparitions out of social obscurity. Not the least of those factors that shape the initial emergence and eventual success or failure of an apparitional cultus is the complex play of lay and ecclesiastical interests, as Mart Bax (1990) has thoroughly documented for the contemporary case of Medjugorje in Bosnia (see also Skrbiš 2005). In her broad-brushed historical sketch of the shifting politics of apparitions in Spain, Roma Riu (1989: 517 f.) demonstrates that the apparitional scenarios that lay seers and church officials entertain have converged and diverged over the centuries as each develops and refines its own "strategies of legitimization" of human interaction with the divine. The focus of much of what follows will be on demonstrating the importance of framing an account of the miraculous in such a manner that its authenticity be established among people – both lay and clerical – who not only believe in the reality of miracles, but also in the necessity of distinguishing them from unfounded claims of supernatural encounters.

The ecclesiastical authorities of the church, of course, are notorious for their posture of institutionalized skepticism about claims of human encounters

4 Carroll himself is fully aware of this point (1986: 145 f.).

with the supernatural, but European miracle narratives describe events that even by local, lay definition are inherently unusual, even implausible. We have yet to speak with a Spanish believer in contemporary supernatural intervention, for example, who did not also admit, sometimes even insist, that some purported miracles, including apparitions, are in fact either fraudulent or the result of psychological delusion. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that some effort will be made in the presentation of an apparition narrative to dislodge its intended audience from a position of tentative skepticism, a skepticism that is every bit as culturally informed as is the conviction that sometimes miracles really do occur. The claim that at first a seer either cannot identify or misidentifies the supernatural subject of his or her vision, we submit, serves to disarm this anticipated wariness and thus contributes to authenticating the miraculous events which initiate or promote a cultus and its pilgrimage. We also believe that this device simultaneously serves to reassure the seer of the authenticity of his or her own experience.

In many European miracle stories the seer is depicted as being young, humble, innocent and without guile, as being initially unaware of the supernatural significance of what has occurred to him or her.[5] Moreover, in these stories the seer is invariably portrayed as someone who is not actively seeking an encounter with the sacred much less with a particular supernatural entity. Often doubt, or the innocence begot of simple ignorance, precedes recognition of a sacred engagement (e.g., Turner and Turner 1978: 41). Reflecting on the ingenuous traits characteristic of many Marian seers, Marina Warner (1976: 311) comes to exactly the opposite conclusion that we wish to advance here when she writes that:

> The confidence that Catholics place in the visions of children like Bernadette and the others who were mostly illiterate and often neurasthenic brutally reveals the desperate thirst believers have for assurances that the faith is still credit-worthy.

For Warner these seers are so utterly bereft of credibility that to pay them the slightest heed betrays a stunning gullibility. Yet, the apparent social, and even cognitive, incompetence of seers does not necessarily require the suspension of critical faculties; on the contrary, this quality may allay the very suspicions that the exercise of skepticism arouses. In our view, the initial failure of the protagonist of the miracle story to recognize the identity of a supernatural personage – especially when combined, as it so often is, with the seer's youth, naiveté, and humble social position – works to soften the skepticism of those who might otherwise suspect chicanery or psychological dysfunction.

Some alleged encounters with the supernatural contain persuasive elements that simply make them more believable, in vernacular and/or ecclesiastical terms. Accounts of these events will thrive – that is, enjoy wider and more long-lasting distribution – while other less compelling tales will not. In other words, socially successful accounts correspond to widely shared cultural models of apparitions. By tidying up elements of the original miracle stories of primary seers the representatives of the official church make apparitional narratives more closely conform to cultural models that they (and lay sophisticates) find convincing. That the initial failure to identify the Virgin was *not* deleted in subsequent accounts of the French miracles suggests that the official "editors" of these stories understood, whether consciously or not we do not know, that this was a crucial rhetorical element in popularly entertained apparitional models that did not conflict with ecclesiastical construals of human encounters with the supernatural. Our tactic, then, will be to reverse Carroll's method. Instead of examining those apparently idiosyncratic details that suffer deletion from later accounts, we will center analysis on a narrative element that is not only retained, but that enjoys a recurrent role in other genres of miracle stories. We hope to convince the reader that elements of widely distributed knowledge structures were at work in shaping these hallucinations, and the stories told about them, even before the mysterious figure in the apparitions was identified as the Virgin Mary.

Marianism and Miracles in Andalusia

Isidoro Moreno, a prolific scholar of vernacular religion in southern Spain, has argued that the key to Andalusian religiosity is its fundamentally "anthropocentric" nature (1982: 230 f.; 1985b: 46 f.). Of course, the quality of anthropocentrism hardly distinguishes Andalusian religiosity from that of many other societies; Guthrie (1980), for example, is not alone in making that quality part of the very definition of religion itself (see also Barrett and Kiel 1996). A particularly important feature of Andalusian Catholicism, however, is that the many different iconic representations of the Virgin, Christ and the saints are treated as if they were separate and distinct personalities from whom divine assis-

5 E.g., Turner and Turner (1978); Christian (1981a); Nolan and Nolan (1989).

tance can be sought in times of need.[6] It is widely believed, for example, that some statues have specialties rather like medical doctors and that there is wisdom when seeking supernatural intervention in matching one's calamity to the appropriate advocation of Christ or the Virgin Mary. Further evidence of the individuation and personification of sacred statues is found in the Andalusian custom of engaging in emotional arguments about which of two statues of the Virgin is prettier or which of two representations of Christ is most productive of miracles (Mitchell 1990: 122; Velasco Maíllo 2000).

