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An Analysis of the Literary Manifestations of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Gonzalo de Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Senora

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Elizabeth M. Deeter for the Master of Arts in Spanish were presented July 9, 1996, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

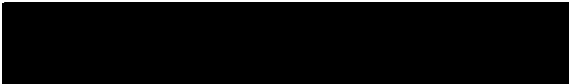
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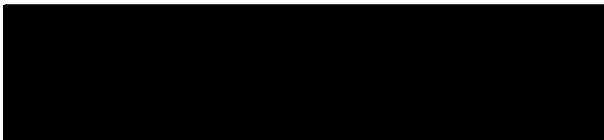
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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Elizabeth M. Deeter for the Master of Arts in Spanish presented July 9, 1996.

Title: An Analysis of the Literary Manifestations of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Gonzalo de Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Señora.

The cult of the Virgin Mary reached its climactic point in Europe during the Middle Ages, and was particularly strong in Spain. Literature became a concrete expression of Marianism because it reflected the beliefs of the populace. Gonzalo de Berceo, a Castilian monk, greatly influenced by the ever-growing Marian piety, wrote a collection of poems in which the activity of the Blessed Mother in everyday human life is documented. I propose to do a detailed miracle-by-miracle analysis of Mary's interactions with others by focusing on Berceo's characterization of her in her principal role as a mother. In addition, I will analyze the characters to whom Mary renders assistance since they are representative of Berceo's

audience and are people to whom the common people were able to relate. Finally, I will consider the visions of Mary that occur during the miracles, particularly whether or not she appears, to whom she appears, and why.

Through this study of the Milagros, it will become apparent that while Berceo incorporates elements of the predominating theology into his miracles, the stories are primarily a reflection of the popular belief. Berceo demonstrates the influence of theology by depicting in his miracles all of the maternal qualities Mary embodied that appealed to people looking for a motherly figure to turn to in time of need. In addition, the role of Mary as an all-powerful intercessor who decides on her own who receives miracles, and who does not, reflects the common faith of the people living in the Middle Ages.

An Analysis of the Literary Manifestations of the
Cult of the Virgin Mary in
Gonzalo de Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Señora

by

ELIZABETH M. DEETER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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A cult is a "collectivity centering around a real or imaginary figure whose followers believe that their lives are made better through activities which honor or are proscribed by the leader" (Swatos 20). As has been noted by Michael P. Carroll, one group that fits within the parameters of this definition is the cult of the Virgin Mary, a phenomenon which recognizes and honors her special role beside her Son in the redemption of humankind. This veneration of Mary, which reached its climactic point in Europe during the Middle Ages, was particularly strong in Spain. I will examine the development and intensification of Marian piety in order to illustrate the appeal of Mary as the mother of God, which was the main focus of the cult from its beginnings. In addition, I will explore the importance of her function as divine queen and powerful intercessor, and how this role became key in Marian devotion. By focusing on the characterization of Mary in Gonzalo de Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Señora, I will show how literature became an important manifestation of the cult in Spain. Through the analysis of the miracles, I will demonstrate that Berceo's portrayal of Mary as both a mother and an intercessor is intended to show her activity

in the daily lives of people who are devoted to her in words and deeds and to provide a course of action to those who wish to benefit from Mary's grace.

In the Middle Ages, the people adored the Virgin Mary and, because of this admiration, the cult strengthened. It is not my intention, nor within the scope of this paper, to prove the validity or invalidity of the Blessed Virgin's divine position and power as seen by Berceo and his audience, but rather to present in the most complete manner possible the importance of one of the many literary manifestations of the undeniable, unquestionable, existence of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Literature became a concrete expression of Marianism because it reflected the beliefs of the populace. Gonzalo de Berceo, a Castilian monk, greatly influenced by the ever-growing Marian piety, wrote a collection of poems in which the activity of the Blessed Mother in everyday human life is documented. Berceo's presentation of Mary in her principal role as a mother is essential in the study of her interactions with others. While critics have noted the maternal functions of Mary in Berceo's work, I propose to do a more detailed miracle-by-miracle analysis

of this role than I have encountered to date. I will also analyze the characters to whom Mary renders assistance since they serve to inspire devotion toward her; many of them are people to whom the common people of the Middle Ages were able to relate. Finally, I will consider the visions of Mary that occur during the miracles, particularly whether or not she appears, to whom she appears, and why.

Through this study of the Milagros, it will become apparent that while Berceo incorporates elements of the predominating theology into his miracles, the stories are primarily a reflection of the popular belief of the time. Berceo demonstrates the influence of theology by depicting in his miracles all of the maternal qualities Mary embodied that appealed to people looking for a motherly figure to turn to in time of need. In addition, the role of Mary as an all-powerful intercessor who decides on her own who receives miracles, and who does not, reflects the common faith of the people living in the Middle Ages.

In order to understand the importance that the Virgin Mary acquired in the religious life of the people, it is necessary to trace

the development of the cult from its beginnings through the Middle Ages. From the first through the seventh centuries, Marian devotion was focused on the admiration of the Virgin's holiness as the Mother of God, and it spread gradually from the East to the West. Some of the canonical and non-canonical literature written about Mary during the second century helped to foster a growing interest in her. An example of an apocryphal writing was the Protevangelium of James which became a source of stories about Mary, her life, and the life of her family. Also during the second century, Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, expanded the idea of Mary as the Second Eve. In order to understand how such a dichotomy could be seen, it is important to mention briefly the comparison that Paul made between Jesus Christ and Adam in the New Testament. According to Paul, sin came into the world through the disobedience of Adam. Later, as a result of Christ's obedience, salvation from sin was made possible. In addition to Paul's writings with regard to Christ and Adam, it has been said that the story of the Annunciation as told by Saint Luke in the first chapter of his Gospel also prompted the perception of a dichotomy between Mary and Eve. Using the

scriptural references as a point of departure, Saint Irenaeus observed that even though Mary and Eve were both virgins, the distinction between the two lies in the fact that Eve disobeyed the Word of God while Mary obeyed it. This dichotomy manifests itself in a dualism known as Eva/Ave and it means that a woman can be Eve, the source of all sins, as well as Ave, or Mary, the source of salvation. "Eve became the mother of sin through her disobedience" (McBrien 870) which in turn, caused the death of all men through Adam. However, through Christ, all men were saved. This view gave Mary an important role in the redemption of humankind. Mary, as the mother of God, gave life to and reared the man through whom all others were saved from sin and eternal damnation. "Mary is the new Eve, the mother of the new humanity in whom God made a new beginning" (McBrien 870).

