

La Gloriosa, ess cuerpo adonado: the Body of Mary in Berceo's Milagros de Nuestra Señora

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The many studies of vocabulary and expression in Berceo have been useful in furthering our awareness of Berceo as poet and priest.¹ While scholarship in recent decades has put to rest the notion of Berceo as a simple and uncultured country priest, I believe that we still have not fully grasped the depth and complexity of his work hidden beneath a veil of rustic simplicity. This article will examine just one example of Berceo's theologically sophisticated and nuanced use of language which has so far escaped the notice of critics: his use of the adjectival form *adonado* with reference to the body of Mary.

The role of Mary in the Christian economy of salvation, the divine plan for the salvation of humanity from its burden of sin,² rests on one factor alone: that she is the mother of Jesus, that is, that she (despite being fully human) gave birth to the divine Saviour of humanity. In Christian Incarnation theology Jesus is seen as both "perfect man and perfect God" (as defined at the Council of Chalcedon, 451) and within the logic of this theology Mary can rightly be said to be *Theotokos*, (Council of Ephesus, 431) that is, not simply the bearer of Jesus in his human form but the "bearer of God". It is the motherhood of Mary which is the basis for all Marian devotion and which underlies everything Berceo writes in the *Milagros*; thus his allegory of the Introduction begins with a reference Mary as the mother of Jesus:

En esta romería avemos un buen prado
En qui trova repaire tot romeo cansado;
La Virgen gloriosa, madre del buen Criado [...] (19a-c)³

Appropriately, the first of the miracle stories, *La casulla de San Ildefonso*, references Incarnation theology and the motherhood of Mary to contextualize what will follow. Jill Ross sees "Mary's relationship to Christ [...] as metaphorical in the sense that she enables Christ, the ultimate metaphor, to be made manifest." (109) Ildefonso's devotion to the Virgin Mary is shown in two ways: in his writing in defence of her virginity, that is, her corporeal integrity (Ross, 132) and in his alteration of the Church calendar so that the feast of the Annunciation is moved from its place in the penitential season of Lent, associated with the impending death of Christ, to the Advent period in which the Church awaits the birth of the Saviour. The very essence of this feast is the announcement of Mary's incipient motherhood and her acceptance of this responsibility.

¹ See, for example, Anthony John Lappin, especially 37-80. Lappin examines the texts traditionally attributed to Berceo "from the point of view of authorial linguistic fingerprinting," by which he means the "relative frequency of apocopation and ecthipsis [...] and [...] the use of certain words." (53). Of particular interest with regard to the subject of this paper is Jill Ross's work on metaphor and the body of Mary.

² As humans are seen to have free will and therefore to sin by the action of the will, there is a consequence of guilt. The sacrifice on the cross of Jesus Christ (both God and man) is seen as an act of redemption, of atonement, of payment for these sins on behalf of all mankind.

³ There are complex theological considerations resulting from the title of Mary as *Theotokos*, of which one is the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. On the topic of Marian devotion and Mary's role in Incarnation theology see Warner. For Berceo's use of imagery and language related to his presentation of the body of Mary in the *Milagros* and especially in the allegory of the Introduction see Ross.

Ildefonso's devotional act, the shift of the feast, unites in time the virginal conception of Jesus the Messiah at the Annunciation with his nativity:

Quando Gabriël vino con la messagería,
quando sabrosamiente disso "Ave María",
e díssoli por nuevas qe pariríe a Messía
estando tan entrega como era al día. (53)⁴

[...]

Fizo grand providencia el amigo leal,
qe puso essa festa cerca de la Natal;
asentó buena vinna cerca de buen parral,
la Madre con el Fijo, par qe no ha equal. (55)

Berceo's understanding of the role of Mary is rooted in traditional Incarnation theology. As early as the 4th century Gregory of Nyassa (+ 394) made reference to Mary's participation in the salvation of mankind by virtue of her role as the mother of Jesus. The most important effect of Mary's maternity was her special claim on the attention of her divine son. From the time of the declaration at Ephesus (431) of Mary as *Theotokos* there was a growing emphasis on her role as the mediatrix between man and God while the mediatory role of Christ (both God and man) was overshadowed by his function as *Pantocrator*, ruler and judge. The beneficial result of Mary's relationship with Jesus is neatly presented by Berceo in strophe 181 as he echoes the words of the Angel Gabriel at the Annunciation: "Ave Maria, gratia plena":

