

THE MAGIC LANTERN THEORY OF KNOCK'S MARIAN APPARITION

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For several years I have been investigating the apparitions of centuries ago – necromancy and phantasmagoria shows. The result of this work was published in the book *Nigromancia y Arqueología de los Medios* which received the MLS 2021 Mervyn Heard Award (see *TML* 27 and 29). The conclusions were revealing: some apparitions had been created using various optical devices such as the magic lantern. In the book I commented very superficially on the case of the Marian apparition (appearance of Mary, mother of Jesus) at Knock in Ireland (1879), one very little known in Spain.



Mosaic of the apparition at Knock Basilica



Projecting a religious magic lantern slide outside

Apariciones Marianas, Linternas Mágicas y Hacedores de Milagros ('Knock: Marian Apparitions, Magic Lanterns and Miracle Workers'). I was very surprised by the largest study on the Marian apparition of Knock, *Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* by Eugene Hynes (Cork University Press, 2008). The writer and sociologist, despite doing a great job, ignored the magic lantern theory completely.

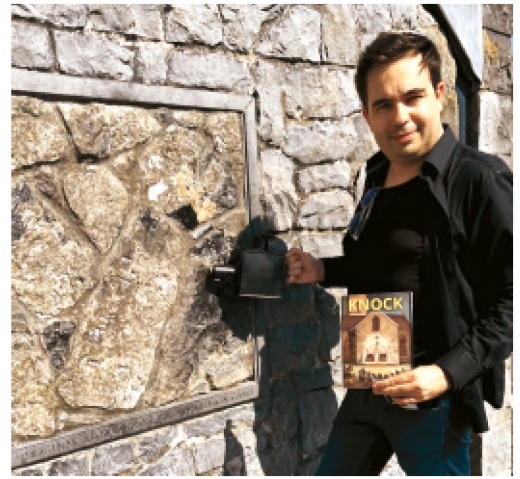
In my book I focus on what Hynes ignored, but it is key also to understand various psychosociological aspects relevant to the appearance of the apparition at Knock in particular. Included are some 30 original and unpublished pieces of evidence, documents, designs and arguments in favour of the fact that the Marian apparition at Knock was a magic lantern projection. In addition, I have complemented the research with various studies of psychosociological effects related to the appearance and studied other less-known cases. In general, it appears likely that various religious organisations have used the magic lantern or other projection devices to make appearances in various contexts and to pursue certain interests.

Alongside the book and my investigations, a television report was made by Pablo Villarrubia in which we recreated the magic lantern projection of the Knock case for the popular Spanish television programme *Cuarto Milenio* directed by Iker Jiménez.

We were by no means the first to do a magic lantern recreation of Knock's Marian apparition and in the book I comment on previous instances. In general, I consider the case as one of the greatest milestones in all possible senses and disciplines. I would like to hope that in future the magic lantern is included in representations of the Marian apparition of Knock, regardless of what one believes or wants to believe. After all, I believe in the magic lantern, don't you?

Book details:

Knock: Apariciones Marianas, Linternas Mágicas y Hacedores de Milagros by Miguel Herrero Herrero (in Spanish) Cinestesia (www.cinestesia.es), published 2023, ISBN: 978-84-126418-2-0 Paperback, 184 pages, with colour illustrations, € 22.88



The author with his book and a magic lantern (c. 1840) next to part of the original gable at Knock where the apparition appeared

Both the Marian apparition at Lourdes in France (1858) and that at Fatima in Portugal (1917) are well known in my country, being located in neighbouring countries. These two apparitions, with the greatest respect to believers, can really be explained by an amalgamation of psychosociological phenomena and some other rare atmospheric phenomenon.

The case of the Marian apparition of Knock has always fascinated me since I came across the first references. It was very rare and different from the other Marian apparitions. On 21 August 1879, during heavy rain on a dark night, 15 people saw a circular white light outside the church. Within it, witnesses saw the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and Saint John the Evangelist levitate. Some of those present also saw an altar surrounded by the wings of various angels, a lamb and a cross. According to witnesses the figures remained there for about two hours, but the human figures, of a white, grey and yellowish tone, and of natural size, neither spoke nor moved. They remained static, like statues, and despite the rain, the place where the apparition was stayed dry.

Following this surprising appearance of a whole religious scene, other alleged miracles took place in the Knock church. After various investigations the Roman Catholic Church approved the Marian apparition as authentic. Pope John Paul II visited the Knock church for the centenary of the miracle in 1979, recognising this place as one of the foremost Marian sanctuaries in the world.

However, it was fascinating to discover that shortly after the first apparition it was already rumoured that it had really all been a magic lantern projection. Due to this hypothesis, I spent several years researching the subject until I ended up recently publishing, in Spain, the book *Knock*:



The light observed on the gable of Knock Church in 1879



Pilgrims praying at Knock Church in 1880