During the Constantine empire in the fourth century, the veneration of the mother of God rose when the Christian church became the imperial church and all the pagan people of the Mediterranean and the Middle East were influenced by Christianity. Mary became important to the pagans who converted to the

Christian religion because they were searching for a female figure to replace the goddesses they had previously worshipped. Until this time, their religion had been shaped by the adoration of a great mother goddess and a divine virgin, such as Diana and Venus. Due to previous religious traditions, the people believed they were unable to pray directly to God: they could not accept the patriarchal idea of God that the Christian religion had adopted. This public was looking for a pure, maternal figure in their new religion, and the Virgin Mary, who was the embodiment of both the mother and the virgin goddesses, represented the union of the divinity and humanity.

During the early part of the fifth century, a controversy surfaced surrounding the application of the title "Theotokos," or mother of God, to Mary. The debate occurred between the Nestorians, who believed that the divine and the human existed as two separate natures in Jesus, and those who believed that these natures existed as one. Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople and leader of the Nestorians, preferred the title "Christokos," or "mother of Christ, Son of God" so as not to cloud the distinction between Christ the human and Christ the divine. Those who supported the title

"Theotokos" were most likely influenced by the dogma of the full deity of Christ, which asserts the oneness in being of the Son with the Father, that was established in the fourth century. According to Agnes Delesalle, "the title of Mother of God derives from Catholic teaching on the Incarnation of the Word. . . . Mary is Mother of God because from her own flesh she gives to the Word a human nature like hers. . . . Mary is *'theotokos'* because *'the Word was made flesh'* in her and through her" (238). In 431, after rejecting the doctrine of Nestorius, the Council of Ephesus declared Mary "Theotokos" or divine mother of God.

As a result of the decision at Ephesus, Marian devotion increased as did the number of liturgical feasts dedicated to her. Before the Council proclaimed her "Theotokos," there was only one feast honoring her: the Purification, celebrating Mary's purification after childbirth. By the middle of the seventh century, there were three Marian feasts being celebrated in Rome in addition to the Purification: the Annunciation, commemorating the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she was to give birth to Jesus; the Assumption, or dormition of Mary, honoring the taking up of the body

and soul of the Virgin into heaven after her death; and the Nativity of Mary, solemnizing the day of the Virgin's birth. As Mariology continued to spread to the West, these feasts were introduced there in the seventh century.

Beginning in the eighth century, emphasis shifted from the motherhood of Mary to her role as a divine queen and powerful intercessor, especially in the East. Growing belief in her assumption, which elevated her to a more than human state as she was taken up in body and soul to heaven, stimulated faith in her intercessory abilities. In other words, "Mary is *already* in the state that will be true of the elect *after* the 'resurrection of the dead'. . . . Mary received what God alone can give" (Bossard 28-29). Thus, by the beginning of the eighth century, her role as an intercessor between man and God and an instrument in the salvation of humanity were accepted beliefs. This view was strengthened by the teachings of Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople at the time. According to him, as "God's earthly mother, she retains authority over him in heaven. . . . Mary, he maintains, does not simply put requests to the Deity on matters they could agree about; she actively and

successfully opposes him" (Ashe 203). She became the perfect mediator between God and man because of her maternal influence over God and her ability to appease his anger.

With the increased faith in Mary's role as a mediatrix, an important concept in Mariology emerged during the Middle Ages which concerned her perceived ability to present earthly prayer petitions to God and to convince the Deity to comply with her requests. One of the first and most popular of Eastern legends and stories that demonstrated her power and willingness to intervene on behalf of her devotees concerns Theophilus, a man who sold his soul to the devil via a paper signed with his own blood. Later regretting his action, he appealed to Mary for help. In response, the Virgin appeared to him while he was sleeping, left the paper which she had retrieved from Satan, and told him his sin was forgiven. Upon awakening, he confessed his sin publicly and died a few days later. This story, included in the collection written by Berceo, became one of the most popular and widely read Mary miracles; such testimonies, translated for reading by people in the West, quickly increased Mary's reputation as an ideal intermediary between

humankind and God in both East and West.

By the twelfth century, still under the influence of the belief in her assumption, the cult emphasized Mary's role as helper of the people. One of the most influential Mariologists of the time was St. Bernard of Clairvaux. He was a member of the Cistercian order which demonstrated its devotion to the Virgin in a variety of ways, thus influencing the development of Mariology all over Europe. As Marina Warner notes,

the passion of its most illustrious saint was typical of the Cistercian order: it was dedicated to the Virgin, her image appeared on the seals of its abbeys, its members wore white in honour of her purity, sang the antiphon the *Salve Regina* at vespers, and began the custom of building a special lady chapel in their churches. (131)

The works of St. Bernard elevated Mary to a higher position in Mariology and influenced the development of medieval spirituality.

Richard McBrien writes that, for Bernard, Mary was

the aqueduct that leads the waters of divine grace down to earth. . . . Bernard did not deny that Christ was the one

true Mediator, but felt that men and women might be afraid of him because he is also their God and their Judge. (874-75)

Sinners feared God and did not feel worthy enough to go directly to him for forgiveness. "Mary stands for Mercy" (Ashe 203) and, therefore, people trusted her and knew that if they went to her, she would defend them before God and save them from condemnation.

According to St. Bernard, Mary is the ideal mediator between man and Christ. That is to say, she does not work alone but through him. However, as will be seen, for the people living during the Middle Ages, Mary was much more than an intercessor. For them, she was independent and capable of making her own decisions.

It is important to consider the Church's theology with regard to Mary's role as an intercessor in order to understand how the popular belief of the Middle Ages exceeded it. The theology concerning the Virgin's intercession "maintains very strictly that the Virgin does not have the power to grant any boon by herself, but only intercedes with her son, who as God is the only source of salvation" (Warner 286). Warner continues:

The most consistent theme in the theology of the Virgin's intercession, however, is her motherhood. She is approached as a human mother who brims over with a mother's love. . . . Her love of mankind is maternal, and her qualities of mercy, gentleness, loving kindness, indulgence, forgiveness, are all seen as motherly. All men are her children through Christ her son, who gave her to them from the Cross; and so she lavishes a mother's love and pity on all her brood. (Warner 286)

Yet in the Middle Ages, the attitude of the people toward Mary went beyond the theology of the Church. For them, her abilities surpassed those of a mediator always working through her son to help bring about salvation. The common people believed that she was independent and had "a will of her own. She could oppose Mercy to Justice and get her way. . . . Mary was equal with her Son in a heavenly division of labour, and when she wanted a favour, he always did what she asked" (Ashe 221). Regardless of how Mary's role is viewed theologically, Marina Warner observes:

the powers of mediation attributed to her throughout

Christianity are considered sovereign: the son can refuse his mother nothing. So a prayer to Mary, made in a spirit of repentance and resolve, is wonder-working; and men and women gathered together to pray to the Virgin forget the distinction between direct and indirect power. (286)

By the eleventh century, miracle stories about the Virgin and the lengths to which she would go to "redeem the fallen" were in circulation throughout Europe (Durham 147). As previously noted, theologically, Mary does perform miracles, but only through God, not on her own. However, "in practice, in the myriad of stories that star the Virgin as all-powerful sorceress with dominion over angels and devils alike, this qualification is forgotten" (Warner 323). The role of Mary in the miracle stories, then, is a reflection of the belief of the people that she is very powerful and capable of acting of her own accord.

