

Notes toward reading Juan Rodriguez Freyle's EL CARNERO: The image of the narrator*

David William Foster
Arizona State University

I

One of the most curious literary documents of Latin American colonial literature is *El carnero* by Juan Rodriguez Freyle (1566-1640?) also known as Juan Rodriguez Fresle). *El carnero* is the history of Colombia, el Nuevo Reino de Granada, between the year of its founding in 1539 and its hundredth anniversary in 1639, the date of Rodriguez Freyle's twenty-first and final chapter of his chronicle.¹ The author asserts that his goal is to provide the history that no one else has thought to write, and his compendium of the human comedy of one hundred years is clearly one of the first models that ought to come to mind in determining the pre-texts of Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967), which bears a remarkable similarity to the whole ironic tone of *El carnero*.²

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1. Although there are a number of general studies on *El carnero* that provide adequate background information, the most comprehensive overview is the doctoral dissertation by Susan Herman, "The *Conquista y descubrimiento del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, Otherwise Known as *El carnero*: the *crónica*, the *historia*, and the *novela*," *Dissertation Abstracts international*, 40 (1979), 285A.

2. One is struck by the fact that critics appear not to have taken note of this possible relationship, despite commentaries on the influence on Garcia Márquez's novel of the chronicles. Moreover, Iris M. Zavala does not mention *El carnero* in her important study, "*Cien años de soledad*: crónica de Indias," in Helmy F. Giacomani, ed., *Homenaje a G. Garcia Márquez: variaciones interpretativas en torno a su obra* (Long Island City, NY: Las Américas, 1972), pp. 197-212. I have not been able

El carnero remained unpublished for over two hundred years, and the first edition was only brought out in 1859 by Bogotá's Imprenta de Pizano y Pérez. Considerable mystery surrounds the history of the manuscript, details of its author's life, and even its title, which has been taken variously to possess some obscure metaphorical relationship to the nature of the events described or to derive from the circumstances of the resting place of the manuscript during the two centuries in which it remained unpublished.³ The author's own title is a brief descriptive phrase, characteristic of the chronicle writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: *Fin del libro de la Conquista de este Nuevo Reino* (p. 397).⁴ Much like the major examples of recovered manuscripts of premodern Spanish literature like the *Poema de mio Cid* and the *Libro de buen amor*, the title by which Rodriguez Freyle's work is known in Colombian literary history cannot properly be said to be the author's at all.

The *Conquista de este Nuevo Reino* is a curious work, however, not because of the questions su-

to consult Gustavo Alvarez Gardezabal's article "Antecedentes de Macondo," *Meridiano*, Nos. 10-11 (1971), 53-59. According to the annotation in Margaret Estella Fau, *Gabriel Garcia Márquez; an Annotated Bibliography, 1947-1979* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 68, item 8, it deals with Colombian narrative antecedents of *Cien años de soledad*. *El carnero* is not one of the antecedents mentioned in the annotation.

3. Concerning the title *El carnero*, see the section "De la palabra 'carnero' y su polisemia" (pp. 1-1 vi) in Dario Achury Valenzuela's "Prólogo" to *El carnero* (Caracas: biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979), pp. ix-xxxvii.

4. All quotes from *El carnero* are, according to the Biblioteca Ayacucho edition cited in note 3.

rounding the history of its title and the fate of the original manuscript. Like many of the key works of the colonial period in Latin America, it is a document that resists facile bibliographic classification and appears to overlap with various literary forms without ever truly becoming a formidable Baroque *Gesamtkunstwerk* capable of creating its own literary genre like *Don Quijote*.⁵ Although generally classified by libraries as a work of history and routinely cited as a primary source for the early years of the region known today as Colombia, *El carnero* is really only historical in nature by virtue of the real-life existence of the names mentioned and the fact that it follows the basic chronological framework of the hundred years of the events of Nueva Granada that it portrays.⁶ However, it cannot be said to provide much in the way of valuable perception or analysis of those events by whatever standards of historical commentary one may wish to use for seventeenth-century chronicles. In this sense, *El carnero* falls far short of the depth of commentary to be found in El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's writings or in Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's much-touted chronicle, which has come to occupy a central place in the understanding of the ideology of Spanish colonial culture and literary and artistic responses to them.⁷

Rather than primarily history, *El carnero* is a loosely structured narrative, and it is only natural that it figures prominently in the history of Colombian letters for what one may generally call the literary features it evinces. Indeed, *El*

carnero is frequently anthologized, and the selections chosen reveal the arguably much more creative side of Rodríguez Freyle's writing: the desire to narrate a series of *exempla* concerning the very human nature of the men and women of the Conquest. In this sense, what occupies the front of the stage in Rodríguez Freyle's panoramic drama of one hundred years of Colombian history are not the heroic deeds of the Herculean masters of the Spanish Empire, but rather the wicked sinners of the realm. Rodríguez Freyle has been called a "frustrated Boccaccio."⁸ Cultural interpretations of the *Decameron* have stressed how it highlights the daily experiences of fundamentally insignificant individuals (insignificant at least in terms of a Romantic conception of history as the sway of the hero) against the backdrop of a society in social and political crisis. *El carnero* is far removed from the *Decameron* in the sense that it does not possess that work's controlling structural design nor does it imply a meaningful juxtaposition between institutionalized values and the contrapuntual conduct of the children of Adam and Eve. However, the comparison is accurate if one reads *El carnero* as placing greater emphasis on the sinful nature of individuals — their greed, their ambition, their lust, and their general moral and ethical blindness — than on the announced goal of representing the important events and naming the influential leaders of one hundred years of Colombian history.⁹

Yet Rodríguez Freyle's narrative, despite the obvious critical temptations, may not accurately be described as protonovelistic in nature, and it does not seem that it would advance the analysis of the emergence of narrative fiction in Latin

5. This is the conclusion of, typically, a scholar like Rocio Vélez de Piedrahita, "Juan Rodríguez Freyle (1566-1638)," in her *Comentarios sobre la vida y la obra de algunos autores colombianos* (Medellín: Editorial Gamma, 1977), pp. 39-67. Concerning *El carnero* and literary genres, see Oscar Gerardo Ramos, "El carnero, libro de tendencia cuentística," *Boletín cultural y bibliográfico*, 9 (1966), 2: 178-2185; and Alessandro Martinengo, "La cultura literaria de Juan Rodríguez Freyle," *Thesaurus*, 19 (1964), 274-299.