Como es la Gloriosa plena de bendición,
es plena de gracia e quita de dición;
no'l serié denegada ninguna petición,
no li diçrié tal Fijo a tal Madre de non.⁵

The identification of Mary as mediatrix encouraged a steady growth in the number of Marian liturgical feasts and a corresponding increase in popular devotion. It was, in fact, the tale of Theophilus that solidified belief in the power of the Virgin Mother to intercede between her Son as *Pantocrator*⁶ and a sinful mankind. By the 11th century Marian devotion was a full part of Christian practice in the west, aided by the increased attention paid to the role of Mary by theologians. Belief in the role of Mary as mediatrix runs directly contrary to the claim by St. Paul that "there is one God and also one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus, himself man, who sacrificed himself to win freedom for all mankind" (I Timothy 2:5). Nevertheless, as Marian devotion grew, theologians neatly side-stepped the definitive Pauline assertion by saying that while Christ is the principal mediator, there may also be auxiliary mediators, chief among them Mary

⁴ All citations from the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* are from the critical edition by Brian Dutton.

⁵ There are other instances as well: strophes 256 and 257 (*Los dos hermanos*), for example, show the immediate effect of Mary's intercession: "Disso a esti ruego Dios el nuestro Sennor: - Faré tanta de gracia por el vuestro amor [...]" and in *La preñada salvada por la Virgen* we find: "quísolis grand miracle don Christo demostrar, / por ond de la su Madre oviessen qué fablar." (441c-d)

⁶ There are several instances in the *Milagros* in which the just but severe judgements of Christ are tempered by the intervention of his mother - for example, in the second miracle, *el Sacristán fornicario* (especially in strophes 93-97), and perhaps most explicitly in Mary's words in the story of Teófilo (859): "Yo fablé en tu pleito de toda voluntat, / finqué los mis enojos ante la majestat; / hate Dios perdonado, fecha grand caridat."

(Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III, 26, art.I). The writings of Bernard of Clairvaux (+ 1153), for example, emphasized Mary's role in salvation as a channel of saving grace, a counterpoint to Christ as God and judge, now considered too distant, too inaccessible to man, and possibly, too harsh. Inevitably, the view of Mary as mediatrix not only allowed her to be seen as a personal advocate for the sinner, but even as co-redemptrix in the plan of salvation because without her maternity, there would be no Saviour. While not officially declared by the Church, the title of co-redemptrix is still frequently used by Catholic theologians (McBrien, 874-91 and Burkard, 24-29).

Thus Mary's entire identity within Christian theology and hagiography is that of Mother of the Saviour, the second Eve,⁷ she through whom salvation was made possible. While sin and suffering was introduced through Eve, the atonement was made possible only through Mary's act of submission to the will of God.

Prat Ferrer (91-92) has seen the descriptions of Mary in the *Milagros* to be defining; he has grouped them in three categories: those which refer to her greatness, to her power, or to her exercise of mercy. These descriptive groups, especially those referring to her greatness and power, are reflective of the "la vision románica de la Virgen" (93) but they are joined by the third, the aspect of mercy as a quality of her motherhood. Berceo constantly emphasizes the extension of this maternal mercy to all humanity; and in this he also underlines her role in the plan of salvation:

Por el so sancto fructo qe ella concibió,
qe por salud del mundo pasión e muert sufrió,
issiemos de la foya qe Adán nos abrió [...] (622a-c)

While we can find in the *Milagros* direct references to Mary as *Theotokos* (as, for example, in 309c in the story of *Jerónimo el nuevo obispo de Pavía* where the Virgin Mary states her identity plainly and emphatically: "Yo so - li disso ella - la Madre de Dios vero [...]") Berceo more commonly uses epithetical phrases or clauses to define her motherhood (Prat Ferrer, especially 91-95, Casaldueiro and Sobejano). She is the "Madre del buen Criado" (31c, and 413c), the "grand Madre caudal" (29c), the "Madre gloriosa" (302a and 620a), the "Madre piadosa" (227a), the "tiemplo de Jesu Christo" (33b), the "Gloriosa, Madre del Criador" (261a), and "Ella qe es de gracia plena e avondada" (624a) – a statement that brings the reader/hearer back to the moment of the Annunciation. For Berceo and his Christian contemporaries, Mary's identity and function in the plan of salvation depend completely upon her being the mother of Jesus.