A second characteristic feature of Andalusian Catholicism, of course, is its unabashed emphasis on the Virgin Mary (see Cantero 2005; Rodríguez Becerra 2007). Although it is very unsettling for many priests and bishops, there is no doubt that most Andalusian Catholics are far more interested in the Virgin Mary than they are in Jesus Christ, God the Father, or the Holy Spirit. It is also evident that the relationship between the Virgin Mary and her devotees is paradigmatically associated with the relationship between mother and child.[7] Just as the Spanish child seeks maternal intercession on his or her behalf when some paternal concession is required, so Spanish Marianists favor working through their heavenly mother when divine intervention is desired (Christian 1972: 100).

The preferred manner of inviting the mediation of the Virgin Mary is through the *promesa*, or vow, made to one of her many specific advocations (Rodríguez Becerra 1982, 1989a, 2006). In a moment of deeply felt need, intervention may be formally requested by making a contract taking the form of a promise to perform some spiritual exercise and/or provide the Virgin with a votive offering if the requested outcome is forthcoming (Rodríguez Becerra 1982). These offerings, or *exvotos,* may take many forms, including metal or wax representations of body parts, locks of hair, photographs, wedding dresses, and military uniforms. As Rodríguez Becerra (1989a: 123) so nicely puts it, an ex-voto is "the fulfillment of a promise materialized in an object." If a devotee receives an unasked-for benefit, he or she may attribute it after the fact to a particular Virgin, Christ, or saint, thus inspiring an *acción de gracias*, or act of thanksgiving. A traditionally favored manner of expressing gratitude for a favor, whether it be bargained for in advance or not, is to render or commission a votive painting depicting the crisis precipitating a supernatural intervention and, perhaps, its resolution (Rodríguez Becerra y Vázquez Soto 1980; Rodríguez Becerra 2005).[8] For centuries these votive paintings have operated as wonderfully explicit visual texts for the instruction of potential visionaries, despite the fact that most do not actually represent visions in the strict sense. For example, an ex-voto representing the cure of an illness might picture a person in bed, surrounded by concerned loved ones, with the Virgin shown hovering above. Although the folk artist does not intend that the scene be taken literally, only desiring to indicate within the limitations of the medium that it is Mary who is responsible for the happy outcome, the scene does resemble an apparition. Ex-votos clearly serve as externalized, imagistic cultural models for would-be seers.

The Cult of the Virgin of the Dew

Since the early 14th century the statue of "La Virgen del Rocío," has been housed in a sanctuary located in a remote part of the municipality of Almonte bordering on the vast marshlands of Andalusia's Guadalquivir River.[9] The legends that recount the miraculous circumstances under which Rocío's cultus began conform to a pattern of narratives labeled "The Shepherds' Cycle" (*El ciclo de los pastores*) by Vicente de la Fuente in 1879.[10] Although there are actually two competing versions of how Rocío came to be discovered, one favored by Almonteños and another promoted for complicated reasons by other Rocío devotees (Murphy 1989), both agree that the statue was uncovered by a man in the wild marshes of the town of Almonte and that this discovery, or *invención*, initiated her cultus. The first known written account of the discovery, and the one that is cited by most contemporary Almonteños, stipulates that at the beginning of the 15th century a man, either hunting or tending flocks in an area of Almonte's marshlands known as "Las Roci-

6 Moreno Navarro (1985a: 173); Cantero (2005); Rodríguez Becerra (2006, 2007).

7 Parsons (1969); Brandes (1981); Saunders (1981); Gilmore and Uhl (1987); Corbin and Corbin (1987: 69).

8 Since the Vatican II reforms many shrines no longer display them or other ex-votos in the "hall of miracles" (*cuarto de los milagros*) that used to be a ubiquitous feature of Andalusian sanctuaries (Rodríguez Becerra 1995). Nonetheless, the "spiritualization of materiality" (Eipper 2007) continues to be a hallmark of Andalusian religiosity.

9 See Infante-Galán (1971); González Gómez y Carrasco Terriza (1981); Comelles (1996, 1998; Díaz de la Serna Carrión et al. (1987); Crain (1992); Murphy (1992, 1993, 1994); Murphy y González Faraco (2002); Molinié (2004).

10 See also Foster (1960: 161 f.); Sharbrough (1975); Turner and Turner (1978: 41 f.); Christian (1981a: 16–22, 208; 1981b: 75–83); González Gómez y Carrasco Terriza (1981: 422–425); Velasco Maíllo (1989).

nas," was alerted by the barking of his dogs to the presence of something in a tangled thicket. Investigating the source of their excitement, he discovered a life-sized statue of the Virgin Mary placed upon the trunk of a tree. He put the statue on his shoulders and set out for the town of Almonte located some 15 km distant. Along the way, however, he felt fatigued and stopped to sleep. When he awoke he found that the statue was gone. Distraught, he returned to the place of his discovery and there he found the statue exactly as when he first saw it. Leaving the statue in the setting that it obviously preferred, he hurried to Almonte where he told of what had occurred. Almonte's clergy and civil authorities returned with him to the marshes where they found the statue in the place and in the manner he had described. Filled with devotion and respect, they took the statue out of the thicket and carried her to the parish church of Almonte to wait until they could construct a temple for her in Las Rocinas. They built an altar for Rocío so that the trunk of the very tree on which she was found could serve as her pedestal.