6. Virtually half of the almost 700 pages of the Biblioteca Ayacucho edition is given over to Achury Valenzuela's historiographic introduction, explanatory notes, and chronology.

7. Of the several recent studies that reveal a surge of interest in Poma de Ayala, two in particular are of interest in the context of the present essay: Rolana Adorno, "Of Caciques, Coyas, and Kings: the Intricacies of Point of View," *Dispositio*, No. 10 (1979), 27-47; and Julio Ortega, "Guamán Poma de Ayala y la producción del texto," *Texto crítico*, No. 15 (1979), 154-164.

8. "Of little historical value, [*El carnero*] reveals to us the presence in colonial Spanish America of a frustrated Boccaccio." J. M. Cohen in his entry on Rodríguez Freyle in *The Penguin Companion to Literature*, 3: U.S.A. Latin America (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 371-372; the quote appears on p. 372.

9. *El carnero* in this regard has been spoken of in relation to the picaresque and Fernando de Rojas's *La Celestina*. On the latter, see Gabriel Giraldo Jaramillo, "Don Juan Rodríguez Freyle y *La Celestina*," *Boletín de historia antigua*, Nos. 308-309 (1940), 582-586; and in his *Estudios históricos* (Bogotá: Ediciones de la Revista Bolívar, 1954). Concerning the picaresque see Martinengo's "La cultura literaria...", and, among others, Antonio Gómez Restrepo, "Un cronista picaresco: Juan Rodríguez Freyle," *Universidad Católica Bolivariana*, No. 100 (1966), 328-337.

America to focus on *El carnero* as a frustrated novel, as one more example of how pre-nineteenth century writers in Latin America were unable to develop fully a novelistic project.¹⁰ Of course, one may simply read *El carnero* as a novel and perceive whatever sustained fictional semiosis the individual act of reading would permit. In view of some of the more radical versions of contemporary reader-response criticism, *El carnero* is a novel, and one can read it to his/her personal satisfaction the way other acknowledged works of fiction are read. Or, to put it differently, *El carnero* is a novel if the readers can successfully assimilate it to the network of conventions they associate with narrative fiction.¹¹

By contrast, one could maintain that *El carnero* is not much of a novel by any of these conventions and that it fails to withstand comparison with either a contemporaneous standard, like *Don Quijote* or with a modern model like *Cien años de soledad*. Indeed, one of the striking features of *El carnero* is thus the significant differences that exist between it and other chronicles of the period that may be more profitably used as primary historical sources, and the substantial discrepancies that may be noted between it and other legitimate narrative intertexts. Although one could assert the rather innocuous belief that *El carnero* is "in a class by itself," such a critical assessment does little to promote the reading strategies necessary to appreciate Rodríguez Freyle's text as original or significant writing.

II

A very real issue in the construction of a proper reading strategy for *El carnero* is the nature and the role of the so called narrative examples. By isolating these segments from the overall text,

anthologies give the illusion that *El carnero* is a history punctuated by parenthetical segments that may be read as autonomous short stories or narrative sketches. This is an impression given by many collections of excerpts from colonial Latin American literature, and many students and scholars may have as their only image of the prose of the premodern period the quasifictional highlights of an entire inventory of basically nonfictional texts — chronicles, histories, biographies, diaries, political tracts, religious dissertations, and the like. If one of the goals of a structuralist criticism is to assess the coherence of a discourse text and to postulate readings for the text that enable the integration of disparate elements — what, in common-sense terms, is meant by "reading so you see how everything fits together"¹² — viewing *El carnero* as a historical chronicle moderated by scandalous vignettes or the daily life of the colonial period in Colombia will simply not satisfy any reasonable standard of analytical commentary. As I shall argue below, there is no reason why an integrationist reading of *El carnero* should not be possible, a reading in which the protofictional segments are less parenthetical digressions from the dominant chronicle framework than they are direct manifestations of Rodríguez Freyle's overall narrative goal for his text. Viewed in this fashion, these segments are not truncated short stories or the outlines of potential novels, but rather important phases in the general design of the text.

If *El carnero* is a curious text because it seems to satisfy the demands of neither the historian nor the literary critic adequately, both of whom demand something other than what the text offers, a greater concentration on this or that feature than appears to be the case, it is also a curious document in terms of the author's attitude toward what he narrates. Indeed, in line with wondering whether current principles of reader-response criticism might enable the reading of *El carnero* as nothing more than an eccentric novel (i.e., highly unusual in terms of other known texts), the critic might also experiment with adducing modern theories of the narrator in order to explain the ostensibly contradictory

10. Thus, Antonio Curcio Altamar includes *El carnero* in his history of the Colombian novel, but gives it only passing reference: *Evolución de la novela colombiana* (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1957). He does, however, underscore the fact that the first edition of *El carnero* (1859) was prepared by the novelist Felipe Pérez (p. 18, note 5). By the same token, Isidoro Laverde Amaya speaks of the enormous popularization of the book's contents and their diffusion: *Ojeada histórico-crítica sobre los orígenes de la literatura colombiana* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1968), Ch. III, "Juan Rodríguez Freyle."

11. Hence the detailed study by Silvia Benso, "La técnica narrativa de Juan Rodríguez Freyle," *Thesaurus*, 32 (1977), 95-165.

12. Regarding structuralist theories of literature, see Jonathan D. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

stance of Rodriguez Freyle towards his material.¹³ Thus, on many occasions the narrator is frankly and unreservedly laudatory toward such-and-such a political or ecclesiastical authority or severely condemnatory of a specific individual or class of individuals (for example, he betrays hostility toward women, viewed in misogynic terms as the cause of man's fall, as well as Indians, seen as treacherous and untrustworthy; neither of these postures, to be sure, is at all surprising for the writings of Rodriguez Freyle's time and place).

Yet, the reader is immediately struck by the problem presented in matching the general tenor of his narrative with the alleged goal of providing a history of the first hundred years of Nueva Granada. While the historical framework is there and the twenty-one chapters do, in fact, register the major names associated with the period, the decision to illustrate the texture of life during the period by reference to scandalous stories framed by pious appeals to conventional morality is disconcerting to say the least. Thus, in general terms, the narrator's strategy is to name a certain authority (say a new Presidente or Adelantado) with reference to a specific moment in the development of his hundred-year chronicle. Some detail or secondary individual or concrete personal or official act associated with the authority will provide the narrator with the opportunity to relate an item of gossip from the period. Such an item may bear little direct relationship to the individual whose tenure is being recorded, and the parenthetical nature of many of the stories related derives from the fact that they literally interrupt a more strictly factual inventory.

