

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Apparition, Narration, and Reappropriation of Meaning

Agustin Martin and Felice Noelle Rodriguez

Philippine Studies vol. 44, no. 4 (1996): 465–478

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Apparition, Narration, and Reappropriation of Meaning

Agustin Martin Rodriguez
Felice Noelle Rodriguez



In 1603, a "larauan" or figure of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was recovered from the sea off the shore of what was to become the town of Caysasay in the province of Batangas. This recovery and the miraculous events subsequent to it were to become the object of a narrative poem and novena entitled "Epitome de la Historia de la Aparicion de Nuestra Señora de Caysasay Que se Venere en el Pueblo de Taal, de la Provincia de Batangas, Y Su Sagrada Novena." This narrative and novena were written in 1859 by P. Francisco Bencuchillo (1859) of the Augustinian order.

This article is a reflection on the movement of interpretation and appropriation of a text in the deepening of the Filipino faith experience. The text, although written by a Spanish friar with the approval of his superior, is a rich ground for an understanding of how the "karaniwang tao" or common people experienced the Holy. As such this text could be extremely valuable in the recovery of a living faith, for the depth of the self and its deepest self-understanding are not immediately accessible to discursive thought. Thus like the mystery of evil for Paul Ricoeur (1969, 8-9, 353-55; 1974, 473) we must approach the question of faith from its symbols.

The living experience of faith is a reality too deep to be dissected immediately by the discursive reason of the experiencing self. For the faithful, faith is lived, not dissected or analyzed. This lived experience leaves traces in material and linguistic reality through which the believer concretizes his or her being. In this way faith produces symbols which are the concretizations of the unique experience of the faithful who are immersed in the reality of their relationship with their god. Thus the man of faith is not immediately a theologian but a story teller, a poet, a myth maker.

The First Naiveté

Always there is the intermediate movement of mythic or poetic concretization of self which precedes any analysis. These moments of self-expression are in themselves moments of self-understanding—but understanding immersed in experience without critical distance. Thus symbols reveal much to us about faith in the realm of “first naiveté” (Ricoeur 1976, 74; 1970, 524ff.). Again, we are using the insight of Ricoeur who sees that there is that moment of immersion in experience which uncritically accepts phenomena according to what we immediately understand them to be. This is the living and dwelling within the naiveté of precritical, lived certainty (Ricoeur 1976, 44). With all our precritical cultural, ideological, and religious biases, we accept what comes to us as that which is the truth, or what is worthy of being accepted as that which is (Ricoeur 1976, 68). But our understanding of what makes itself present to man, whatever form the phenomena may take, is not always a truthful understanding of being. We could be deluded by subconscious desires which, unaware, shape our vision (Ricoeur 1970, 34).

What Freud has shown us is that what we understand to be real could be shaped by pathologies of our psyche (Ricoeur 1970, 33). After all, in the depths of our self, we are shaped by forces beyond our immediate understanding or control. There is always that deep movement of the involuntary which shapes our perception of the real (Ricoeur 1974, 443). There is also that brokenness in reason which, though finite, seeks to grasp the infinite. Thus the precritical understanding of the world could be filled with true insight into what is, but at the same time it could be shaped by delusion. A critical attitude must then intervene in the moment of first naiveté in order to reveal the insight arrived at by lived experience (Ricoeur 1970, 33).

Critical intervention comes when a certain distancing from the world view of first naiveté is for some reason accomplished. When the reader somehow achieves some distancing from the immediate experience or understanding of the presuppositions of first naiveté, the meaning of the text becomes retrievable “through and beyond estrangement” (Ricoeur 1976, 44). In other words, critical intervention is not merely destructive but productive of fresh insight.

Critical intervention and distancing must move both with the suspicion of one aware of the possibilities of delusion and the faith of one aware that the symbols that language bears are overflowing with a superabundance of meaning. This is most true in the realm

of faith where experience is immersed in the beyond of being and reason. We must be aware that what speaks speaks within the language of what overflows language. Thus the call for caution must be accompanied by the call for an openness to a meaning that overflows the total comprehending action of language (Ricoeur 1976, 443). Thus the critical moment is a moment of preparation—a preliminary act of opening to what comes into revelation. Symbol bears the overplus of meaning that cannot be contained completely by discursive thought. Thus an excursion into symbol and myth prepares the thinker to recover for discursive thought the truth mediated by symbols.