With the increase of devotion to the Virgin came the evolvment of many manifestations of this admiration. In addition to the many titles that Catholic Christianity has given to her, Mary

has gained much cultural importance. For example, hundreds of shrines have been built in her honor, many of which continue to inspire pilgrimages today. Two of the most famous are in Spain: the shrine of the Virgin Guadalupe of Estremadura and the shrine of the Virgin of Montserrat. As previously mentioned, many liturgical feasts were dedicated to her and by the end of the seventh century they were being celebrated in both the East and the West. Two prayers, recited in demonstration of devotion to the Virgin, are the Hail Mary and the rosary. The Hail Mary has been one of the most common prayers of the Catholic Church since its appearance in the seventh century (the second part was added in the fifteenth century). The rosary commemorates the fifteen mysteries in the life of the Virgin and her Son, and the chain of fifteen decades of beads is symbolic of those mysteries. Hymns and antiphons have also been written and sung in honor of Mary for hundreds of years. Among the most renowned are the *Ave María*, the *Salve Regina*, the *Regina Caeli*, and the *Ave Regina Caelorum*. Artists who painted the Virgin contributed to the abundance of Marian symbolism which appeared during the Middle Ages, much of which is still used by the

Church today in reference to Mary (Buono 199). The arrival and continuous existence of these manifestations helped to reinforce the ever-increasing admiration of the Virgin Mary.

Although the cult of the Virgin Mary is generally addressed as a trend in Europe as a whole, it was particularly strong in some areas. In his book, The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins, Michael P. Carroll provides a psychoanalytic argument to explain the increased presence of Marian devotion in Spain. While I am not convinced by this argument, the analysis of specific data he includes does present a compelling case that illustrates the cult's importance there. Referring to what he calls "the geographical distribution of the cult" (4), Carroll examines data concerning the influence of anti-Marian movements in Europe during the Middle Ages. In medieval times, various heresies evolved that rejected Mary's ability to intercede on behalf of those who petitioned her directly. It is clear from the documentation provided that Spain was seemingly unaffected by the development of these heresies with anti-Marian agendas. Carroll concludes:

If we look for areas of Europe that are today associated

with the Mary cult and that both during the Reformation and the Middle Ages were never associated with a widespread anti-Marian Christian movement, then we are reduced to two cases: southern Italy and Spain. (16)

Next, the author comparatively studies the type and location of Catholic shrines in Europe. According to the data, in the British Isles, 21 of 23 shrines were dedicated to one or more saints and, of the remaining two, only one was dedicated to the Virgin. In contrast, 51 of 71 shrines in Continental Europe were dedicated exclusively to the Virgin and the majority of these were located in France, Italy, and Spain. This information strengthens the link between Spain and the Mary cult and demonstrates the prevalence of Marian devotion there.

Finally, Carroll directs his attention to two studies of the religious folklore traditions of Spain and Ireland in an effort to determine the extent to which Mary is featured as a central character. In his study of traditional Irish literature, Tom Cross discovered that only eight of 136 motifs featured the Virgin Mary. By contrast, John Keller found that in the study of medieval Spanish

exempla he conducted, of the 43 motifs involving saints, angels, or Mary, 29 featured the Virgin specifically. Clearly, Mary is more emphasized in the Spanish literature than in the Irish, yet one more indication of the stronghold Marian devotion had in Spain. Carroll notes: "Limited though such an analysis is, it provides another bit of evidence to strengthen the association between Spain and the Mary cult" (17).

The exempla were not the only literary manifestation of Mariology in Spain. In the eleventh century, collections of legends about specific Marian shrines appeared, i.e. Our Lady of Laon, Our Lady of Soissons, and Our Lady of Rocamadour. In the thirteenth century, these stories were compiled into anthologies of legends, such as the Speculum Historiale of Vincent of Beauvais and the Miracles de la Saint Vierge of Gaultier of Coincy (Christian 5). Several Spanish writers used the anthologies in order to write their own versions of the miracles. During the thirteenth century, Marian devotion manifested itself in the works of Alfonso X, Llull, Gil de Zamora and Gonzalo de Berceo (Marchand 169). It is believed that at least Berceo wrote the miracles for two reasons: to present the

Virgin and the capacity of her power and also to inspire devotion towards her.

Gonzalo de Berceo was a monk who spent most of his life in the monastery San Millán de la Cogolla. He was a simple clergyman who was aware of the prevailing atmosphere of Marian devotion that predominated in Spain during his life. It is evident that Berceo identified with the people of his community because he was the first known Castilian author to write in the vernacular. Writing in a language that the mostly illiterate masses would understand made the stories more accessible to those he wished to inspire. The Marian piety of the Middle Ages is manifested in Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Señora, a collection of twenty-five poems depicting the Virgin and her willingness to intervene on behalf of her faithful followers who find themselves in difficult circumstances.¹

The relationship between Marian theology and the miracles of Berceo can be understood by considering the work of literary critic Brian Dutton who has demonstrated the existence of a cult to the Virgin Mary in the monastery where Berceo spent much of his life. In the Introduction to his edition of Los Milagros de Nuestra Señora,

Dutton presents much of the evidence proving the existence of the cult by citing the documents extensively. According to him, the cult to the Virgin can be traced through papers dating back to 926 which state that the relics of San Millán were present at the most important altar to the Virgin in the monastery. As such, Marian piety became an integral part of the religious life of the monks who lived there. At the abbey, there was a sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin which served to attract pilgrims travelling along the Camino de Santiago, a few kilometers away from the monastery. Having lived at the monastery for most of his life, Berceo was intimately in touch with what happened there, and the sanctuary to the Virgin is closely linked to the origin of Berceo's Marian works.

In the eleventh century, the monastery acquired a hospital which, according to Michael Gerli, more than likely served as a starting point for pilgrims on their way to the Virgin's sanctuary in the monastery of Yuso. Gerli suggests that if pilgrimages were routinely begun from the hospital, it is possible that Berceo's miracles were recited in order to inspire people to make the trip to the sanctuary (Gerli 23).

Gerli's conclusion is logical when one considers that some critics have noted that in his works in general, Berceo identifies himself with the members of the rural community in which he lived. The miracles were an important, powerful source of inspiration for the people, and his identification with his audience played a key role in this encouragement. In the Introduction to the miracles, Berceo reveals himself as a devout pilgrim: "Yo maestro Gonçalvo de Verceo nomnado, / yendo en romería caeçi en un prado."² By presenting himself as a pilgrim appealing to other pilgrims, "the narrator acquires both credibility and authority. . . ." (Gerli, "Poet and Pilgrim" 141). As Gerli also notes:

While invoking the first person witness, he states that the events which are about to unfold happened to him "yendo en romería" (2b), and that, as a result, he now enjoys the redemptive grace of Our Lady. ("Poet and Pilgrim" 141)

Berceo becomes a member of the group he wishes to inspire and demonstrates his understanding of their situation while at the same time he indirectly recommends the pilgrimage to them.