As part of his handling of his narrative and in combining the historical materials of interest to him, Rodriguez Freyle creates a narrative voice that has three fundamental registers: 1) the concern for the summary inventory of the year-by-year and person-by-person events of the period 1539-1639 in the Nuevo Reino de Granada: this inventory is modulated by appropriate accolades for administrators and officials whom he can praise as noble men worthy of their King and appropriate condemnation for those few who betray their King's trust either through evil or

incompetence; 2) the attitude of a severe confessor toward the deviations of men and women from an institutionalized moral and ethical standard, expressed either in conventional Christian terms or through the judicious allusion to exemplary classical sources characteristic of the humanistic learning of the day; 3) the picaresque interest in the stories of otherwise historically insignificant individuals behind the facade of his official history.

Thus, the latter aspect is enhanced by the complex nature of the narrative voice as it moves among these potentially contradictory registers, particularly in the accommodation of tales of scabrous gossip to the ostensible goal of providing a chronicle of notable accomplishment in Nueva Granada. It is the narrator's ability to combine an official public history with a Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern view of daily life that gives the text its particular literary quality.

III

Let us pursue our discussion of proper reading strategies for *El carnero* by examining the narrator's confessed goals for his discourse and by an assessment of any potential ironies they may involve. From a theoretical point of view, it is possible to maintain that all discourse texts contain explicit and implicit instructions for their reading; a subcategory of implicit instructions are the ironic ones, to the extent that the irony must be appreciated as such and decoded in order for the reader to grasp the direct propositional meaning intended?¹⁴ In literature: criticism does not usually prize those instructions that are so explicit that no "interpretational savoring" is necessary on the part of the reader. "Dear Reader" asides of the sort to be found in eighteenth and nineteenth century novels, the "al lector" prologues so characteristic of at least Spanish Renaissance literature¹⁵, and the trappings associated with contemporary documentary writings are

13. As, for example, in Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), in particular, Ch. 5, "Discourse: Covert vs. Overt Narrators."

14. Umberto Eco speaks of how texts encode "instructions" for their adequate reading in "The Irony of Signs and the Role of the Reader," *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 14, i (1981), 35-45. For a compendium of contemporary theories of the reader, see Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

15. This tradition is examined by Alberto Porqueras Mayo, *El prólogo como género literario; su estudio en el*

perhaps not really the norm for literature as a whole.¹⁶

Much more frequent are the implicit signposts, such as the phenomenon of unreliable narrators," whom we come to listen to in a fashion that translates their statements into another, unspoken message that, in turn, conditions our understanding of the discourse. Or we may be accustomed to the interplay of complementary and contradictory narrative voices in a work of fiction (the *Rashomon* syndrome) which alerts us to yet another sort of reading of the text.¹⁸ Much has been written in recent years concerning reading codes and reading protocols, especially with reference to fiction and to prose narratives in general." One of the important points of this body of opinion (although not necessarily its unanimous conclusion) is that specific structural features in a text may be identified by the readers as metatextual indications of the reading strategy the narrator and/or the implied author may wish to impose.* I am speaking here of interpretation in the most general sense of the word and not just hermeneutic decipherment. Narrators and implied authors do not necessarily "say" the same thing — unreliable narrators are identified as such by the reader through the agency of the implied author. But, unless we can identify textual strategies for ignoring or revising the overt or insinuated instructions of the narrator> we deal with them as honest if not always immediately comprehensible assertions.

siglo de oro español (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1957), and *El prólogo en el manierismo y barroco españoles* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1968).

16. See David William Foster, "Latin American Documentary Narrative," *PMLA*, 99 (1984), 41-55.

17. The idea of "unreliable narrators" is one of the main concerns of Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

18. The greatest writer of ironic fiction in Latin America is, of course, Jorge Luis Borges, an aspect of his work that has been repeatedly underscored by the extensive bibliography on his writing.

19. The most famous treatise on reading codes in Roland Barthes's study of the Balzac story "Sarrasine," *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

20. For a phenomenological study of levels of the author and narrator, see Félix Martínez Bonati, *Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature: a Phenomenological Approach* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Perhaps Rodríguez Freyre's most overt reading instruction is the one bald statement that comes at the opening of *Capítulo XVII*, about two-thirds through the text: "Dire lo que vi y lo que oí" (p. 314). One is willing to assume that by "Rodríguez Freyre" reference is made to both the historical author of the text and to the narrator whose internal self-references match known facts in the former's life or have been taken by the historians for whom *El carnero* is a primary source as reliable facts concerning the author's life. *El carnero* is characterized by a markedly "personal" author, one who is concerned with establishing a sense of rapport with the reader; more on this aspect of the text below. Thus, the one-line paragraph, inserted as a sort of discourse punctuation in the introduction to the discussion of the events surrounding the government of Antonio González (1589-97), is characteristic of the narrator's assertions to the reader concerning the authenticity of what is being reported.

What are the implications of Rodríguez Freyre's statement? Obviously, we cannot merely take them as corroboration of the historical, as opposed to any suspected fictional, nature of the chronicle. Such an avowal does not inherently establish documentary accuracy, historical authenticity, or narrational objectivity. Moreover, despite the insouciant linking of the two predicates *ver* and *oir* with reference to the narrator's sources of information for what he relates, there is an immeasurable breach between the two in terms of what can be verified or accepted at face value. To doubt the truth or the accuracy of what the narrator claims to have seen is to impugn directly his own responsibility for his own text. A zero-degree reading convention is to accept both the veracity and the competence of the narrator and to impute unreliability on the basis of specific internal features. Thus, it is not difficult to assume a distrustful stance toward Fernando Vidal Olmos, the narrator of the novel-within-a-novel, the "Informe sobre ciegos" that constitutes the third book of Ernesto Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas* (1961).²¹ There is ample evidence that the narrator is a combination of paranoid and schizo-

21. Concerning this aspect of Sábato's novel, see Z. Nelly Martínez, "El 'Informe sobre ciegos' y Fernando Olmos, poeta vidente," *Revista iberoamericana*, No. 81 (1972), 627-639; and David William Foster, "The Inte-

phrenic, and as a consequence he is usually read as unreliable and only unintentionally or unwittingly reliable. However, narrators are to be trusted, as a major reading convention or discourse maxim,²² unless there is evidence to the contrary. Historians may have corrected Rodríguez Freyle on several points (the edition used for purposes of this study contains extensive amplifications and corrections to Rodríguez Freyle's information by the historian Darío Achury Valenzuela), but there is no critical opinion to the effect that he is an unreliable narrator in any substantive sense of the term.