The Almonteño discovery story just summarized contains most of the eleven narrative elements that Honorio Velasco Maíllo (1989; see also 2000) has identified as typical of the hundreds of examples of the Shepherd's Cycle narrative to be found throughout Spain (see Table 1). Two of these elements, one of which is instantiated in the Almonteño version and the other which is not, are of particular interest to the present topic. In the Almonteño account, like so many others, the discoverer of the sacred object does not initiate or even seek an encounter with the sacred. He (and 80% of the time it is a "he") is engaged in his ordinary pursuits in the countryside when the sacred suddenly reveals itself to him. A second, related element in many of these accounts is that very often the discoverer initially fails even to recognize that he has found a representation of the Virgin Mary. Typically, the statue is identified first as either a "*señora* (lady)," or a "*mujer* (woman)," or an "*imagen femenina* (feminine image)," and then, only later, as the "*Virgen*" (the Virgin Mary). In the official version of Rocío's *invención,* there is no hint of this initial misidentification element. Instead, in the florid style of the 18th century it stipulates that,

> … he discovered the image of that sacred Iris [who is] free from the thorns of sin; he saw among the brambles the simulation of that Mystical Bramble [who is located] in the middle of the ardor of original sin [but is free from it]; he saw a statue of the Queen of the angels, of natural height, placed upon the trunk of a tree (Quoted in Díaz de la Serna C. et al. 1987: 45).

Table 1: The Shepherd's Cycle Schema (Velasco Maíllo 1989).

Honorio Velasco Maíllo's Shepherd's Cycle Schema	
(1)	The story is one of the discovery of a sacred object (usually a statue of the Virgin Mary) in a particular place, often at some distance from human settlement, by an individual who takes notice of it to a nearby community.
(2)	The discoverer is usually a low-status youth, often a shepherd.
(3)	**The discoverer does not purposefully seek an encounter with the supernatural: it is thrust upon him or her.**
(4)	The place, if not the time, of the discovery is rigorously defined.
(5)	The discovery is anticipated by mysterious physical signs, often bright lights or sounds.
(6)	At the moment of the statue's discovery the mysterious is converted into the supernatural.
(7)	**The statue is identified first as either a "*señora* (lady)," or a "*mujer* (woman)," or an "*imagen femenina* (feminine image)," and then, subsequently, as the "*Virgen*" (the Virgin Mary).**
(8)	The discoverer initiates the appropriation of the statue by attempting to take it to a community.
(9)	The statue mysteriously resists being taken from its spot to the community, often three times.
(10)	The discoverer begins the process of the social extension of belief by bringing news of the events he has experienced to a nearby community.
(11)	The new cultus is institutionalized by the construction of a sanctuary for the statue usually at the place of its discovery.

Yet, in the alternative (and increasingly popular) version of Rocío's discovery, one well known to Almonteños even though they might not accept it as authentic, the discoverer at first takes the statue to be something more mundane than a religious icon:

> Frightened, he saw the image of a small sculpture that at first he believed to be a doll because its size was no greater than a *vara* [note: 85 cm or 2.8 ft] in length (*Editorial Andalucía* 1981: 66).

Almonteños are fully aware that in the alternative version of the discovery of Rocío the man who encounters her at first believes her to be a child's toy, not a representation of the Virgin Mary.

The Rocío discovery story fits a script that is well known not only in Iberia but also throughout the rest of Europe, especially in France. In their analysis of the foundation narratives of 3,126 pilgrimage shrines in Western Europe, the Nolans (1989) identify stories of the "found object" type as accounting for fully 18% of the total sample, including 36% of the Iberian cases and 21% of the French shrines. We mention these details not only to suggest that the misidentification element in one version of Rocío's discovery is well known in Almonte, but to point out that the French seers discussed by Carroll very likely were exposed to them, as well. Although often depicted as poor students or illiterate, most of the young French seers of the 19th century demonstrated a good grasp of the popular devotions of their time (see Carroll 1986: 160–164), and this undoubtedly included stories of the "Shepherd's Cycle" variety. Finally, the Nolans (1989: 259) note that "a considerable number of the 563 found object stories have a similar structure." That is, the elements of these tales, while admitting of different instantiations, seem to have traveled relatively intact throughout Europe.

It is quite relevant to the thesis of this article that the founding of the cultus of Rocío and the mythological charter for her pilgrimage is not based on an apparition (*aparición*) or vision of the Virgin herself, but rather on the miraculous discovery (*invención*) of a statue that represents her. *Invenciones* have been rather more common in Spain than elsewhere, in part at least, because of the wisdom during the era of the infamous Spanish Inquisition to have some concrete evidence that a miraculous event had actually occurred (Christian 1981b: 90–93; Carroll 1986: 133). With but a single exception, the regional sanctuaries established in Spain between 1520 and 1900 were not based on apparitions (Christian 1989: 109). The keen, if not exactly kindly, interest that inquisitors paid to people who claimed to have had visionary experiences must have had a chilling effect on anyone who considered telling others of his or her extraordinary experiences. Certainly, there were more than a few cases of visionaries, including priests and nuns, who suffered severe penalties for refusing to keep quiet about their encounters with the sacred. Having a vision was not sanctionable in and of itself, but promoting it once it had been officially determined to be of dubious authenticity was. The inordinate number of *invenciones* that figure in the foundation stories of medieval Marian devotions in Spain, and their close correspondence to an explicit cultural model, is additional evidence that establishing credibility is as important a factor in the successful diffusion of accounts of miraculous events as are considerations of psychodynamic appropriateness or affective appeal.

We believe that it is a mistake to conclude from this, as Carroll (1986: 132–134) seems to do, that Spaniards have been less likely to *experience* apparitions simply because most miracles that serve to establish devotions are not apparitional in nature. As we will describe at greater length below, although an apparition did not initiate the Rocío cultus, a large number of apparitions have been reported by her devotees.