Berceo continues pulling his audience into the stories with him by directly addressing them at the beginning of various miracles, in a sense asking them to join him in the experience of the story. For example, at the beginning of "El sacristán fornicario," Berceo writes: "Amigos, si quisiéssedes un pocco esperar, / aun otro miraclo vos querría contar" (75ab). Not only does Berceo call them "friends," but he also uses the second-person pronoun vos or you all to address them, immediately establishing a more intimate relationship between himself and his public. In the "Romero engañado por el enemigo malo," Berceo again calls upon his *compañeros*: "Sennores e amigos por Dios e caridat" (182a). A similar address appears at the beginning of miracle XXI: "Sennores e amigos, companna de prestar, / deque Dios se vos quiso traer a est logar" (500ab).

Michael Gerli has carefully studied the discourse in the Milagros and has concluded that Berceo had other ways, in addition to his direct appeals, of addressing his listeners and including them in the narrative. According to Gerli, Berceo "was also careful to incorporate his public into his fiction through the manipulation of

the narrative voice and point of view at strategic junctures in the text" ("Poet and Pilgrim"144). For example, at the beginning of other miracles, he employs the first person plural form of the verb--we-- , thereby creating an intimacy between himself and his listeners. The audience is able to imagine not only Berceo as a witness to the events about to happen, but also themselves as witnesses alongside him. In "El clérigo y la flor," miracle III, he writes: "Leemos de un clérigo que era tietherido" (101a). The same use of the first person plural is seen in miracle VI, "El ladrón devoto."

Si facié otros males, esto no lo leemos
 serié mal condempnarlo por lo que non savemos,
 más abóndemos esto que dicho vos a vemos,
 si ál fizó, perdóneli Christus en qui creemos. (143)

A change in narrative voice often occurs at the end of the miracles when Berceo reinforces the idea that Mary is a protector who gives rewards in exchange for devotion to her or punishment for lack of devotion. Gerli states that by "adopting a discursive structure that could only be characterized as dialogic, the narrator changes both tense and person to reach out beyond the text and

invoke and enfold his listening audience within the discourse" ("Poet and Pilgrim"144). As already observed, Berceo sometimes uses the first person plural verb form to call upon his listeners at the beginning of the miracles. As the miracle runs its course, there are no references to we, the narrator and his public, until the end of the story when Berceo wishes to reiterate the idea that he and the audience are all part of one group. The final quatrain of miracle XXI illustrates this point:

A la Virgo gloriosa todos gracias rendamos,
 de qui tantos miraclos leemos e provamos;
 ella nos dé su gracia que servirla podamos,
 e nos guíe fer cosas por ond salvos seamos. (582)

The use of the first person plural verb form is significant in that it allows Berceo to befriend his public by drawing them into a group who has the privilege of sharing the experience of the miracle story together.

When Berceo has captured the attention and interest of his audience, he begins to tell the miracles. The impact of the poems comes from the idea of salvation that predominated during the

Middle Ages. For the common people, death was the promise of a better life in heaven after having endured so much suffering on earth. In the minds of the medieval people, if they went to heaven to live in grandeur with God, all the suffering on earth would be worth it. The miracles emphasize the importance of devotion; with devotion comes the promise of a beautiful eternal life with God.

It is important to emphasize that Berceo's characterization of the Virgin Mary reflects the overwhelming feelings of the medieval people toward Mary, not just the theology of the Church with regard to her. As already discussed, in the works of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, he maintains that Mary is the ideal mediator between man and Christ and that she never works alone, only through him. However, it is vital to remember that for the people of the Middle Ages Mary is much more than an intercessor. For them, she is all-powerful and makes her own decisions. In Berceo's Milagros, she is a representative of Jesus; with very few exceptions, it is she who decides who deserves her help, and it is she who in fact grants the miracle.³ Clearly, in this respect, Berceo's poems are a reflection of the popular belief concerning Mary rather than the views of St.

Bernard. The faithful people looking for help pray directly to her and ask for help directly from her. Sincere devotion is what matters to the Virgin, and one does not have to go to extraordinary lengths to merit her assistance; even the simplest manifestation of devotion, a prayer, is recognized and rewarded.

According to John E. Keller, each of Berceo's miracles follows, more or less, the same pattern. To begin, Berceo tells where the miracle takes place and the name of the protagonist. Next, he describes the qualities, good or bad, of the principal character. If there is an evil antagonist (for example, the devil) he is also introduced. Then, he tells the events of the miracle story. At the end of each miracle, there are various stanzas that reinforce the reward for honoring Mary or the punishment for disservice to her. There is also a reminder of the protective role of the Virgin (60-62).

In each miracle, Mary is presented as a maternal figure who helps sinners and poor people as any mother would help her own children (Finke 212). As already noted, the Virgin's motherhood plays a key role not only in theology, but also in popular belief. As the mother of Christ who lost her son in order that all others could

be saved, Mary has become a maternal figure to all humankind. People looking to her for help first see her as a mother overflowing with love for her "children," someone who will assist because she is a mother, and mothers always help their own. All of the motherly qualities she undoubtedly showed to Christ--love, nurturance, tenderness, etc.--are transferred to her followers since they are now her family. Those characteristics commonly associated with a maternal figure are manifested in Berceo's characterization of the Virgin. In nearly all of the miracles, Mary demonstrates the love she feels for her devotees; she is gentle, caring, nurturing, and compassionate. As a mother, she shows unconditional love toward all her believers, even the most disgraceful who have committed seemingly inexcusable offenses. She has mercy on them, accepts them, and forgives them because of their genuine, unceasing admiration of her. She expresses her thankfulness by granting them the salvation they have solicited. If necessary, she intercedes on behalf of her followers to defend and protect them just as any mother would do if her children were hurt by someone or were in danger. In the same way that she is gracious and generous toward

the faithful, she becomes angry when it is evident that someone has rendered her a disservice. She has the capacity to reward as well as to punish, another trait characteristic of most mothers.