By contrast, the assertion that one of the narrator's sources of information is what he heard, what was reported to him does not obligate the reader to any natural assumption that it is true or objectively reported. (I am assuming that the thrust of *oir* here refers not to what one heard *from* personages being presented, but rather what one heard *about* them from other sources, an obvious interpretation in the case of the many events during the hundred-year history of the Nuevo Reino de Granada to which our narrator cannot have been a direct, personal witness). Although the narrator may imply his belief that a certain assertion reported to him is a matter of fact, the reader may question it without necessarily doubting the narrator's reliability. We may question the narrator's sense of critical evaluation as regards what he chooses to report, and this is a form of impugning his reliability — indeed? it could well serve as an implied author's sign that his narrator is naive or ingenuous (the case with Toto as narrator in Manuel Puig's *La traición de Rita Hayworth* [1968] or Miguel Vera in Augusto Roa Bastos's *Hijo de hombre* [1958])²³ However, it does not mean

that we are dealing with a narrator who is untrustworthy or disingenuous, but merely that we have the right to understand that such information cannot be authenticated vis-a-vis a narrator whom, by convention, we have the right and the obligation to believe.

Since we have disposed of the narrator's statement as a guarantee of the inherent accuracy of his discourse, we must assign to it some other function in the texts. The most natural function for such a statement to serve is not to describe the accuracy of the text, but to request from the reader a belief in its accuracy. Clearly, these are two separate operations, and in a very real sense the difference between them is the contrast between reading a text like *El carnero* as history and reading it as protoor quasifictional narrative. The historian guarantees the accuracy of this analysis by an appeal to the appropriateness of his sources, and modern historiography has evolved a complex system of protocols to evaluate accuracy and to enable the historian to assert his professional reliability.²⁴ In the case of primary sources that antedate contemporary historiographic criteria, an assertion such as Rodríguez Freyle's is at least a *prima facie* indication of the desire to be taken as reliable.

On the other hand, a reading of *El carnero* that is not concerned with evaluating its historical accuracy or with using it as a primary source for historical knowledge will — and this is the important feature of my argument at this point — read the narrator's statement as the characterization of the framing of the narrative *as though it were* historical fact, and they are not simply adapting the Aristotelian hypothesis that poetry is valuable because it shows what could be true. Rather, the sense of their fiction is that the narrative is to be read as though it were a true story, and the interest of the reading — the specific complexity of the text and the sophistication of the act of reading it demands — derives from the interplay between the contradictory images of fiction and historical fact. If Conrad's *Lord Jim* is told via narrative conventions that assert it is a true story, a modern novel like Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el Supremo* (1974) demands to be read as the autobiography of and accompanying

gral Role of 'El informe sobre ciegos' in Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas*, "Romance Notes, 14 (1972), 44-48.

22. For information on discourse maxims, consult Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

23. Concerning Puig's novel, see Augusto Sarrochi Carreño, "Sobre el narrador de *La traición de Rita Hayworth* de Manuel Puig," *Revista signos de Valparaíso*, 7, i (1973-74), 94-104; and Marta Morello-Frosch, "La traición de Rita Hayworth o el arte nuevo de narrar películas," *Sin nombre*, 1, iv (1971), 77-82. With regard to Roa Bastos, see David William Foster, "Una nota sobre el punto de vista narrativo en *Hijo de hombre* de Roa Bastos," *Revista iberoamericana*, No. 73 (1970), 643-650.

24. Hayden V. White discusses modern historiography and its relation to the analysis of narrative in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

documents concerning Paraguay's nineteenth-century dictator, Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia.²⁵

I do not wish to maintain that *El carnero* should be approached like *Yo el Supremo* as a complex novel based on the ironic assimilation of history to fiction or fiction to history. Nor can much be gained critically by proposing that *El carnero* be read as simply a charmingly primitive form of the novel in seventeenth-century Colombia.²⁶ Rather, my proposal is that the assertion "Diré lo que vi y lo que oí" represents a discourse goal to be understood neither as the assurance of historical accuracy nor as the ironic characterization of a fictional narrative, but as the characterization of the validity and the interest of the material being presented — some of which is deadly dull to anyone but a historian of the period of some of which is scandalous in terms of the narrator's avowed commitment to high Christian morals. Concern for this material can, therefore, only legitimately derive from the fact that it is believed to be true. Thus, the image of probable historical fact can be taken by the reader as a strategy of the narrator to allay any reservations one may have about it, reservations about either its dullness or its sinfulness, or, indeed, whatever reservations ideal or real readers may have. As a consequence, the criterion of alleged accuracy does not need to be submitted to independent verification by the reader. It suffices that the allegation is made to ensure the acceptability of the discourse and the narrator's right to it.²⁶

A similar statement is to be found in Capítulo VII. Although it does not have the independent force of the one we have been discussing because it is contextualized in terms of a specific allegation:

Dijeron en este Reino que el Adelantado había entrado con un vestido de gra-

na que se usaba en aquellos tiempos, con mucho franjón de oro, y que yendo por la plaza lo vio el secretario Cobos desde las ventanas del palacio, y que dijo a voces: "¿Qué loco es ese?, echen ese loco de la plaza": y con esto salió de ella. Si él lo hizo y fue verdad, como en ésta se dice, no es mucho que lo escriba yo. Tenía descuidos el Adelantado, que le conocí muy bien, porque fue padrino de una hermana mía de pila, y compadre de mis padres, y más valiera que no, por lo que nos costó en el segundo viaje que hizo a Castilla, cuando volvió perdido de buscar *El Dorado*, que a este viaje fue mi padre con él, con muy buen dinero que acá no volvió más, aunque volvieron ambos. (p. 188)

Although this passage is typical of Rodríguez Freyle's rather rambling style in his narrative, it contains three interlocking assertions concerning the validity of what is being reported and which the reader is asked to accept without reservation. In the first place, there is an explicit appeal to the narrator's right to communicate fact, no matter how farfetched or offensive it may be. That is, the idea of the Adelantado prancing around in red festive raiment ("vestido de grana") is so totally dissonant with his image and with social decorum (hence Cobo's angry demand to know who the "loco" is and his imperative to chase him from the public plaza) that one might attribute it to a libelous fantasy. However, without attributing it to any other authority than to the vague and all-serving "dijeron que"—the venerable Hispanic topos of the *dizque*—the narrator is able to justify his repetition of the rumor under the enabling speech act concerning the legitimacy of repeating what is true.