With Ricoeur we can see that the immediate experience of myth, especially myth which come to us from the first naiveté of ancestors, is no longer accessible to us. After the passage of man through the nihilism of modernity (which can no longer accept myth with the naiveté of primordial man without seeing the delusion of desire or the blind drive for existence) we are no longer contemporaneous with the experience that gives us direct access to the meaning of these myths (Ricoeur 1974, 442). We no longer intuit the meaning of the fall whenever we hear the story of Adam nor do we accept the fact that the hosts of Heaven sang glory at the birth of Christ. These stories we understand to be symbols, i.e., things which do not have the weight of historical fact. They are products of the human mind which creates symbols to express a deepfelt reality. But we forget that for the writers of these myths, these events were as real as the rising and the setting of the sun, as real as the bonding of atoms or the gravitational pull of black holes. For primordial man understood his stories from the rationality of myth.

We cannot, of course, return to mythic understanding. The idea is not to return to primordial understanding but, from our present, we must discover the new possibilities of faith (Ricoeur 1974, 465). Our critical eye born from a critical distance allows us to rediscover myth and recover from it the possibilities of man. For the recovery of symbol and its meaning for us who have gone through the distancing of nihilism means the recovery of our own being and its possibilities uttered in these myths (Ricoeur 1970, 510). The task in this case is not merely the recovery of understanding. More deeply it is a recovery of who we are and who we can be from the recovery of understanding and insight. Thus the recovery of symbol is no mere looking back in curiosity nor is it a mere exercise in method. Finally, what we seek is the "second naiveté" that Ricoeur speaks of in many of his works concerning symbol.

The Second Naiveté

This "second naiveté" is precisely the movement of recovery when the critical thinker, faced with the overplus of meaning posited by the first naiveté, has arrived at the truth of the symbol after critical thought. Second naiveté is the revitalizing of the text after the critique of nihilism, for it recovers the saying of the symbol in an attitude of critical openness. In a sense, "second naiveté" is a recovery of faith for the critical thinker. The critical moment distances or alienates us from acceptance but it also opens us to an openness or naiveté which transcends uncritical acceptance of meaning. Ricoeur believes that after the critical moment of nihilism, suspicion, and distanciation, we are able to recover the essential insight into being that the symbol bears. But to recover that insight, what is required is a postcritical opening to the superabundance of meaning that symbol speaks.

Before we proceed to an actual investigation of the text at hand, it would be important to qualify the idea of a critical reader of myth who arrives at a second naiveté. From Ricoeur's texts, the critical reader seems to come to a text from a position of superiority, as if he or she were at a point closer to the truth than the source of the text. His reading of the history of faith which moves from the religions of fear and bargaining to nihilism toward a faith of the God of love is indicative of a bias for a progression in understanding which corresponds to the forward movement of chronological time.¹ Later time seems to be more authentic and the critical person of second naiveté is closer to a more authentic faith. This seems to be the case since faith does seem to deepen as we move in time—whether in the case of individual growth or humanity's historical development. But we should be more cautious in asserting this understanding of the history of faith. It could very well produce a bias for the present state of things over the past as primitive or backward.

Perhaps a more fruitful understanding of the second naiveté is to see it as a recovery of the saying of the symbol for the critical vision of the present. The idea of critical refers to the distance of time and the disparity of horizons which dissociate us from the naiveté of a precritical direct access into the meaning of the text. It would be critical because now that the meaning is no longer directly accessible to the reader, and the intervention of interpretation is called for. The second naiveté is the moment when the critical thinker is given access to the insight of the myth from his or her particular

horizon of meaning. We must be aware that in the reappropriation of meaning, we could be appropriating meaning into our precritical notions of the present. A second naiveté at its deepest possibility is a reappropriation of a deeper vision which the text opens for the reader. But it could also happen that distanciation could produce a transferring of the text from one level of first naiveté to another with the presumed, uncritical literal reading of the text that the reader arrives at.

This is not to contradict the insight of Ricouer into the progression of the western religious experience as a movement from religion to atheism toward authentic faith. But a cautionary note must be made to check against any excessive valuation of the biases of the present historical situation of faith or understanding against its more "primitive" or "less authentic forms." With that precaution stated, we may proceed to sift through the text at hand in order to see how the dialectic of first and second naiveté can work to give the reader an insight into lived faith.