It is not clear exactly when the first Rocío brotherhood was established in Almonte after her alleged discovery, although officials of the "Hermandad Matriz," or Principal Brotherhood, place its foundation during the mid-sixteenth century (Reales Espina 2001). Afterwards, affiliated brotherhoods (*hermandades filiales*) began to appear in towns bordering on the marshes and by the end of the 19th century, ten had been established in the provinces of Sevilla, Huelva, and Cádiz. The main function of each brotherhood is to administer its community's participation in the spring pilgrimage to Rocío's sanctuary, which by the turn of the 20th century was attracting about 5,000 pilgrims annually (Nogales 1900). During this century, Rocío's cultus and her pilgrimage have experienced prodigious growth.[11] By the turn of the 21st century, up to a million people attended her spring rituals, with many tens of thousands in the company of 107 affiliated brotherhoods from all eight provinces of Andalusia and beyond (Murphy y González 2002b; Cantero 2005). Although she began her devotional career as the patroness of a single community, Rocío has emerged as the key symbol of regional identity in southern Spain.[12] The annual spring pilgrimage to Rocío attracts enormous national as well as regional media coverage and the Almonteños have become renowned for the vigor with which they defend their community's primacy in her cultus. Almonteño social life is infused with Rocío devotionalism and cannot easily be understood apart from it. The aggressive commitment to their advocation of the Virgin is frequently characterized by critics as violent, fanatical, barbaric, and even pagan (e.g., Umbral 1988; Díaz Perez 2001), but such criticisms evoke equally passionate defenses (e.g., Burgos 1985).

11 Murphy (1992, 1993); Murphy y González Faraco (2002, 2006a).

12 Rodríguez Becerra (1989b); Moreno Navarro (1995); Ostenfeld-Rosenthal (1997); Murphy y González (2002, 2006b); Cantero (2005).

Given her enormous popularity it is not surprising that many miracles have been attributed to Rocío[13] and this is attested to by the large number of ex-votos that have been wrought in her honor and that are preserved by the "Hermandad Matriz" and by private collectors (Rodríguez Becerra y Vázquez Soto 1980).

While the town of Almonte contains its fair share of skeptics, many Almonteños volunteered tales of Rocío's direct intercession in their lives. Most of these narratives, however, do not depict spectacular events. Many people tell stories closely following the cultural model of the *promesa,* or vow, briefly described above. For example, faced with the serious illness of a close relative, one Almonteño promised to walk the 15 km to Rocío's sanctuary in silence if the sick person be spared. When the patient eventually recovered, the vow was fulfilled and the cure attributed to Rocío. Other stories of Rocío's miraculous interest in the people of Almonte involve the spontaneous invocation of her name in a moment of crisis. For example, one man told us that while driving at a fairly high rate of speed, one of his tires blew out and he lost control of his car. Almost instinctively, he blurted out Rocío's name just before he regained control of his vehicle and averted an accident. He credits his escape from serious injury or death to Rocío's intervention.

Yet, not all of the miracle stories related to us in Almonte concern matters of life and death. We were told of many cases of Rocío's efficacy in matters large and small: she has helped the infatuated melt hard hearts, barren women conceive children, students pass exams, the unemployed find jobs, the absent-minded locate lost valuables.

Almonteños also believe that Rocío provides miraculous protection and benefits to the entire community, particularly in times of great need. For example, *La Venida de la Virgen*, or "The Coming of the Virgin," is a major Rocío ritual that is related to her miraculous intervention in the collective lives of the townsmen. Since at least the 16th century whenever the Almonteños have felt particularly threatened – by pestilence, hunger, drought, or political turmoil – they have gone *en masse* to Rocío's remote shrine and ceremoniously carried the statue on their shoulders back to the town.[14] The statue is then installed in front of the altar of Almonte's parish church where she offers a comforting presence during a time of general stress. When the crisis has passed, Rocío is duly credited and the townsmen organize a triumphant procession to return her to the sanctuary of the marshes. Since the middle of this century, however, the *venida* has been regularly scheduled so that it occurs at least once every seven years, "Whether we need her help or not," as one Almonteño asserted.[15]

Fig. 1: La Virgen del Rocío dressed as a shepherdess (left) and as a queen (right).

Two Manifestations of Rocío

Whenever the *venida* takes place, the statue undergoes an impressive transformation. Her clothes and adornments are changed for the magnificent, but grueling, 15 km procession from the sanctuary to the town. The change produced in her appearance is so marked that the uninitiated might easily confuse the dual manifestations of Rocío for two entirely different statues of the Virgin Mary (see Fig. 1). The result of this periodic change of clothing is a relatively rare form of secondary splintering in Andalusian Marian iconography (Murphy y González Faraco 2007).

13 E.g., Cruz de Fuentes (1908); Jurado Carrillo (1919); Álvarez Gastón (1981).

14 Álvarez Gastón (1977); López Peláez (1998); Flores Cala (2005); Murphy y González Faraco (2007).

15 One explanation for the innovation of actually scheduling the *venida* is that Almonteños, perhaps for the first time in their history, have enough control over their lives to make communal supernatural intercession a rare necessity. Therefore, if they want to see Rocío in their town, they must plan for her to come even in the absence of crisis. Another possibility is that by arranging for Rocío to pay regular visits to the town, Almonteños underscore the unique nature of their relationship to the sacred statue in the face of the explosion of interest in her in the region.