Mary's maternal ability to reward as well as to punish is evident in the first miracle of Berceo's collection, "La casulla de Ildefonso." Thus it is fitting that this story appear at the beginning as it serves to set the tone for the rest of the miracles. Right from the start, the public is aware of the Virgin's extraordinary powers: her ability to reward those who are loyal and devoted and to punish those who demonstrate a lack of devotion. Ildefonso, a very devout archbishop, is graciously awarded a vestment by Mary after he writes a book about her virginity and arranges for the Feast of the Annunciation to be celebrated in December rather than in March since it is a more joyous time of year. Mary, in her kind, loving, motherly way, appears to Ildefonso to express her gratitude:

Amigo, --dísso l--sepas que só de ti pagada,
 ásme buscada onrra non simple, ca doblada:
 fecist de mí buen libro, ásme bien alavada,
 fecístme nueva festa que non era usada. (61)

Three quatrains later she warns:

De seer en la cátedra que tú estás posado,
 al tu cuerpo sennero es esto condonado;
 de vestir esta alva a ti es otorgado,
 otro que la vistiere non será bien hallado.>> (64)

Clearly, the stage is being set for what is to come later in the story. The audience, already feeling the impact of the reward, has no reason to doubt her word. Ildefonso is granted the ultimate reward at his death: his soul is sent to heaven to be with God. A newly appointed bishop, the arrogant Siagrius, mistakenly assumes himself to be his predecessor's equal and sends for the vestment. As he puts it on, he is promptly strangled by the neckband because of his inappropriate use of the vestment and more importantly, his assumption that he is somehow worthy enough to wear it even though he has not manifested even one shred of devotion to Mary. In addition, his ignorance of Mary's warning is indicative of his lack of devotion. If he were indeed devoted, he would have known that Mary bestows such gifts only on those people who have earned them. Thus, the audience witnesses the two extremes of Mary's powers in

one miracle.

The final quatrains of this miracle and nearly all the others are dedicated to praising Mary and encouraging the public to do right by her. Berceo reiterates what has just occurred in the story:

La Virgen gloriosa, estrella de la mar,
 sabe a sus amigos galardón bueno dar:
 bien sabe a los buenos el bien galardonar,
 a los que la dessierven sábelos mal curar. (73)

Berceo recognizes that in order to have a strong impact on the people, he must show what will happen to those who are good as well as those who are bad. By giving the audience the opportunity to see both, devotion is encouraged because Mary's rewards are more desirable than her punishments. With this first miracle, Berceo has made clear that if one is devoted, one will reap the rewards; if not, there will be consequences.

While the previous miracle demonstrated the Virgin's gratitude and anger with regard to two different people, in miracle XVII, "La iglesia profanada," we see an example of the same group of people experiencing Mary's wrath and then her forgiveness firsthand. Three

friends decide to kill one of their enemies and since "non ovieron vergüenza / del sagrado logar" (382b), they follow the man into a church and murder him there. The Virgin, outraged at the profane event which has taken place, decides to take action.

La Reína de Gloria tóvose por prendada,
 porque la su elesia fíncava vïolada;
 pesó l de corazón, fo ende despechada,
 demostrógelo luego que lis era irada. (384)

The assassins are inflicted with a painful disease which causes them to lose limbs and leaves them horribly deformed. Berceo ensures that his public is aware of why the men have been punished by referring to the community in which the offenders live.

Entendiénlo los pueblos, ellos no lo negavan,
 que ellos merecieron por ond tanto lazravan
 las virtudes sannosas que ellas los majavan,
 no lo asmavan ellos quando las vïolavan. (387)

As their condition deteriorates, the men appeal to different saints for assistance. Receiving no response, "prisieron un consejo, ante fuera a prender, / tornar enna Gloriosa que los fazié arder"

(388cd). Appealing to her as "Madre," they admit the magnitude of their crime and beg Mary for mercy and release from their suffering.

Madre, repisos somos del yerro que fiziemos,
erramos duramente, grand locura trasquiemos,

si tú non nos acorres a nada nos tenemos,
sin ti d'esta fiebre terminar non podremos. (392ab,
393cd)

Mary recognizes their newfound devotion and grants them a partial cure from their illness. The three sinners will no longer be in pain, but their deformities will remain to serve as a reminder to all who see them of the possible consequences one can go through at the hands of the Virgin's ire. Thus, the characters of this story serve to inspire devotion to Mary in two ways. First, they give hope to the people who can relate to the assassins-- they [the audience] may have participated in a similar atrocity--that they too can be saved if they repent and ask to be pardoned. The men also inspire devotion by instilling fear of the Virgin's anger in Berceo's listeners because the people living during this period were already enduring many

hardships and did not need or want physical pain to worsen the situation. Here, the impact on the common people is strong much in the same way it was in the first miracle. Again, the public is able to see that genuine devotion ensures a positive outcome and the lack thereof can bring about much suffering.

The recipients of Mary's miracles are representative of the members of Berceo's audience and can be divided into two groups: innocent devotees and sinful devotees. The first group consists of people who are faithful and have demonstrated their devotion in a variety of ways, such as praying and writing songs or books in the Virgin's honor. Among those in this group are clerics, bishops, almsgivers, etc. When the time comes for Mary to make a decision concerning their salvation, she has no doubt about their worthiness because they have done nothing to jeopardize it and call it into question. Thieves, lazy clergyman, pregnant nuns, fornicators, etc. make up the latter group. Marina Warner observes: "The more raffish the Virgin's suppliant, the better she likes him" (325). The only quality these people have in common is their loyal devotion to Mary manifested in prayers to her or singing Mass in her honor. Berceo, by

writing about figures with whom the public could identify, helped the people see that a place in heaven is guaranteed to everyone, repentant sinners as well as the common people of simple faith. According to Geoffrey Ashe, "every case was a special case" for the Virgin and "a suppliant's love for her was what mattered, and it was this that extracted mercy where mercy was needed" (220).

The steadfast devotion to the Virgin by her innocent devotees is rewarded again and again throughout the collection. Berceo provides numerous examples of people deserving of salvation on the basis of their goodness, purity, and humility. They have all lived commendable lives, fulfilling their spiritual duties day-in and day-out. At the time of their departure from this world, the Virgin goes to them as a mother who loves her children and gives them the greatest gift of all: eternal life. For example, in miracle IV, "El premio de la Virgen," it is evident that the clergyman is very devoted and loyal to the Virgin. He shows his devotion by writing songs for her and singing them everyday:

Apriso cinco motes, motes de alegría

que fablan de los gozos de la Virgo María;

diziéelos el clérigo delante cada día,
 avié ella con ellos muy grand placentería. (118)

Later, when the cleric becomes ill and is dying, she appears before him and says:

Amigo--díso'l--sálvete el Sennor spirital,
 de cuya Madre fust tú amigo leal.
 Afuérzate, non temas, non seas desmarrido,
 sepas serás aína d'esti dolor guarido;
 tente con Dios aína por de cuita essido,
 ca dizlo el tu pulso que es bueno complido.
 Yo cerca ti estando, tú non ayas pavor,
 tente por mejorado de toda la dolor;
 recibí de ti siempre servicio e amor,
 darte quiero el precio de essa tu lavor. (124cd, 125-
 26)

As we see, she first addresses his emotional concerns; her reaction to the clergyman is one of compassion and caring, strong feelings of a mother who loves her child. Having reassured the cleric that she is there for him and there is no reason to be afraid, she sends his

soul to heaven to be with God in order to show her gratitude for his piety.