There is only one case in the *Milagros* in which Berceo uses an adjective to refer to Mary's body rather than to her moral or spiritual qualities or dignities (as for example in the use of epithets such as "Reína de Gloria" [384a] or "sancta Reína" [278a]). In this one case in which he refers to the body of Mary, the adjective he uses is *adonado*.⁸

⁷ In strophe 621 Berceo draws on the contrast between Eve and Mary, conveniently encapsulated in the medieval palindrome Eva/Ave: "Los qe por Eva fuemos en perdición caídos, - por ella (María) recombramos los solares perdidos [...]" For an excellent synopsis of the concept of Mary as the Second Eve, see Warner, 50-7.

⁸ The same adjective, *adonado*, is used also in 280a in the miracle of the *El labrador avaro*. Here Berceo refers not to the body of Mary directly, but to her name, that is, to the identity of Mary as mother: "Nomne tan adonado e de virtud atanta / qe a los enemigos seguda e espanta." This passage, with its declaration of what Mary does by virtue of the value of her name, and with its use of the verbal *seguda* (meaning *persigue*), foreshadows what is written in stanza 472 in which she is shown to pursue and terrify (*seguda e espanta*) the psychological enemies of the monk. The Latin source of *El labrador avaro* cited by Dutton (Thott 128) in fact makes reference to Mary's power as related to her

In the story of the drunken monk (*El monje beodo*) Mary defends the unfortunate cleric from the physical manifestations of his innermost demons:

Vien se cuidó el monge seer despedaçado,
sedié en fiera cueta, era mal desarrado,
mas valió¹ la Gloriosa, ess cuerpo adonado,
como fizo el toro, fo el can segudado. (472, emphasis mine)

Here Berceo objectifies Mary, equating her essence to her transformed body; she is that body in its enhanced state: “la Gloriosa, ess cuerpo adonado.”

The adjective *adonado*, while rarely found, was favoured by Berceo; in fact any mention of the early use of this word inevitably cites one of the lines from Berceo. Derived from *adonar*, the past participle and adjectival form is generally defined as meaning *colmado de dones*.⁹ In addition to the two uses in the *Milagros* there are other instances of its use in works attributed to Berceo: in the *Vida de Santa Oria* at 119d (“allí fue adonada la cofradía”), in the *Vida de Santo Domingo* at 437a (“el barón adonado”) and 462a (“padre tan adonado”), and also in *Duelo de la Virgen* at 66a (“sanctos sermones [...] tan adonados”) - although the latter work (among others) has been rejected by Lappin (237) as being by Berceo.

While the reference to Mary as “ess cuerpo adonado” is remarkable in its objectification, there is, I believe, a more deeply nuanced meaning of *adonado* at work here. In an earlier miracle (*San Pedro y el monje lozano*) we find an unusual metaphor related to the theology of the Incarnation and the Redemption. The metaphor presents Christ as the divine *don*, God’s great gift to mankind:

Tornó en la Gloriosa, Madre del Nuestro Don,
e en las otras vírgenes qe de su casa son. (168a-b)

It is Mary’s participation in the Incarnation of God, her motherhood of Jesus, that gives her special status, and it is in her maternal advocacy that the severity of God’s just judgement on the sinner is tempered with mercy:

Quando vío don Christo la su madre gloriosa,
e de las sus amigas processión tan preciosa,
issió a rescebirlas de manera fermosa. (169a-c)

[...]

“Madre – dixo el Fijo – non serié derechura,
tal alma de tal omne entrar en tal folgura [...]
mas por el vuestro ruego faremos y mesura. (170a-b,d)

maternity: “largiente Deo per sue genitricis merita.” This same Latin collection expectedly has numerous references throughout to Mary as “Mater Dei” and “Mater Domini.”