Sometime near the turn of the 17th century, Almonteños, following the fashion of the times, began to clothe their statue in the elegant fancy dress of the great ladies of Spain (Infante Galán 1971: 54; González Gómez y Carrasco Terriza 2002). Framing the richly embroidered outer skirt and flowing cloak of the Virgin are ornaments reminiscent of the "Lady Clothed in the Sun" described in the New Testament's "Book of Revelations": a beautiful crown topped by twelve stars, stylized sunbursts (*ráfagas*) arrayed along both of her sides, a crescent moon at her feet (Carrasco Terriza 2009). When wearing this costume adorned with celestial lights Rocío is said to be "dressed as a queen" (*vestida de reina*), a reference to a number of her principal titles: "Queen of the Heavens," "Queen of the Marshes," "Queen of Andalucía." This is the appearance Rocío presents when in her sanctuary, which is all the time save for her processions to and from Almonte every seven years.

When Rocío travels between her basilica and the town, she is "dressed as a shepherdess" (*vestida de pastora*). The crown, sunbursts, and crescent moon are removed and Rocío is outfitted in the traveling attire of the highborn Spanish ladies of the 19th century (Murphy y González Faraco 2007: 346–351): a full length dress, a short shoulder cape, a wig of hair done in long curls topped by a wide-brimmed summer hat decorated with wild flowers and the fruits of the harvest.[16] While the effect produced hardly conjures up the image of a humble shepherdess, that title being less descriptive than theologically evocative, when compared with her regal attire, this costume certainly serves to humanize Rocío. It is in that sense that the Virgin of the Dew can be said to shift periodically between two significantly different degrees of anthropomorphism. The fact that Rocío appears in two radically different forms – and that one representation more closely resembles an ordinary, human mother – figures prominently in the miracle stories we will now finally relate.

Three Modern Miracles Attributed to Rocío

All three of the Almonteños who told us these stories are believers not only in Catholicism but also in the contemporary existence of miracles. This is a particularly important factor in the case of Rocío because of the extremely polarized views, corresponding roughly (but only roughly) to the politics of the left and right, concerning the meaning and significance of the Rocío cultus in Andalusia (Murphy 1992, 1994; Murphy y González Faraco 2005). Those who prefer to see only superstition, folklore, or mystification in Rocío's pilgrimage are likely to use the recounting of miracle tales to ridicule her cultus[17]; their rhetoric, equally worthy of anthropological investigation, is of quite a different order and will not be considered here.[18] It is worth noting, however, that all three narrators emphatically deny any desire to persuade confirmed atheists or high-minded iconophobes.

These three accounts were collected in the mid-1980s. In subsequent conversations, other Almonteños reported versions of two of these stories (No. 2 and No. 3). Each narrator was asked to relate any miracles that he or she knew of that could be attributed to Rocío and no one told fewer than four stories. Significantly, in each case the first story told is the one we report here.

Miracle Account No. 1

"José," a 47-year-old shopkeeper responded to our query about Rocío miracles by affirming that he had become a devout follower of "La Virgen del Rocío" because she cured a serious childhood illness that he suffered:

> My devotion for the Virgin of the Dew began in my childhood, when She saved my life. I am not an Almonteño by birth. I was born in another place, but when I was young, my family moved to Almonte, where I have lived ever since. Just a few years before our move to Almonte … I was only nine years old … I contracted a very severe illness, I had a fever so high that the doctor told my mother that he feared for my life. In one of the moments in which the fever rose a great deal, so high that I became delirious, I had a vision. In this vision, a very beautiful woman came to me and uncovered me, moving away the blanket that covered me … and she touched me on the forehead with her finger. I immediately fell into a deep sleep. When I awoke the fever had completely disappeared. I was

16 For a more complete description see Infante-Galán (1971: 69 f.).

17 E.g., Grosso (1981); González (1981); Umbral (1986, 1988); Díaz Perez (2001).

18 A number of scholars have fruitfully discussed the role of politics in the local and worldwide debates about the meaning of visions in the cult of Mary (see especially Bax 1990; Perry and Echeverría 1988; Christian 1984, 1987). While not concerned with Marianism, Candace Slater's extraordinary studies of saints' tales in Brazil (1986, 1990b) and Spain (1990a) provide us with exemplars for the investigation of this and many other issues. Slater (1990a: 181) presents a brilliant case for her point that even archaic narrative forms, like the miracle story, can "foster spirited debate" about contemporary social and political issues.

cured. Since my family had not yet moved to Almonte, I did not recognize that this woman was the Virgin of the Dew, inasmuch as I had seen photographs or postcards of her only dressed in her queen's garb. Some years after this illness, when we had come to Almonte, and someone for the first time showed me a photograph of the Virgin dressed as a shepherdess, I immediately realized that this was the woman of my vision. Do you understand, now? I did not know what had occurred to me until much later after it had happened. Do you think that a child could invent such a story as this? I am convinced that the Virgin makes miracles to he who asks for help when he needs it. And I don't care if others believe differently or not.