The reader, as a consequence, is asked to accept both the discourse principle (one which requires suspension of the competing principle in Western culture that permits the narration of only information of morally redeeming value) and the really quite unsubstantiated assertion that what is being narrated is, in fact, "verdad" in any reliably historical sense. The fact that Rodríguez Freyle's narrative operates so blithely by virtue of both this specific discourse principle and an apparent lack of concern for substantiating assertions in any way other than by reference to hearsay and other circumstantial evi-

25. See Raúl Dorra, "Yo el Supremo: la circular perpetua," *Textocrítico*, No. 9 (1978); and Peter Turton, "Yo el Supremo: una verdadera revolución novelesca," *Textocrítico*, No. 12 (1979), 10-60.

26. In the style of the observations by Enrique Pupo-Walker, "La reconstrucción imaginativa del pasado en *El carnero* de Rodríguez Freyle," *Nueva revista de filología hispánica*, 27 (1978), 346-358. Also in his *La vocación literaria del pensamiento histórico en América: desarrollo de la prosa de ficción: siglos XV, XVII, XVIII y XIX* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1982), Cap. III.

dence is undoubtedly part of the "charm" readers have customarily attributed to *El carnero*. More precisely, any such charm is a function of the radical innocence of the narrator in terms of the demands of discourse principles our reading **conventions** require of apophantic texts, **fictional**-literary or otherwise. Or, to put it somewhat differently, the discrepancy I have identified between the narrator's insouciant assertions of narrative rights and the reading conventions **universally** (albeit abstractly or ideally) in force in our culture is most likely one locus of the **aesthetic** pleasure one has in reading Rodriguez Freyle's chronicle.

The second assertion on which the narrator bases himself is the appeal to privileged **information** concerning the "descuidos" of the Adelantado stemming from the fact that he was **godfather** to one of the narrator's sisters and a close friend of their parents. Such an assertion is, of course, an appeal to private knowledge. Although such knowledge may be accurate, since it is **unverifiable** it must be accepted on faith — the degree to which the reader is willing to trust the veracity and the accuracy or objectivity of the narrator — which simply puts us right back where we were with the original question of **documentation** on the basis of assertion. I do not wish to belabor this point, because it is fairly obvious that one of Rodriguez Freyle's principal **involvements** with his material is his own personal identification with many of the people and events he relates, a fact that clearly explains why he was interested in writing *El carnero* in the first place, other justifications notwithstanding.

But if there is any critical virtue in assessing the nature of the narrator's claims to our **attention** on the basis of his own unique discourse concerning the historical events of the Nuevo Reino de Granada, the ways in which the **narrator** explains both his sources and defends his handling of them acquire special meaning in terms of our construction of the image of his discourse strategies. Such an assessment has little to do, from the point of view of the literary scholar, with gauging the appropriateness of those sources and the narrator's handling of them in terms of *El carnero* as a primary historical source. Rather, it is the rhetoric of the narrator's identification of his sources and his reasons for writing that are of specific interest for the **literary critic's** characterization of the narrative **texture** of *El carnero*. The controlling discourse **max-**

im — one which literary readers cannot challenge in the way that historiographers may question and repudiate primary sources — is the succinct assertion "lo escribo porque **sé** que fue la **verdad**."

Critics have repeatedly observed how one of the dominant features of *El carnero* in terms of the other chronicles of the New World is the clear emphasis on the unheroic and on the **morally** reprehensible behavior of highly placed **individuals**. This feature not only gives *El carnero* its novelistic quality but foreshadows the **demythificational** thrust of so much modern Latin American literature. But it is precisely this **emphasis** of Rodriguez Freyle's historical narrative that makes the narrator's appeal to what I have called his controlling discourse maxim so **particular**ly effective in the legitimation of his **handling** of this material. In turn, such a legitimation provides us with the image of a narrator much closer to those of the modern demythificational literature — for example, *Cien años de soledad* (1967) or other novels bearing obvious **intertextualities** with the tradition of the chronicles, like Carlos Fuentes's *Terra nostra* (1975) or Mario Vargas Llosa's *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) — than he is to the earnestly recorded or heroic achievements that we associate with the inventory of the major chronicles of the **Conquest**.

The third major trace of the narrator's **self-characterization** is a reflection on the issues of what, in modern terms, we would call the **invasion** of other people's privacy, which is one of the dominant features of **fiction** as a displaced act of voyeurism:

En su lugar dire **quién** puso estos **letreros**; y están luchando conmigo la **razón** y la verdad. La **razón** me dice que no me **meta** en, vidas ajenas; la verdad me dice que **diga** la verdad. **Ambas dicen** muy bien, pero valga la verdad; y **pues** los **casos** pasaron en audiencia y en **cadalsos** públicos, la misma **razón** me da **licencia** que lo **diga**, que peor es que lo **hayan** hecho ellos que **10 escriba** yo; y **si** es verdad que **pintores** y **poetas** tienen igual **potes-tad**, con ellos se han de **entender** los **cronistas**, aunque es diferente, porque **aquellos** pueden **fingir**, pero a éstos **córreles** obligación de **decir la** verdad, so pena del **daño** de la **conciencia**. (p. 236)

While not exactly based on tortuous logic, this passage nevertheless is a clever chaining of a number of different arguments: 1) whether or not one should discuss the acts of others; 2) competing claims of reason and truth, with the triumph of the latter because it is true (the reader will have noted the narrator's incidental use of the topos of a debate between anthropomorphized Truth and Reason); 3) the legitimacy of discussing what became public knowledge and was a public spectacle; 4) the defense that what the narrator does is no worse [sic!; the logical unspoken presupposition here is that it is bad, but comparatively less so] than the actual sinful or immoral deeds of the individuals whose privacy is being invaded by the narrator; 5) the narrator of what is alleged to be historical fact should have the same rights as poets and painters, who operate in accord with the topos of "el poeta finge"²⁷; 6) the chroniclers of historical fact can always be held to the condition of, precisely, the substance of historical fact.