The protagonist of miracle V, "El pobre caritativo," also finds himself worthy of the benefits of the Virgin's mercy. It is evident in the miracle that the poor almsgiver is aware of how a person must live in order to obtain the grace of Mary at the time of death. Berceo ensures that his listeners will know which acts constitute sincere devotion by giving concrete examples in the stories.

Por ganar la Gloriosa que él mucho amava,
 partiélo con los pobres todo quanto ganava;
 en esto contendíe, e en esto punnava,
 por aver la su gracia su mengua oblidava. (133)

As the man is about to pass on, the Virgin comes to him to praise and thank him for his demonstrations of devotion--his selflessness, manifested by his charitable actions, and his recitation of the Hail Mary--and reassures him that he will go to heaven to be with her Son.

<<Tú mucho cobdiciest la nuestra compaña,
 sopist pora ganarla bien buena maestría,

ca partiés tus almosnas, diziés 'Ave María',
 por qué lo faziés todo yo bien lo entendía.

Yo so aquí venida por levarte comigo,
 al regno de mi Fijo que es bien tu amigo. (135, 137ab)

Toward the end of the miracle, Berceo describes the effect of the event on the people who are with the almsgiver and hear the voice of Mary. By doing so, he encourages the people listening to the narrative to act similarly.

Los omnes que avién la voz ante oída,
 tan aína vidieron la promesa complida;
 a la Madre gloriosa que es tan comedida,
 todos li rendién gracias, quisque de su partida. (139)

Another man who has lived a virtuous life and proves that he unquestionably merits the Virgin's rewards is Jerónimo, the main character of miracle XVIII, "El nuevo obispo." In the first quatrain of the miracle, Berceo describes him:

En essa misme cibdat avié un buen christiano,
 avié nombre Jerónimo, era missacantano;

fazié a la Gloriosa servicio muy cutiano,
 los días e las noches, invierno e verano. (306)

When the bishop suddenly dies, the monastic community prays to God to show them whom to appoint to the position. In recognition of his devotion, the Virgin decides that Jerónimo should be the new bishop and she appears "a un omne católico, bien de religión," (308a) with her message. He reports his conversation with her; Jerónimo is found and named the new bishop. The appointment is his first reward from Mary. As he continues to live a humble life, he ensures the bestowal of yet another gift at his death.

Guióli su fazienda Dios nuestro Sennor,
 fizo buena la vida, la fin mucho mejor;
 quando issió d'est siglo fue al otro mayor,
 guiólo la Gloriosa, madre del Criador.

With the story of Jerónimo the audience observes another example of what can be gained by living an honorable, incorruptible existence.

The role of Mary in "El clérigo ignorante," miracle IX, is one of a protector and an intercessor. In the story, the clergyman is devoted

but ignorant.

Era un simple clérigo, pobre de clerecía
 dicié cutiano missa de la Sancta María;
 non sabié decir otra, diciéla cada día,
 más la sabié por uso que por sabiduría. (220)

When the bishop learns of the cleric's ignorance, he expels him from the monastery. The cleric, sad and dismayed, prays to Mary for help. The Virgin, who is angry because of the bishop's refusal to allow the clergyman to continue reciting her Mass, appears to him and threatens him as a mother would do in defense of her child.

Si tú no li mandares decir la missa mía
 como solié decirla, grand querella avría,
 e tú serás finado en el trenteno día,
 ¡Desend verás qué vale la sanna de María! (231)

Her anger is that of any mother whose child has been hurt by another and quickly turns into powerful feelings of wanting to provide protection. The willingness of Mary to reward those who are devoted to her is also evident here.

La madre piadosa que nunca falleció

a qui de corazón a pides li cadió,
 el ruego del su clérigo luego gelo udió:
 no lo metió por plazo, luego li acorrió. (227)

The Virgin's maternal, protective instinct is visible in other miracles. One such miracle is number nineteen, "El parto maravilloso," in which a pregnant woman is saved by the Virgin from the rising tide on the monastery island of Mont-St. Michel. The people watching from the shore assume she has drowned and are surprised when she appears later with her newborn. With regard to this miraculous occurrence, Mary Jane Kelley observes that "Berceo emphasizes the fact that these people did not see the actual miracle ('como non vedién nada' 440a) and therefore had need of an explanation" (818).

Dissieron: "Dezit, duenna, por Dios e caridat,
 por Dios vos conjuramos, dezitnos la verdat;
 dezitnos de la cosa toda certenedat,
 e cómo vos livrastes de vuestra prennedat. (444)

Kelley continues by noting that the onlookers have already assumed that a miracle has taken place even before the woman tells her

story. According to this critic, "The physical context of the event helps them arrive at their conclusion, since they know that Holy surroundings are a likely scene for miracles" (818).

Por Dios avino esto, en ello no dubdamos,
 e por Sancta María a la que nos rogamos,
 e por Sant Miguel en cuya voz andamos,
 es esti tal miraclo bien que lo escrivamos. (445)

Although Berceo does not mention explicitly the nature of the devotion of the woman, it is implied by her very presence among the other pilgrims on the way to the chapel of Saint Michael. As the woman describes what has happened, Mary's protectiveness is evident in the actions she takes to save the woman and her child.

Yo en esto estando, vino Sancta María,
 cubrióme con la manga de la su almexía;
 non sentía nul periglo más que quando dormía,
 si yoguiesse en vanno más leida non sería.
 Sin cuita e sin pena, sin ninguna dolor,
 parí esti fijuelo, ¡grado al Criador!
 Ovi buena madrina, non podría mejor,

fizo misericordia sobre mí, peccador. (448-49)

The Virgin's protective actions toward the woman suggest a kinship between the two women since Mary is a mother coming to the rescue of someone about to become one. González-Casanovas writes: "The miracle itself consists of the dramatic and symbolic enactment of Mary's role as Mother not only of God but also of all humankind" (26).

A similar bond between Mary and another pregnant woman is evident in miracle twenty-one, "De cómo una abbadesa fue prennada et por su conbento fue acusada et después por la Virgen librada." The central protagonist is a nun who has led a virtuous life and set an example for the other nuns in her abbey:

En esta abbadessa yazié mucha bondat,
 era de grand recabdo e de grand caridat,
 guñava su conviento de toda boluntat,
 vivién segund regla en toda onestat. (506)

Unfortunately, the abbess "cadió una vegada" (507a) and "quando bien se catido fallóse embargada" (507d). When she can no longer hide her pregnancy, the other nuns suspect what is happening and

send word to the bishop. When the nun realizes that her secret is about to be discovered, she prays to the Virgin for help and advice. It is clear that the abbess is aware of and has faith in the capabilities of Mary. She says:

Madre, bien lo leemos, dízelo la escriptura,
que eres de tal gracia e de tan grant mesura,
que qui de voluntad te dice su rencura,
tú luego li acorres en toda su ardura. (519)

Mary hears the nun's plea and appears to her in a dream. First, the Virgin offers words of reassurance, "<<Aforzad, abbadessa, / bien estades comigo,. . ." (531ab) and then, words of forgiveness:

Non ayades nul miedo de caer en porfazo,
bien vos á Dios guardada de caer en ess lazo,
bien lis ed a osadas a tenerlis el plazo,
non lazará por esso el vuestro espinazo. (532)

With the assistance and protection of Mary, the baby is born and sent with angels to be raised by a follower of Mary.