The Text: Narrative and Lived Faith

The "Epitome..." is really a work composed of two related yet distinct parts. The first section is the actual "historia de la aparicion" and the second part is the "sagrada novena." Although both were written by P. Francisco Bencuchillo these works seem to belong to two different modes of remembering. The "historia" is clearly a work of the mythic imagination written in octosyllabic quatrain, i.e. verses of four lines per stanza with each line bearing eight syllables. The form follows the typical *pasyon* form. The "novena" clearly follows the formula of novenas approved by the Church.

What is most interesting about the narrative form of the "historia" is its close affinity with the narratives of apparitions in late medieval Spain. These narratives which recount the discovery of a sacred image follow a typical pattern: the discovery of the image, the taking of the image to the town proper, the return of the image to its original site where a shrine is built, and the flourishing of a town around the site of the shrine (Christian 1989, 16). In these narratives, a statue or image is found by one of the common people in some uninhabited, undomesticated location. The townspeople, the parish priest, or even the person who discovers the image try to install the image in the parish church, but through some miraculous power it

returns to the original site where it was found. After the failure of a number of attempts to install the image back in the Parish, the people decide to enshrine it in the wilderness where it was found. There a chapel is built and eventually a town is built around it.

This is almost exactly the story of the discovery of the *Nuestra Señora de Caysasay*. She is caught by a fisherman in his net, then she is taken to the town where she is put into the care of a pious woman. Every night the image disappears and returns the next morning. These strange excursions are reported to the parish priest who decides to keep the image in the parish church under guard and lock. Still the image is able to leave and she disappears without a trace. All that is left of her is a report that she was seen with a heavenly retinue traveling along a path lit by candle light. No one could tell where she had disappeared to until two women who are gathering firewood in the wilderness spot her on top of a tree. They tell the parish priest of their discovery and they are painfully rebuked for telling lies. They convince the good Father that they are sincere, so he follows them and there they discover the image on a tree. A shrine is built for the image on the spot and eventually a town grows around it.

That the story fits so neatly into a pattern is in itself a source of many questions worth investigating. Is there an obvious medieval influence in the construction of the myth? The easy answer of course is that the friar, seeing things from a Castillian, medieval horizon, will recount the story in a form which will validate the holiness of the event. But if one examines the documents of the investigation that followed the discovery of the image, it is clear that the friar followed the story as it was recounted by the people. The documents themselves may not have been available to him then but the documents show a consistent narrative line which recounts the events. He must have reconstructed the narrative from the traditional recollection of the event by the townsfolk. Thus we see that either the narrative form is a universal, primordial archetype for apparition stories or the people's religious mythology is already effectively colored by the Spanish medieval imagination as early as the 1600s.

We should not be surprised that as early as the 1600s, the medieval religious framework already captured the religious imagination of the people. Clearly the pattern of apparition mythology has a universal and primordial appeal. It fits into the very experience of the establishment of sacred space through hierophany which belongs to most religions. Eliade documents these incursions of the Holy into

profane space even among the earliest stories of religious man (Eliade 1959, refer especially to the second document). We see in the poem how P. Bencuchillo must have put into poetic form what the people remembered as the myth of their town's establishment and this establishment's rootedness in hierophany. There is hardly any obvious reinterpretation in the poetic narration of the discovery.

In the narrative the image is taken to embody the Virgin Mary. The figure is referred to as the Virgin and never as a thing. And whenever Mary is described these are the characteristics they attribute to her: "Inang pinag bocod," (12) "Virgeng walang caholip," (25) "Virgeng caayaaya," (26) "Virgeng Inang maamo," (33) "Inang cauliuli," (37) "Poong Virgeng mapag ampon," (45) "Virgeng mapag-adya," (53) "Virgeng mapagcalara," (55) "Virgeng mahal," (56, 78), "Virgen/ maibiguit, maulihin/ sa Poong maalongning," (71), "Ina...nang Dios," (76) "Virgeng Inang naaua," (77).² Here we see the image of a person of majesty who is tied to her people as one who is affectionate, compassionate, and filled with a mother's love for her children. This is the Mary of the Filipino's devotion. She reflects the Filipino's need for the powerful being who looks down on the lowly with compassion and deep concern. This is a recurring theme in the Filipino's search for the Divine, i.e. the search for the powerful and compassionate being who will take one in as child or "alipin,"³ i.e., a person of total dependence. The story of the beheaded Sangley fits exactly into this pattern.