What the narrator seems to be doing here is acknowledging implicitly the unspoken challenge to his right as a chronicler to occupy himself with the sordid details of the private acts and public deeds of the persons whom his narrative surveys over a hundred-year span of time. Such an exculpation as this, however, really does not bespeak the narrator's need to defend himself — after all, writers will offer texts to their readers unless prevented by the structures of repression from doing so, usually with complete disregard for public opinion against writing or a particular variety of writing. Even if Rodríguez Freyle may have felt the need as a specific human being engaged in the act of writing censorially about the lives of others, Rodríguez Freyle as the abstract entity of a discourse text we call the narrator is, I would postulate, making more of a contribution to the way in which we read his narrative than to any objections we may have to his assumed right to compose it. There is, therefore, the appeal to the criterion of truth as a legitimizing criterion and as a virtue by contrast to the rights of poets and painters.

The most striking element of the narrator's argument, however, is the moral one based on

the assertion that the moral reprehensibility of the individuals concerned can serve as an enabling condition for the narrative that concerns itself with "vidas ajenas" (this is a literary equivalent, one supposes, of the claim often made in our own society that criminals ought not to have civil rights or liberties...). This is a rather strange assertion, not so much as such, but because one would have expected the more traditionally Christian and medieval criterion of the need to describe such acts as a moral example, "para escarmiento de todos y consuelo de nadie" as the proverb says. That Rodríguez Freyle breaks with this tradition, which, as María Rosa Lida de Malkiel has shown, goes back at least to the Arcipreste de Hita's *Libro de buen amor*,²⁸ and substitutes in its place the image of the narrator as ethically suspect is yet another one of the features of *El carnero* to which the critic may attribute aesthetic value: the reader need not see this argument as foreshadowing the concept of the narrator as voyeur in order to appreciate the acrobatic logic in which the narrator must engage in order to confirm his right to pursue the events of his story.

The final quote that frames the narrator's *relato* that I would like to consider involves both his contextualizing his own narrative in terms of a tradition of similar histories and the projection of an indefinite series of iterative situations that will involve essentially the same authorial stance and commentary:

Ya tengo dicho que todos estos casos, y demás que pusiere, los pongo por ejemplo; y esto de escribir vidas ajenas no es cosa nueva, porque todas las historias las hallo llenas de ellas. Todo lo dicho, y lo que adelante dijere en otros casos, consta por autos, a los cuales remit0 al lector a quien esto no satisficiera. (p. 287)

This quote brings together three of the recurring justifications of the narrative act to be found in *El carnero*: the fact that the narrator is following the example of a firmly-established tradition of chronicle writings that are based on a privileged, if potentially reprehensible, observations (hence, the need for the justification) of

27. Otis F. Green writes on this topos in his *Spain and the Western Tradition; the Castilian Mind in Literature from El Cid to Calderón* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963-1966), III, 190-202, "The Poets Feign."

28. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *Two Spanish Masterpieces: The Book of Good Love, and The Celestina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

the secret or private lives of real people; the fact that all of the information that is provided **concerning** these private lives may be independently verified in Rodriguez Freyle's own sources (for the reader as **nonhistorian**, the assertion that this is possible is more persuasive than any **determination** that it is, in fact, a legitimate one); and, finally, that the information of such a **scandalous** and morally objectionable nature is **provided** only as an example for the appropriate enlightenment of the reader. Although this third justification is in reality the first made by the narrator in the passage quoted, I underscore it last in order to elaborate at this point on how it is a venerable topos of, at least, premodern Christian literature. As Lida de Malkiel argued persuasively in her famous answer to the problem of why the *Libro de buen amor* dwelt so insistently on examples of *loco amor*: since he was a putatively moral narrator, Juan Ruiz was constrained to demonstrate the misfortunes and evils of the forms of love he would have his **readers** avoid. Thus, the exemplariness of *El carnero* demands that the narration be read in the **context** of the need to "invade the privacy," if we may be permitted this modern phraseology, of individuals in order to underscore the sort of human conduct Rodriguez Freyle finds to characteristic of the one hundred years of Colombian history.

Of particular significance in the passage quoted above is the conjunction of three uses of the future subjunctive. Such a stylistic feature is unimportant as the future subjunctive: only the reader unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the **dialect** in which *El carnero* is written will find such a usage out of the ordinary. Rather, the point to be made is how the use of the subjunctive in this context marks the indeterminacy of Rodriguez Freyle's narrative: his justification is applicable not only to the examples he has given up to this point (approximately, midway in his narrative), but to *whatever* examples he may subsequently give, and to *whatever* he may subsequently say. Moreover, *whoever* may be unsatisfied with any of these examples given or to be given will find independent verification in the (significantly, unnamed) *autos* on which the narrator is basing his history. Such an affirmation is basically **hyperbolic** and serves as a strategic "narrative **punctuation**" to forestall any objection that the narrator may feel his audience might make.

This is, indeed, a curious feature of *El carnero* or any similar narrative: the narrator's implied recognition of how the narratee may find the discourse less than entirely credible, less than completely appropriate or permissible in ethical or moral terms. The narrator's parenthetical assurances to the reader concerning the **legitimacy** of his **discourse** — a legitimacy that derives from the assertion that he is observing specific enabling criteria like exemplariness or historical veracity — may be implied. But it is no less abrupt. As an aside punctuating the details of a **particular** example, as a coda to a particular event that has just been described in vivid terms, or as a strategy of transition from one example to **another**, this sort of note by the narrator to the reader has the effect of abruptly interrupting the deictic narrative ("they did that there at that time") to reassure the reader that the narrator is abiding by both the general discourse **conventions** of the genre his text has identified 'itself with (the historical chronicles) and the specific ones he has established for his own writing (the goal of a moral commentary on the persons and events set forth).

IV

Rodriguez Freyle's need, as narrator, to **assure** his reader over and over again that he is **fulfilling** his narrative goal is one of the salient **features** of the texture of *El carnero*, and it may be directly related to the issue of balanced history vs. scabrous preoccupation that has **characterized** the critical assessments of the book as both chronicle and protonovel. Although one of the premises of my own study of *El carnero* is that it is not **necessary** to classify the text as either history or novel — that, indeed, such **classifications** impoverish texts, which lend themselves to multiple complementary and contradictory **readings** — the simple fact remains that it is the narrator's concern with emphasizing the justification for his own discourse that calls our attention to the uncertain generic status of the text.