Mi devoción por la Virgen del Rocío viene de mi niñez, cuando Ella me salvó la vida. Yo no soy almonteño de nacimiento. Nací en otro sitio, pero cuando contaba con pocos años, mi familia se instaló en Almonte, donde vivo desde entonces. Precisamente poco antes de ese traslado (tenía yo solamente nueve años), contraje una enfermedad muy grave, con fiebres tan altas que el médico le dijo a mi madre que temía por mi vida. En uno de los momentos en los que la fiebre subío mucho, hasta el extremo de hacerme delirar, tuve una visión. En ella, una mujer muy bella se me acercó y me destapó, levantando la manta que me cubría, y a continuación me tocó la frente con su dedo. Entré de inmediato en un profundo sueño. Al despertarme, la fiebre había desaparecido por completo. Estaba curado. Como mi familia aún no se había trasladado a Almonte, yo no podía reconocer en aquella mujer a la Virgen del Rocío, a la que había visto en fotos o postales sólo con su traje de reina. Cuando, algunos años después de esta enfermedad, nos vinimos a Almonte, y alguien me enseñó por vez primera en mi vida una fotografía de la Virgen vestida de pastora, caí rápidamente en la cuenta de que aquella era la mujer de mi visión. ¿Comprendes ahora? No supe lo que me había sucedido hasta mucho tiempo después. ¿Crees tú que un niño puede invertarse una historia como ésta? Yo estoy convencido de que la Virgen hace milagros a quien le solicita ayuda cuando la necesita. Y no me importa si otros creen lo contrario.

Miracle Account No. 2

"Paco," a 36-year-old member of a prominent Almonteño family, began his repertoire of miracle stories, not by telling of his own experiences but by relating a story about a Rocío visionary, named "Ana," who originally lived far from Rocío's sphere of influence:

I'm going to tell you of the case of a woman to whom the Virgin of the Dew appeared. She was called "Ana" and was a native of the province of Jaen. One day, Ana had a vision of the Virgin Mary, but she did not recognize which of the Virgin's manifestations it was, although the word "Rocío" did appear in her vision. Given that she lived in an area of Andalucía that then had little to do with Rocío devotion, this expression [this word] meant nothing to her. And she began to investigate its significance. Someone informed her about the existence of a Virgin named Rocío in the province of Huelva. She sent a letter to the bishop of our diocese inquiring about that Virgin. Shortly afterwards she received a written reply accompanied by a photo of the Virgin of the Dew dressed as a queen. Looking at the image she did not recognize in it that which she had seen in her vision, so she wrote again to the bishop, but this time she carefully described the details of the image that had appeared to her. For a second time, the bishop replied to her request for information. This time the photo [note: that the bishop sent] was of Rocío in her shepherdess dress. Looking at the photo Ana immediately identified it as the image of her vision. She took this fact as a clear indication that she should move to El Rocío in order to be closer to the Virgin.

Voy a contarte el caso de una mujer a la que se le apareció la Virgen del Rocío. Se llamaba Ana y era natural de la provincia de Jaén. Un día, Ana tuvo una visión de la Virgen María, pero sin llegar a reconocer de qué Virgen se trataba, aunque en su visión aparecía una palabra: "Rocío". Dado que vivía en una zona de Andalucía entonces poco relacionada con la devoción rociera, esa expresión no le decía nada. Y empezó a indagar sobre su significado. Alguien le informó sobre la existencia de una Virgen así llamada en la provincia de Huelva. Mandó una carta al obispo de esa diócesis preguntando por esa Virgen. Poco después recibió contestación escrita accompañada de una foto de la Virgen del Rocío vestida de reina. Al ver la imagen, no reconoció en ella a la que había visto en su visión, por lo que de nuevo escribió al obispo pero esta vez dándole detalles minuciosos de la imagen que se le había aparecido. Por segunda vez, el obispo contesta a su solicitud. En esta ocasión la foto correspondía a la Virgen del Rocío con su traje de pastora. Al verla, Ana la identificó inmediatamente como la imagen de su visión. Entendió el hecho como un clara indicación de que debía trasladarse al Rocío para así estar más cerca de la Virgen.

Miracle Account No. 3

"Elena," a middle aged woman whose family has long been involved in the administration of the Rocío cultus in Almonte, told us of an event that occurred in Almonte three decades earlier:

What I am going to tell you happened in Almonte, back in the 1950s. One day a girl of no more than four years

of age was playing and, I don't know very well how, she fell into a well. And right away she began to cry and to shout asking for help. A lot of time passed and nobody heard her cries. After a while, a man happened to pass by and he heard her shouts. With the aid of other neighbors, the girl was at last able to be pulled out of the well without suffering any injuries of consequence. But this was not an easy task because of the narrowness of the shaft and the danger that getting to the girl represented to her. While the delicate operation of raising her from the well was ongoing, the people tried to console and calm her by talking to her. Nevertheless, the girl responded by saying that she was alright and that she was not afraid because a beautiful woman was with her, accompanying her. Once she was saved, pulled out of the well without much in the way of injuries to her body, nobody paid attention to what the girl had told them, taking it as an expression of her imagination, a consequence of the fear and tension that the girl had experienced in that dark well.

Three years later, the Virgin came to Almonte. The girl, now seven years old, was overcome by strong emotion upon seeing the Virgin dressed as a shepherdess moving through the streets of Almonte to the parish church. She said to her parents: "Her! Her! She is the Lady who saved me!"

Lo que te voy a contar sucedió en Almonte, allá por los años cincuenta. Un día, una niña de no más de cuatro años de edad estaba jugando y, no sé muy bien cómo, se cayó en un pozo. Y al momento empezó a llorar y a gritar pidiendo auxilio. Pasaba el tiempo y nadie oía su llanto. Al cabo de un rato, pasó por casualidad un hombre y oyó sus gritos. Con la ayuda de otros vecinos, la niña pudo por fin ser sacada del pozo sin haber sufrido heridas de consideración. Pero esta tarea no fue fácil, por la estrechez del brocal y la peligrosidad que suponía llegar hasta la niña. Mientras duraba la delicada operación de subirla, la gente intentaba consolarla y tranquilizarla hablándole. Sin embargo, la niña les repondió que nada le sucedía y que no tenía miedo porque con ella estaba, acompañándola, una señora muy hermosa. Una vez estuvo a salvo, fuera del pozo, y sin apenas daños en su cuerpo, nadie prestó atención a lo que la niña les había contado, tomándolo como cosa de su imaginación, consecuencia del miedo y la tensión que había vivido la niña en ese oscuro pozo.