To my mind, there are two possible explanations of the Virgin's intervention on behalf of the abbess. First, Mary is a mother who is

ever-loyal and dedicated to her maternal responsibilities to her children. Here, she demonstrates her capacity to forgive just about anything in order to help her child. The second reason stems from the connection between the two women: they are both women who have become mothers as the result of rather unorthodox pregnancies. In Mary's case, she was pregnant with a child other than her husband's. One can surmise, then, that Mary was shunned and made an outcast in her community because of societal codes which frowned upon pregnancy outside of marriage. The question of the paternity of the abbess's infant is not relevant; it is the fact that she is pregnant at all that is scandalous since it is she who serves as a model for others in the convent to imitate. Had her pregnancy been uncovered before she received help from Mary, she would have been the subject of ridicule at the hands of the monastic community and would have been expelled. It is this similarity of experiences that prompts the identification of Mary with the nun.

Mary's unconditional love is evident in numerous miracles in which she has mercy on her sinful devotees who are guilty of unforgiveable crimes and misdeeds. In "El ladrón devoto" (miracle

VI), the protagonist is a thief who, nevertheless, repeats the longest version of the Hail Mary, a firm indication of his devoutness. When the authorities attempt to hang him, the Virgin, recognizing his devotion, intervenes on his behalf to protect him: "Metióli so los pies do estava colgado / las sus manos preciosas, tóvolo alleviado:" (150ab). In this story, she plays different roles: mother, intercessor, and protector. Later, when the thief is about to have his throat slashed, she puts her hands around his neck to protect him:

Fueron por degollarlo los mancebos más livianos,
con buenos seraniles grandes e adianos;
metió Sancta María entre medio las manos,
fincaron los gorgueros de la golliella sanos. (155)

Here, in spite of the thief's sinful ways, Mary pardons him because his one redeeming quality is his admiration for her. Her acceptance of him, weaknesses and all, is a true mark of her unbiased attitude concerning her children, a characteristic indicative of motherhood.

In addition to "El ladrón devoto," "El sacristán fornicario"

(miracle II) is another example in which the unconditional love of the Virgin is most apparent. In this story, not only is the sacristan corrupted by an enemy and becomes a fornicator, but there is evidence of a lack of sincere admiration for Mary.

Siquier a la exida, siquier a la entrada,
 delant del altar li cadíe la passada;
 el enclín e la Ave teniela bien usada,
 non se li olvidava en ninguna vegada. (80)

Elizabeth Howe notes: "The sacristan has retained only the vestiges of his devotion to the Virgin, praying before her shrine as much from habit as from fervor . . ." (191). There is not much evidence to justify the intercession of the Virgin, but even though the sacristan does not necessarily deserve her help, she does not hesitate to intervene (Howe 192): "quand ixió de casa, de mí priso licencia, / del peccado que fizo yo'l daré penitencia" (92cd). She recognizes his weakness and forgives him because of his previous dedication to her. However, instead of sending his soul directly to heaven, she revives him, he reforms, and then earns his salvation by spending the remainder of his life faithfully devoted to the Virgin.

This story is one instance in which Mary appeals to Christ to settle a dispute between herself and a devil. When the sacristan dies, a group of devils arrives to escort his soul to eternal damnation. "With legal arguments they manage to confound the angels sent to rescue the fallen devotee, thereby necessitating the direct intervention of 'la Gloriosa' on behalf of the sacristan" (Howe 191). Mary calls upon her Son when she and the devil are unable to resolve the dispute between them. Christ, incapable of denying any request put forth by his mother, "mandó tornar la alma al cuerpo el Sennor, / dessent qual mereciesse, recibrié tal onor" (94cd). The sacristan is resuscitated and granted the opportunity to prove that he merits the assistance of the Virgin at the time of his final passing from this world. Without a doubt, this story reflects the theology of Mary's intercession rather than the medieval popular belief because only with the assistance of her Son is she able to overpower the devils.

This same need of Mary to petition her Son when she comes up against devils can be seen in "San Pedro y el monje mal ordenado" (miracle VII). Like the sacristan in the above miracle, the

protagonist of this story is lacking in devotion. The only piece of information that even suggests devotion on the part of the monk is his service in St. Peter's monastery. Berceo describes the monk: "avié en él un monge assaz mal ordenado, / de lo que diz la regla avié pocco cuidado. / Era de pocco seso, facié mucha locura," (160cd, 161a). Later, "murió por sus peccados por fiera ocasión, / nin priso Corpus Dómini nin fizo confessión," (163bc). Not surprisingly, devils appear to take the monk's soul to eternal damnation. In this case, St. Peter is the combatant against the devils. The saint first asks for Christ's help, but when He refuses to bend the rules, "undaunted, San Pedro requests the aid of a more powerful advocate, the Virgin Mary. . ." (Howe 192). Mary acknowledges the monk's devotion, insincere as it may be, and goes to her Son to ask for help in retrieving the monk's soul from the devils. Again, she succeeds and Christ renders his decision in her favor:

Quiero fazer atanto por el vuestro amor:
 torne aún al cuerpo en qui fo morador;
 faga su penitencia como faz peccador,

e puede seer salvo por manera mejor. (172)

In both of these miracles, it is evident that Mary's function is that of a true intercessor between man and God and "casting Mary as man's advocate before the judgment seat of God derives as much from her role as mediatrix as it does from her maternal instincts to protect mankind by interceding with her divine Son" (Howe 190). Howe observes that "the affect [sic] achieved in relating the miraculous salvation of these individual, even undeserving, sinners is less theological understanding than it is fervent devotion to the Virgin Mary" (193).

In addition to miracles II and VII, the final miracle of Berceo's collection, the well-known story of Theophilus referred to earlier, is also illustrative of not only Mary's maternal characteristics but also her role as a mediator between man and God. In Berceo's version entitled "De cómo Teófilo fizo carta con el diablo de su ánima et después fue convertido e salvo," it is evident that Theophilus is ". . . un omne bono" (750a) from Berceo's description of him:

Era en sí mismo de buena contenenencia,

sabié aver con todos paz e grand abenencia;
 omne era temprado, de buena conciencia,
 era muy bien condido de sen e de ciēcia. (752)

Theophilus, who serves as a steward under the bishop, is dismissed from his position when the bishop dies and a new one is appointed. Overcome by jealousy and anger, he signs away his soul to the devil. Later, he regrets his actions and contemplates how to return to the good grace of God. Theophilus is an example of a sinner who is so ashamed that he cannot bring himself to ask for help directly from God. He ponders this thought and even states "no trovaré qui quiera por mí a Dios rogar;" (797b) even though he wants to ask the Virgin, he fears "non me querrá oír ca es de mí sannosa, / porque la denegué, fiz tan esquiva cosa" (799cd). Later, realizing that he cannot resolve his problem without her assistance, Theophilus prays to Mary, admits his sin, and begs for help.