The foregoing leads us back to Rodriguez Freyle's controlling assertion concerning the **nature** of his text. Surely, if the sources, the *autos*, to which he refers exist, then there is **documentary** material concerning the Nuevo Reino de Granada, and he cannot allege for his discourse the quality that so often marks similar (pseudo) historical narrative, that of "telling what has **ne-**

ver been told before.” Rather, the singular quality of *El carnero*, so its narrator maintains, is to demonstrate that the events of one hundred years of history in new Granada are, despite beliefs to the contrary, worthy of telling. Tellability thus becomes the dominant criterion for Rodriguez Freyle’s narrative:

Del descubrimiento que don Cristobal Colon hizo del nuevo mundo se originó el conocimiento de la India occidental, en cuyos descubrimientos y conquistas varones ilustres gastaron su valor, vidas y haciendas, como lo hizo don Fernando Cortés, marques del Valle, en la Nueva España; el marques don Francisco Pizarro y don Diego de Almagro, su compañero, en el Peru, Valdivia en Chile, y otros capitanes en otras partes, como se ve en sus historias, conquistas y descubrimientos, entre los cuales se hallan algunos rasguños o rastros de la conquista de este Nuevo Reino de Granada; de la cual no he podido alcanzar cuál haya sido la causa por la cual los historiadores que han escrito las demás conquistas han puesto silencio en esta, y si acaso se les ofrece tratar alguna cosa de ella para sus fines, es tan de paso que casi la tocan como a cosa divina por, no ofenderla, quizá lo hacen porque como su conquista fue poco sangrienta, y en ella no hallaron hechos de celebrar, lo pasan en silencio; y para que del todo no se pierda su memoria ni se sepulte en el olvido, quise, lo mejor que se pudiese, dar noticia de la conquista de este Nuevo Reino, y lo sucedido en él desde que sus pobladores y primeros conquistadores lo poblaron, hasta la hora presente, que esto se escribe, que corre el año de 1636 [...]. (p. 9)

These are the opening words of the narrator’s text, and it is clear that the motivating criterion of Rodriguez Freyle’s discourse is dual in nature: to provide a chronicle for new Granada on the same level as that of the writings mentioned for other areas of Spanish America, and to demonstrate that the events of the Nuevo Reino are of an equal interest (if, perhaps, less bloody.= From these criteria stems the unavoidable

imperative for the narrator to focus on the most Outrageous occurrences over the span of one hundred years, and from his compliance with this imperative stems also the need to repeat the interlocking series of justifications that frame the narrative as a whole by punctuating strategically its detailed trajectory from one incidence of malfeasance, betrayal, immorality, and rapine to another.

It is in this fashion that the reader is asked to understand the organization of the individual *casos* that *El Camero* relates. To be sure, so much of the material in Rodriguez Freyle’s text is narratively uninteresting: it is a moot point whether it is interesting from a historian’s point of view; within the context of any minimal demands for narration, fictional or otherwise, whole segments of *El camero* are merely catalogs of names and dates. One does not need to have recourse to commonplaces concerning changing tastes in narratives to assume that these passages are not the main point of interest in *El carnero*. In line with an integrationist postulate about the necessary structural integrity of a text, the best that we probably can do is to maintain that the virtue of these flat registries of vital statistics is to highlight those occasions on which the narrator undertakes to invade the privacy of some individual in the interest of exemplifying some occurrence in the sweep of this historical panorama. Thus, we need to focus on how the transition is made from inventory to exmpium and how the latter, with all its scandalous detail? is justified in terms of the controlling narrative conventions.

Take, for example, one such digression, which concerns what happened while the civil authorities were involved elsewhere in a scandalous event described in the previous chapter (IX). During their absence — because of their absence? another reprehensible event takes place, this time one that involves adultery and gambling and their consequences:

for the reader as concerns the author’s vision of his own work: “El ‘Prólogo al lector’ de *El carnero*: guía para su lectura,” *Thesaurus*, 29 (1974), 177-181. In a more extensive treatment of *El carnero*, Chang-Rodriguez underscores how it is a demythification reading of the socio-cultural values of the period: “Las mascarás de *El carnero*,” in her *Violencia y subversión en la prosa colonial hispanoamericana, siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Jose Porrúa Turanzas, 1982), pp. 41-61.

29. Raquel Chang-Rodriguez has written briefly about Rodriguez Freyle’s prologue and how it is a guide

Ya dije cómo cuando esto pasó estaba el presidente ausente en la ciudad de Tunja, que había ido a la averiguación de aquella muerte, y el matador estaba retraído en la iglesia: y el corregidor, don Pedro de Ayala, que había enviado el informe a la Real Audiencia, estaba con él, ambos en grillos; y *por ser este caso ejemplar lo pongo aquí*, que en su lugar, lo cual pasó como se sigue.

En la gobernación de Venezuela, y en la ciudad de Carora, estaba casado un don Pedro de Avila, natural de aquel lugar, con doña Inés de Hinojosa, criolla de Barquisimeto, en la dicha gobernación. Mujer hermosa por extremo y rica, y el marido bien hacendado; pero tenía este hombre dos faltas muy conocidas: la una, que no se contentaba con sola su mujer, de lo cual ella vivía muy descontenta; la otra, era ser muy jugador; que con lo uno y con lo otro traía maltratada su hacienda, y la mujer, con los celos y juego peor tratada. Llegó en aquella sazón a aquella ciudad un Jorge Voto, maestro de danza y música. Puso escuela y comenzó a enseñar a los mozos del lugar: y siendo ya más conocido, danzaban las mozas también. (p. 221: emphasis added)

With these two paragraphs and their outpouring of references to events described previously on the one hand and to a new cast of characters and situations on the other, the narrator establishes the setting for one of the more involved and violent of his tales concerning deceit, betrayal, and revenge. True to the convention requiring the narrator to justify his story in terms of its exemplary nature (the affirmation I have underlined above: which is followed by the parallel assertion, that it "did happen this way"), the telling of the complicated event is punctuated by allusions to the underlying moral message to be derived from it:

¡Oh hermosura! Los gentiles la llamaron dádiva breve de naturaleza y dádiva quebradiza, por lo presto que se pasa y las muchas cosas con que se quiebra y pierde. También la llamaron lazo disimulado, porque se cazaba con ella las voluntades indiscretas y mal consideradas. Yo les

quiero ayudar un poquito. La hermosura es flor mientras más la manosean. O ella se deja manosear, más pronto se marchita. (p. 223)