As an addendum to the discovery narrative, the seemingly famous legend of Haybing is told. Haybing is a devotee who was beheaded when a persecution of Chinese at Caysasay occurred. According to legend, Haybing was found alive at the church steps the day after he was beheaded. When questioned about the miraculous event, he says that the Virgin of Caysasay rescued him. After he is saved, he swears allegiance and service as long as he has the "buhay na caniyang hiram," (78) his borrowed life. Thus he has an "utang" or debt and is tied to the powerful Mother of God who bestows life on him. But he turns his back on the debt ("caniyang pinagtalican, sa Virgen na cinaotangan") (79) and he instantly dies when he openly professes his valuing his wife over the Virgin.

Integral also to the "Historia" is the story of the town's founding. Here, the most significant detail is the lack of potable water because their only source of water was saline. The Virgin miraculously transforms the water source into potable water and those who are dying of thirst are saved. In this whole first part, what we see is a Virgin

Mother who is known intuitively as mother, source of life, protector, and some kind of patron to whom the people owe allegiance. This is the intuitive, uncritical understanding of the Virgin from the level of the lived faith of the people. This faith is consistently echoed throughout the narrative, but a more studied examination of the actual narrative structure borrowed from the Castilian, medieval apparition narratives shows a possible political understanding of these events.

One significant aspect of this narrative and the medieval narrative structures is the insistent return of the image to its place of discovery, the place where the people dwell, away from the centers of power. In this case, the Virgin repeatedly returns to the wilderness where she was found. Another consistent detail is that she is first found by a member of the common folk, and when she is lost, it is also the common folk who rediscover her. The Virgin here is of the people found in the places where they are. And when she is placed in the "bayan" or the parish which is the center of the established religion she insists on going back to her place of discovery.

According to William A. Christian, Jr. (1989, 20) in his *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*, the return to the wilderness is a

paganization (from pagus, country) of Christianity—a kind of encoded recapitulation of the process by which rural pre-Christian notions of a sacred landscape reasserted themselves over an initially cathedral-and-parish-church-centered religion.²

The whole narrative seems to be an assertion in mythic form of the people's own understanding of sacred space which was not comfortable with the parish church, "bayan"-based religion of the Spanish. It is perhaps a reappropriation of the common folk of the established church religion. So we see that the whole narrative is already interpretation. It is already speaking the lived experience into a form which will be handed down to generations, essentially explaining their idea of religion and faith. But this is not yet properly interpretation, if interpretation is taken to be the work of discursive thought. No conscious analysis of the experience is made here. The people's insight into their experience is put into a narrative form which expresses the people's deepest understanding of their faith. Interpretation, on another level will come when P. Bencuchillo constructs his prayer.

Novena as Appropriation

In the Novena, the moment of interpretation of myth by the Spanish friar comes into play. If he put aside his theological baggage when he wrote the "Historia," he appropriates the meaning of the "Historia" in the novena, bearing with him all his cultural and religious baggage. P. Bencuchillo in the novena takes the narrative and, in one sense, reappropriates it for the church. But this reappropriation is not a colonization, a domination and destruction. We could say that it is an opening of its vision and making it available to the reader. In order to understand the meaning of this appropriation which is an opening, we must return to Ricoeur.

No text is understood purely according to its author's intentions. We can analyze the socio-cultural conditions that condition it. We can analyze its language and that will help us to understand the referent of the text and to a certain degree the intention of the author (Ricoeur 1976, 71ff.). This work is a necessary moment of interpretation if we want to work past the naiveté of understanding, which according to Ricoeur is still in the level of guessing the text's meaning according to our natural understanding, according to the affinities we have with the text's or even the author's horizon of understanding (*ibid.*, 76). The meaning of the text is beyond the author's intention or my needs in understanding the text. True, we must understand a text as an "expression of certain socio-cultural needs and as a response to certain perplexities . . . localized in space and time" (*ibid.*, 90). But more than that localized understanding, there is the need to "render contemporaneous" the text for the present reader. This rendering is not a pure appropriation for the self. Understanding turns into comprehension when the "disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine power of the text," is revealed by the reading (*ibid.*, 92).