⁹ Defined thus by Dutton with reference to both uses (280a and 472c) in *Milagros*; José Baro mentions only 280a. Claudio García Turza (150) cites the meaning of *adonado* in 472c as “lleno de dones, potente.” See also Vicente García de Diego y Carmen García de Diego. Martín Alonso (143) finds this word first attested in the 13th c. in Berceo and he defines *adonado* as “lleno de dones, gracioso, donoso” or “dotado de virtud especial.” The verb *adonar* he finds first in *Siervo libre de amor* (c.1440) of Juan Rodríguez del Padrón.

As Jesus is for Berceo the divine gift which brings salvation, his use of *adonar* means much more than “*colmar de dones*”; it means to imbue with, to fill with the *don*, the essence of the Godhead. Thus in 472c (“mas valió la Gloriosa, ess cuerpo adonado”) the *don*, that is Christ, the Lord of all, has been gifted to Mary in her body (which is thus the *cuerpo adonado*). But I believe that there is still more subtlety to be found here.

It is clear that Berceo was well educated and probably benefitted from advanced studies either at Palencia, or, as Lappin (81) has suggested, possibly even further afield.¹⁰ He knew Latin, certainly well enough to handle a Latin source for the *Milagros*, and to abbreviate, expand and alter as suited his purposes. Further, the Bible in its Vulgate version was a part of general learned culture. As Diego Catalán (310) notes: “En los poemas de Berceo los recuerdos bíblicos brotan con espontaneidad de una tradición cultural dentro de la cual viven inmersos el poeta y su público.”

Through a reading of the Vulgate Berceo most certainly would have become familiar with one of the Hebrew names for God, the Lord of Lords: *Adonai*.¹¹ There are two places in the Vulgate in which Berceo would have found the name *Adonai*:

Adonai Domine magnus es tu et praeclarus in virtute et quem superare nemo potest (*Apocrypha, Judith* 16:16) and
...qui apparui Abraham, Isaac et Iacob in Deo omnipotente et nomen meum *Adonai* non indicavi eis (*Exodus* 6 :3, emphasis mine).

It is particularly in the story of Judith that Berceo would find not only the name *Adonai*, but also very likely a suggestive connection between the episode of Judith slaying Holofernes and that of Mary vanquishing the devils that beset the drunken monk. As Warner (55) comments: “In medieval times, a parallel between Judith and Mary was developed: the widely-read *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* which unveiled the inner typological meaning in Old and New Testament scenes by setting them side by side, shows Judith’s triumph over Holofernes beside an all-conquering Virgin Mary, who transfixes Satan with the vexillum thrust deep into his gullet.”¹²

Mary’s body (and thus Mary herself) is *aDONado*, that is, gifted with, filled with the gift, the *don* which is Jesus, the incarnation of the Lord of Lords. The subtlety of this image is breathtaking: for Berceo it could truly be said that her body was not only *adonado*, but perhaps *ADONAI*do.

¹⁰ For a wide-ranging and entertaining discussion of Berceo’s education and formative influences see Lappin, 4-16 and 81-98 and for Biblical influence on Berceo see Fradejas Lebrero, Ruiz Domínguez and García de la Fuente.

¹¹ Berceo’s familiarity with the Bible is no longer in question. García de la Fuente 1986-87 states: “Que Berceo es un conocedor de la Biblia es un dato ya totalmente probado” (213) and more suggestively “Berceo conoce y utiliza la Biblia más de lo que a primera vista pueda aparecer” (226). Covarrubias gives this etymological definition of ADONAI: “Es uno de los nombres de Dios. *Adon dominus* [Adon, el Señor] y está en número plural *domini mei* [...] y éste se pronunciaba [...] en lugar del nombre inefable...Jeová.” *Adonai* is used as a plural of intensity and of majesty.

¹² While the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* is dated from 1309, its typological themes predate the manuscript and would certainly have formed part of the stock-in-trade of educated preachers in the 13th c. Judith sought to entrance the Assyrian enemy Holofernes by adorning her body with “all her feminine finery” (*NEB, Judith* 12:15), and (*Vulgate, Judith* 12:15: “et surrexit et ornavit se vestimento suo.” In Berceo’s reminiscent miracle of the drunken monk and the conquest of the satanic apparitions, Mary’s body is correspondingly beautified but in a different way – it is a body enhanced by her pregnancy with Jesus; it is not *adornado* but *adonado*.

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