Tres años más tarde, la Virgen vino a Almonte. La niña, con siete años cumplidos, al ver a la Virgen vestida de pastora por las calles de Almonte en su camino hacia la iglesia parroquial, cayó en una fuerte emoción. Y así dijo a sus padres: "¡Ella, Ellla, ésa es la Señora que me salvó!"

The most obvious commonality in these apparition stories is the initial failure of the three seers to recognize Rocío because she was dressed in her traveling clothes when she appeared to them, instead of in her regal garb. It is striking that in the telling of these stories much more emphasis is placed on this initial confusion than on the strictly miraculous aspects of these encounters with the Virgin. Our strong impression is that these storytellers began their accounts of miracles with what they considered to be the strongest, most disarming, case in their repertoires.

All three narratives were immediately preceded by what can only be characterized as formal disclaimers: each narrator took pains to avoid the appearance of a hard sell approach to the extraordinary stories they were about to tell. José echoed the sentiments of the other two storytellers by proclaiming that he did not expect everyone to believe in miracles and that was fine with him. He said that his own personal experience and that of his friends would be his guide in these matters, and others could suit themselves.

Another common feature in these narratives is that at the time of the apparitions all three of the seers lack important knowledge about Rocío. The first visionary is a boy from a community other than Almonte, the second is an adult outsider without the slightest idea of who Rocío might be, and the third is a very young child who had not lived long enough to have seen Rocío dressed as a shepherdess. Thus, these three people all embody one of the most well established traits of successful Marian visionaries: social naiveté. Of course, in the case of these particular miracles their ignorance is not an elective feature in the story; it is absolutely essential if the misidentification element of the narrative is to work. No adult Almonteño could fail to recognize Rocío in either of her guises.

The initial inability of the three seers to identify Rocío strengthens the credibility not only of the visions themselves but also of the less compelling narratives that followed in the storytelling sessions. These secondary accounts either depict less dramatic, almost mundane, events or they detail health crises whose resolution could easily be attributed to some cause other than supernatural agency.

Taking advantage of the unusual circumstance of Rocío's two very different costumes, this stylized initial confusion about her identity in tales of her visitations is, we believe, central to an Almonteño strategy of persuasion that draws upon and combines both local and regional cultural elements. Eventually, the use of such strategies may generate stereotypic formats or cultural models like the *promesa* complex (in both its individual and collective forms) and the Shepherds' Cycle, which assume greater and greater authority with imitation

and repetition (Christian 1981a: 36, 208). Ironically, however, the very popularity of such a model can work to undermine its effectiveness in specific cases, including, it would seem, that of Rocío. Juan Infante-Galán (1971: 21–23), for decades the Official Chronicler of Rocío's Principal Brotherhood, dismisses the story of Rocío's discovery as a "poetic legend" on the grounds that so many other purported *invenciones* of statues of the Virgin share precisely the same characteristics (see also López Taillefert 1997).

Clearly, the use of a cultural model, or even a single narrative element such as the one discussed here, runs some risk of diminishing success with overuse. But it is also possible to error by the simultaneous application of too many different models of human contact with the supernatural. In a charming and illuminating article, whose title in English would be "Francisco Martínez Wants to Be a Shrine Keeper," William Christian (1989) recounts the story of an 18th-century Spanish shepherd and itinerant laborer who tried to secure more lucrative and less onerous employment by faking various encounters with the divine.

Having decided to become a shrine keeper, or *santero*, Francisco Martínez knew that it would be easier to preside over a new devotion than to displace the *santero* of an already established sacred center. Thus, he endeavored to associate himself with a new miraculous sacred image likely to attract alms-bearing pilgrims seeking interaction with an efficacious supernatural intermediary. At least this was the opinion of the inquisitor who ultimately was called upon to judge the authenticity of a series of encounters with the supernatural that Martínez alleged to have experienced.

Before eventually recanting and admitting his series of frauds, Martínez claimed that his experiences began when a mysterious, fair-haired youth appeared before him and predicted that various supernatural events were about to transpire. The pilgrim, "recognized as an angelic messenger only in retrospect," advised Martínez that his crucifix would begin to sweat blood from its wounds. Martínez eventually displayed a crucifix that, in fact, he smeared with his own blood. Although this apparent miracle attracted a great deal of lay attention, a priest confiscated Francisco's sacred object, thus effectively thwarting his plans. Undaunted Martínez claimed that while performing the Stations of the Cross, he had a vision in which a small, black image of the Virgin Mary appeared to him, instructing him to go to a nearby town to tell the people to visit her in a place she designated. Martínez told his story to a local priest who accompanied him to a rocky ravine where they found a small statue of Mary. Unfortunately, perhaps because of the sheer number and diversity of his supernatural encounters, Martínez was not believed and under questioning revealed that the only part of his story that was true was that a real pilgrim did speak with him, but without making any predictions or performing any miracles. He not only admitted to doctoring the crucifix with his own blood, but also revealed that he had stolen the small statue of the Virgin, had stripped it of its clothing and blackened its face to disguise it. He hid it in the ravine and made up the story of the vision.