The end of all reading is a "disclosure of a possible way of looking at things" (*ibid.*). This way of looking is not an epistemological project that stays in the realm of an inactive doing. Rather it discloses a way of seeing the world which involves a being in the world. What we appropriate in the text is a world, because a new way of being involved in and comprehending the world is disclosed to the reader as his horizon of meanings is engaged with another's horizon. With this fusion of horizons, the reader is made aware of the possibilities of projecting one's self into the world beyond what is conceivable. In the appropriation of a way of seeing or the expansion

of one's horizon, the reader is not only led to the possibilities of seeing, but seeing more deeply, "The reader...is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself" (ibid., 94). Thus appropriation means essentially encountering a text and recognizing its power of awakening in the self a way of understanding what is, and consequently awakening the self in a new possibility of self projection. This "disclosure" of self and world is beyond the actual intention of the author, for once the text is objectified and the reader encounters it from a distance, the text yields possibilities beyond the horizon of the author's intention in the actual event of reading and interpretation. The interpretation of the text is a concrete moment or event of encounter which creates meaning and possibilities of being. Bencuchillo's novena is an example of encounter and the appropriation of text.

The novena is composed of a prologue which gives instructions on the proper attitude and obligations of the "Cristianong mauilihin na nacaibig maglincod sa mahal na Virgen" and the prayer. The prayer has three parts: the "Sa Mahal na Virgen sa Caysasay," the "Icaluang Panalangin," and the "Dalit." The first part tells us that the Christian who desires to serve the Virgin through the novena must fulfill the following obligations: 1) to go to confession and communion; 2) upon waking and before sleeping, to examine one's conscience, regret one's sins, and promise to avoid these sins; 3) to hear mass daily; 4) to live the Holy virtue which is the theme for that day; 5) to give alms; 6) pray the rosary; 7) to ask the Angels' help in giving proper praise to the Virgin; 8) to praise the king of the nine choruses of heaven (i.e. the Virgin); and 9) to meditate on the nine mysteries of the Virgin's life which the church holds most sacred (i.e., the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin's being offered at the temple, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the offering of Christ at the Temple, the seven swords through her heart, and the Assumption). In this section we are taught that we are vassals before a great lord, a king who governs different provinces in a vast empire (i.e., the nine choruses composed of the chorus of the angels, the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the popes, the confessors, the virgins, and the doctors). Before such a great and majestic personage one must assume the attitude proper to one who is lowly and most unlike the King of the hosts of heaven. Of course this image of Mary as king and the vassalage owed by one who wishes to incur her favor is based on a clearly medieval relationship of vassal with one's lord. He says in the introduction that one should

fulfill these nine set obligations if one wants to be worthy of being favored by the Virgin (Bencuchillo 1859, 17). In this section, clearly the experience at Caysasay has nothing to do with the obligations imposed. Medieval imagery predominates the thinking here and its world view colors the faithful's relation to the Virgin.

The same applies to the second prayers where the understanding of the Virgin and the believer's relation to her is colored by the same image borne by the introduction. In fact the prayer sounds almost as if it were lifted from a standard catechism. The appropriation becomes most evident only in the "Unang Panalangin" and the "Dalit." Here the image of Mary is still very traditional with "Hari at Virgen," light in the darkness, source of life, and door to Heaven summing up the images that the believer holds of Mary. But what is interesting is how a more primal, less theological image of Mary reasserts itself in this prayer.

Here, Mary is one who is infinitely blessed by God the Father. She is the one who is made wealthy ("caniyang pinacayaman-yaman"). And as one made infinitely wealthy we ask that she give us even the merest fragment of that wealth ("aco,i, iyong bahaguinan nang iisang alipato niyang karamihan mong cayamanan") (Bencuchillo 1859, 22). The believer prostrate before the Virgin realizes his or her abject poverty ("cam,i, capos at culang nang icaguiguinhauang ano man" and "sa aming mga salat"). Here obviously, the living experience of the Virgin is tied to the idea of her whose image comes from the sea to manifest her presence to the common people. This is true for the "Dalit" too. But in the "Dalit" the relation of abject poverty before infinite wealth is reasserted with images taken from episodes of the narrative. The birth of the well, the miraculous restoration of the life of the Sangley, and the recovering of the image from the sea are used to illustrate the power or "bagsic" that the Virgin has which benefits all her faithful "campon" or "quinaual" who are really loyal followers or soldiers (Bencuchillo 1859, 46-47).

Here we see that P. Bencuchillo appropriates the narrative and uses it for his catechetical purposes and in so doing is appropriated by the narrative. For in the novena there is a dynamic back and forth movement between official, medieval, theological reflection on the Virgin and the lived experience of the people of a wealthy and benevolent patron who is the source of salvation and grace for the common people. If the narrative is taken into account as the naive experience of the apparition, we see elements of this naive relation

of the "ducha" or the one who owns nothing to the absolutely wealthy. But then this very raw understanding of the event is appropriated by Bencuchillo into a medieval, properly Catholic understanding of the Virgin. The result is an opening of a way of seeing and being with the Holy.