Sennora, tú que eres puerta de paraísso,
 en qui el Rey de Gloria tantas bondades miso,
 torna en mí, Sennora, el to precioso viso,
 ca so sobeja guisa del mercado repiso. (819)

After waiting 40 days with no response, "apareció l de noche
 Sancta Virgo María, / díssoli fuertes bierbos com qui con fellonía"
 (822cd). She is angry with him and her words are very harsh:

Díssoli: "¿En qué andas, omne de auze dura?
 Sobre yelo escribes, contiendes en locura;
 harta só de tu pleito, dasme grand amargura,
 eres muy porfidioso, enojas sin mesura.
 Fazes peticiónes locas e sin color,
 a nos ás denegados, busquest otro sennor;
 don renegado malo, de Judas muy peor,
 non sé por ti quí quiera rogar al Criador.
 Yo vergüenza avría al mi Fijo rogar,
 non sería osada la razón empezar:
 el que tú deneguesti e busquesti pesar,
 non nos querrá oír nin a ti perdonar. (823-25)

In response, Theophilus admits his error and implores her to help him by reminding her of all the others she has assisted in the past who were also in need of her aid. When Mary encourages him to pray to God himself, he rejects her suggestion because of his fear of God:

Madre, todo lo creo, só ende bien certano,
 quanto que Christo manda creer a su christiano;
 mas só en grand vergüenza, en miedo sovejano,
 ca fui, mi Sennora, contra Él muy villano. (840)

He also reminds her of her Son's inability to refuse his mother anything:

Tú eres pora todo ¡grado al Criador!
 por rogar al tu Fijo, tu Padre, tu Sennor;
 quequiere que tú mandes o ovieres sabor,
 todo lo fará Elli de muy buen amor. (843)

Just as Jesus is unable to say "no" to his mother, so is Mary unable to resist the pleas of her devotees. She goes to God and returns to Theophilus with good news:

Yo fablé en tu pleito de toda voluntat,
 finqué los mis enojos ante la magestat;
 áte Dios perdonado, fecha grand caridat,
 conviene tú que seas firme en tu bondat. (859)

Just as there is significance in the presence of the first miracle at the beginning of the collection, so can a similar

importance be found in the placement of the final miracle. To my mind, all of the main elements of the poems in the collection are present in the last story of Berceo's work. To begin with, all of the maternal qualities Mary has demonstrated throughout the miracle stories are manifested in her interactions with Theophilus: displeasure, disappointment, unconditional love, forgiveness, etc. Secondly, through his characterization of Theophilus, Berceo has shown the importance of faithfulness and loyalty to Mary and the requirement of repentance in the quest for salvation. In addition, he has demonstrated that despite human error, forgiveness and eternal life are possible. This miracle is Berceo's final opportunity to create a lasting impression in the minds of his audience. To my mind, he has written an all-encompassing example of man's rejection of God and Mary and their regenerative outreach to a repentant soul.

While the stories in Berceo's collection are linked by the common thread of a miracle, it is possible to separate the narratives into two categories: stories in which Mary is both seen and heard and those in which she is only heard. It seems that while

Mary does not discriminate when deciding who is granted a miracle, she is very careful in her decision about to whom she will appear in a vision and to whom she will not. One general characteristic of the miracles in which an appearance does occur is that people of the Church--monks, bishops, nuns, etc.--are the privileged few permitted to experience such an epiphany. In the stories in which she is only heard, the people who hear her voice are characteristic of the general population. One plausible explanation of the pattern of visions requires a closer look at the people to whom she appears. As already stated, in Berceo's miracles, they are representatives of the Church. As such, they are among an elite group of medieval people who are lettered and, therefore, held in high esteem by the illiterate public. Monks and nuns are role models who possess personal values and qualities that the common people admire and aspire to have. Because of this deep respect, whatever the clergy say is held in high regard and has to be true because of the credibility of the source. By appearing to members of the monastic community, Mary ensures that the miracle stories will be told repeatedly. More importantly, to my mind, is that by permitting the

selective few who can read and write to see her, she also guarantees that the narratives will be recorded. While the occurrence of any miracle has a strong, personal impact on all those who hear it, the report of one accompanied by a vision strengthens the power that Mary seems to have.

Curiously enough, the beneficiary of the miracle is not necessarily the person who sees her. For example, in miracle XIII, Jerónimo is the actual recipient of her gratitude because he becomes the new bishop. However, she does not state her wishes to him in a vision. Instead, she appears to another man of the Church with her message. It seems that even though Jerónimo is deserving of Mary's reward, his faithfulness in and of itself does not warrant an appearance. When the vision occurs, he is not yet a member of the "official" church community. In miracle IX, Mary comes to the aid of the ignorant monk but, again, he is not the one who sees and hears her. In anger, she appears to the bishop and demands that he help the monk. There are two reasons to explain the choice of her appearance to the bishop rather than the monk. First of all, the bishop, who is clearly in a more prestigious position within the Church hierarchy,

has the power to reverse his decision and allow the monk to return. Secondly, the bishop, being a literate person, would undoubtedly record the appearance of the Blessed Mother and the results of that manifestation, an act that not only demonstrates his devotion to Mary, but also serves to diminish his guilt.

Miracle stories such as Berceo's, which are perceived both aurally and with the inner eye of the human spirit, may promote either skepticism or increased faith by those who hear them. Obviously, the latter was the case for faithful followers and members of the cult of the Virgin Mary. It has been noted that the "milagros" amount to ecclesiastical propaganda, recited primarily to solicit donations for the monastic community; some may even equate literature such as the Milagros de Nuestra Señora with outlandish fairy tales. However, as has been seen in this study, such writings served as inspirational stimulus for continued growth on a spiritual journey in medieval times.

There is little doubt that Berceo's intention was similar to that of one of the writers of the Gospels: "these are written so that you may come to believe. . ." (John 20:31). By documenting the actions of

a maternal, loving, caring, powerful being embodied in the Virgin Mary, Berceo presents a compelling case for belief in and adoration of the Blessed Mother.

Notes

¹In general, all of Berceo's works represent the religiousness of the period. However, the Milagros is the work which most reflects the Marian devotion of the time.

²Gonzalo de Berceo. Milagros de Nuestra Señora. Ed. Michael Gerli. (Madrid: Cátedra, 1988), 2ab. Further quotations from the miracle stories will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

³I will discuss the exceptions below.

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