Martinez's scam unwittingly reproduces the cultural stratigraphy of supernatural visitations of humans in the history of Spanish Catholicism. The most recent knowledge structures are utilized first and when they do not produce the desired effects, Martinez works his way back through earlier cultural models which had progressively fallen out of favor, either because of pressure from ecclesiastical authorities or because they lost credibility with (or appeal for) laymen. Presumably, if the secular and church authorities had not intervened, he would have ended his search for a new job by discovering the corpse of a Christian saint martyred by the Romans. In any event, it would appear that successful seers not only develop their accounts around well established cultural models, but they also instantiate these models in a credible manner. Unsuccessful seers, like Francisco Martínez, fail to do one or the other. Note, however, that he begins his false accounts by claiming to have failed initially to identify a supernatural personality; he intentionally lied about mistaking an angel for a pilgrim.

Discussion

In suggesting that problematical identifications of the Virgin Mary may serve a rhetorical role in stories of her apparitions, we do not wish to imply that Carroll's psychodynamic analysis of particular seers is necessarily misguided or incorrect. Indeed, especially in the two accounts from Almonte that involve children, Carroll's sort of analysis, with some slight modification, can contribute to our understanding of their extraordinary experiences. Yet, there are important differences between the Rocío apparitions and those addressed by Carroll. First, Rocío's visitations did not establish a new Marian devotion but rather serve to sustain one of great vintage; these visions are of a "preexisting image" (Christian 1981a: 206 f.) with a substantial reputation for the performance of miracles. Second, and

perhaps more importantly, in the Rocío miracles involving the children it is not necessary to look to Oedipal conflicts or problematic relations with a mother figure to identify the proximate source of the apparition. The two children appear to have unconsciously elaborated a nurturing mother figure as a solution to a problem whose genesis was high fever in one case and claustrophobic entrapment in the other. Thus, whereas the idea of "mother" is a problem that inspires the visions of the French seers studied by Carroll, hallucinatory maternal images are psychological responses to dilemmas of a quite different order in at least two of the Rocío miracles. This, of course, underscores that which is obvious to anyone who actually observes Andalusian Marian devotionalism close at hand: the Virgin Mary is an extraordinarily multivocalic and flexible symbol; she performs a variety of psychological, cultural, and social work for her diverse constituency (Notermans 2008). Those who seek some sort of generic psychological characterization of her do so at the risk of trampling over considerable social complexity and cultural nuance. Mary's great salience in Andalusia (and elsewhere) resides not in a single psychodynamic service that she provides for her vast and varied body of devotees. Rather, her success as a symbol is due, in part at least, to the fact that she not only offers the believer *several* different kinds of psychological comfort (e.g., the satisfaction of pre-oedipal dependency needs, relief for problems of insecure gender identity, and partial resolutions of oedipal difficulties), she also serves as a vehicle for the elaboration of various art forms and for the creation of aesthetically pleasing social contexts (Murphy y González Faraco 2002b). Additionally, the organization of her cultus constitutes a structural backbone that provides social continuity for many Andalusian communities, regardless of what sort of political regime happens to be in place at the moment.

Carroll's psychodynamic explanation of confusion about the Virgin's identity in the visionary experience is not incompatible with our emphasis on its role in the culturally constructed and historically shifting knowledge structures that underlie and generate socially successful accounts of apparitions. We would simply contend that the initial failure to identify an apparition is not just a threshold that an intense psychological experience must cross if it is to be incorporated into a religious tradition; it simultaneously serves as a rhetorical device that reduces cognitive dissonance and cultural ambivalence and by so doing helps produce that very transit from the private to the public realm. Moreover, it is a very robust and versatile narrative element that appears in a variety of culturally scripted interactions of humans with supernatural personalities and sacred objects. We have described here its role in the reported experiences of 19th-century French visionaries, in the much older narratives of the Shepherd's Cycle, in Francisco Martínez's invention of a "mysterious pilgrim," and in the unusual case of Rocío's dual representations in contemporary apparition tales.

Other examples, from Spain and elsewhere, could be adduced if space permitted, but suffice it to say that this narrative element appears easily to lodge itself in cultural models circulating in all three distributions of Catholic culture, the universal (or at least the European), the regional, and the local. This suggests that perhaps the misidentification element is a central component of a general schema of human-supernatural interaction in the culture of Catholicism. The eventual recognition of the Virgin may indeed mark the movement of a private experience, with strictly personal significance to the seer alone, into the public realm of Marian devotionalism. But it may also represent the intuitive (and perhaps unconscious) understanding that a temporarily reluctant visionary, one who obviously is not attempting to engage the supernatural, is a more believable visionary.

Melford Spiro's view that religion's primary utility lies in its "disguised representation and gratification of the repressed wishes" (1987: 182) is in total accord with the central thesis of Carroll's work on the cult of the Virgin Mary. Carroll's skillful use of that insight enables him to explain why some people are more likely to experience apparitions than others; it also helps him to account for the varying content of those experiences. Yet, Spiro also argues that for religion to do its affective work, it must be invested with cognitive salience (1987: 161–184). Guided by that observation we have sought to understand why some accounts of the miraculous capture the attention of larger audiences, or simply enjoy more frequent and privileged retelling, while others inspire little and fleeting interest. In his influential definition of religion, Clifford Geertz neatly makes the point that we would underscore here by asserting that the moods and motivations produced by religion are clothed in "an aura of factuality" (1973: 90). The delayed identification of apparitions is so frequently encountered in accounts of Marian visions precisely because it contributes importantly to establishing just that aura of factuality.

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