Clearly, the "Dalit" and the first prayer are appropriations of the 1603 experience by the Spanish friar with a clear Spanish medieval and Roman Catholic world view. But how deeply is the appropriation accomplished? Does Bencuchillo really appropriate the meaning of the apparition of 1603?

On one level, we could say that there is an act of appropriation that is accomplished here. The meaning of the apparition reanimates the medieval, theological interpretation of Mary's role in the church. The image of Mary in the first prayer and the "Dalit" puts in living context the almost alien experience of Mary who is King of so many levels of the medieval Kingdom of God. What is truly appropriated in the novena is the way of seeing which opens for the believer a lived experience of the holy. What we might miss in the novena is a deeper integration of world views. But, although the second prayers seem to be theological tracts which have nothing to do with the apparition at all, they really are integrated into the whole act of appropriation. Taken on the whole we see how these theological tracts have been changed because they have appropriated the Apparition narrative's experience of the Holy.

After the devotee prays through the first prayer, the power and wealth of Mary is rooted in lived experience. Because of this rootedness in lived experience, her kingship of the celestial hierarchy begins to have a living meaning. The idea of Mary as king of the celestial hierarchy becomes very real as the penitent is immersed in the narrative which roots an alien city of God in living myth. At the same time, the narrative is given some form of theoretical structure once it comes into living contact with Bencuchillo's Mary.

Conclusion

This is where the second naiveté takes us. It is a revitalization of narrative and doctrine. Through Bencuchillo's reappropriation, the devotee is offered a new way of seeing, and a new possibility of being with. In this novena, we can see how remembering and retelling become acts of appropriation of a new way of seeing. This

act of remembering becomes an act of revitalizing two world views. The continuous appropriation of Mary by the friar and the devotee assured her living presence among the people. The primal experience and the medieval, Catholic experience deepen each other. And it is perhaps this back and forth movement of native, mythic understanding and Spanish, medieval Mariology which assured the Virgin Mother a lasting and primary place among the Catholic population.

But in spite of this depth of being with, this is not the full achievement of second naïveté which Ricoeur expounds, for Bencuchillo doesn't take any real critical distance from the text and in fact assumes that his reading of the event is literal. What happens in this reading is that the first naïveté of the text is taken up into a new horizon which reads the text in the level of first naïveté. Of course that is fruitful. We have seen how it can be fruitful. But even more deeply than that, we have to understand how text can yield more with a certain critical distance which can see through the presuppositions of the text and reappropriate its lived saying. How far and how consciously can we do this? It seems that our acts of appropriation will never be totally transparent. But that is precisely the necessity of the cultivation of the tools for critical reflection. Textual analysis, semiotics, ideology critique, and hermeneutics are some of the aids to taking a critical step back. Although we will never be self-transparent, our appropriation of meaning will deepen if we can become aware that our literal meaning isn't very literal and that it is perhaps another level of first naïveté. Second naïveté at its deepest possibility is an opening to the truth of the text's seeing after critical examination of the text's biases and a critical awareness of my own act of interpretation as bias laden.

Although Bencuchillo's reading of the text seems to lack a critical distance, he is able to achieve a certain level of second naïveté because of his own bias for the correctness of Spanish, medieval Catholicism. This affords him a critical step backward from the direct impact of the narrative, and his literal meaning is really a reappropriation of narrative.

Notes

1. This is the very theme of Ricoeur's essays, "Guilt Ethics, and Religion," and "Religion, Atheism, and Faith," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 425-39, 440-67.
2. The numbering here follows the division by stanza of the printed 1859 text.

3. See for instance Blancas and Oliver, where Jesus, God the Father, and Mary are alternately described as those who take on the lowly as "alipin" thus taking them under the care of the divine.

References

- Bencuchillo, P. Francisco. 1859. *Epitome de la historia de la aparicion de Nuestra Señora de Caysasay Que se venere en el pueblo de Taal, de la Provincia de Batangas y su sagrada novena*. Manila: Imprenta de Ramires y Giraudier.
- Christian, Jr., William A. 1989. *Apparitions in late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1959. *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1969. *The symbolism of evil*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- . 1970. *Freud and philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . 1974. *The conflict of interpretations*.
- . 1976. *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Forth Worth, Texas: Christian University Press.