Muy a menudo tuvo el aviso de su daño; pero cuando Dios Nuestro Señor permite que uno se pierda, también permite que no admita consejo, como se vio en este hombre; porque sustanciando esta causa, el presidente vio estos dos renglones [of warning] escritos sobre la mesa donde cenaron. (p. 225)

Llegó el presidente al tercer día de cómo recibió el informe; sacó de la iglesia al don Pedro Bravo de Rivera, sustanció la causa y pronunció en ella sentencia de muerte contra los culpados. Al don Pedro confiscó sus bienes: la encomienda de Chivata, que era suya, la puso en la corona, como lo está hoy. Degollaron al don Pedro: a su hermano Hernán Bravo, ahorcaron en la esquina de la calle al Jorge Voto; y a la doña Inés la ahorcaron de un árbol que tenía junto a su puerta, el cual vive aún hasta hoy, aunque seco, con haber más de setenta años que sucedió este caso. ¡Oh hermosura desdichada y mal empleada, pues tantos daños causaste por no corregirte con la razón! (p. 227)

Thus, the telling of this fascinating little tale of the mess people can make of their lives is justified because 1) it relates to the comings and goings of the official representatives of the Crown; 2) it is a matter of public record, and landmarks relating to it are still available as verifiable points of reference (Chivatá, the desiccated tree from which Doña Inés was hanged); and 3) it illustrates a moral point, the deceptive nature of human beauty. No matter that the moral point is not particularly pertinent to the event at issue and that it shifts too much blame on women (Rodríguez Freyle amply establishes throughout *El carnero* his credentials as a conventional misogynist). From the perspective of the narrative conventions with which the narrative is operating, it is sufficient for his purpose that the intrinsic interest of this fascinating piece of scandal be attenuated by allusion to a moral message exemplified by the story. Yet, it would be unfair

to attribute disingenuousness to the narrator of *El carnero*: the interest of his discourse lies, precisely, in the not too subtle balancing of the need to prove that interesting events took place during the hundred-year history of the Nuevo Reino de Granada and, at the same time, to validate the narrator's self-image as a chronicler of unimpeachable moral virtue. Without this interplay, *El carnero* would be quite another text, and probably one much less interesting.

One of the occurrences related in Capítulo XIII provides further illustration of Rodríguez Freyle's narrative strategy; this time it is a tale concerning the consequences of unbridled jealousy:

Seguía el fiscal los amores de una dama hermosa que había en esta ciudad, mujer de prendas, casada y rica. Siempre me topo una mujer hermosa que me dé en qué entender. Grandes males han causado en el mundo mujeres hermosas: y sin ir más lejos, miren la primera, que sin duda fue la más linda, como amasada de las manos de Dios. ¿qué tal quedó el mundo por ella? De la confesión de Adán, su marido, se puede tomar, respondiendo a Dios: "Señor, la mujer que me disteis, esa me despeñó". (p. 258)

The narrator continues in this vein, and, indeed, he compiles in a few pages a veritable *accumulatio* of denunciations of women's beauty and is carried far afield from the relation of the specific occurrence that sparks such an assessment of feminine qualities. What is of significance in this example for a theory for the reading of *El carnero* is the overlapping of referential patterns. On the one hand, the skeleton of the one hundred years of history provides a series of outstanding events for confirming the nature of life in one sector of the New World. On the other hand, and much in keeping with the forms of moral and doctrinal literature that Rodríguez Freyle evokes again and again from both the Hispanic and the patristic traditions, the vents both provide the confirmation of the opportunity to dwell on issues of virtue and constitute a scheme of beliefs that enable the narrator to justify his choice of examples and to focus on their details. "Siempre me topo una mujer hermosa que me dé en qué entender" thus becomes another one of the controlling narrative maxims of *El carne-*

ro to the extent that an anecdote concerning a beautiful woman is one of a series of typical circumstances that provide the basic categories for Rodríguez Freyle's narrative, along with examples of greed, ambition, pride, and the like.

One could object that *El carnero* does no more than underscore specific instances of the master scheme of the seven vices, and of course this would be an apt characterization. The important point is that these vices and their variants emerge as the primary anecdotal material of *El carnero* and not the historical registries of names, places, and dates that on several occasions simply provide the chronological continuity between one scandalous event and another. It requires no grafting onto a description of *El carnero* of the concept of the subtext — that other less overt and explicit text we recover as the true or, at least, more significant discourse of a text, the "hidden textual agenda" — to appreciate how it is the narrator's concern with selecting, framing, explaining, and justifying a certain type of human event that constitutes the dominant act of fabulation in this chronicle. As a consequence, the narrator is unable to abide by his own maxim of discretion in the face of such events:

La casa donde sólo la voluntad es señora, no está segura la razón, ni se puede tomar punto fijo. Esto fue el origen y principio de los disgustos de este Reino, y pérdida de haciendas, y el ir y venir de los visitantes y jueces, polilla de esta tierra y menoscabo de ella... Callar es cordura. (p. 259)

V

The sort of image of the reading strategy demanded by *El carnero* does not in any way argue either for reading it as a novel, proto, quasi, or otherwise, or for considering it only in terms of its narrative anecdotes of a human interest nature. Of course, one may want to read *El carnero* in a fashion reminiscent of Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963), picking and choosing among those parts that are of contemporary novelistic interest (as well a historian may read *El carnero* only in terms of its documentary references, skipping the essentially uninformative scandals).³⁰ But,

30. See Mario Benedetti, "Julio Cortázar, un narrador para los lectores cómplices," in his *Letras del conti-*

then, *Rayuela* only formalizes the way many readers approach a literary text, so the stimulus for fragmentary reading that *El carnero* may arguably provide is not a necessarily distinctive structural feature.

My point would be, rather, that there is a profound compositional unity underlying Rodríguez Freyre's book, one that derives from the mutual dependence that I have described between the historical framework that provides the narrative opportunities and the moral interpretations that provide the justification for the concentration on the narrative occurrences. All literary texts are essentially coherent structures if we simply decide to read them as such, imposing on them the interrelationship of the parts that our individual reading and interpretational skills allow us to do, and in reality there is no such thing as more and less coherently readable texts. Instead, there are only texts that appeal more or less to the existing reading competences of those who take them up. *El carnero* appeals to a number of reading competences, the two most obvious being the tradition already established by the middle of the sixteenth century of New World chronicles and their roots in the humanistic, protohistorical writings of the Renaissance, and the much longer tradition of moral interpretations of the events of daily human commerce, beginning at least with the late Medieval genre of the novella. But *El carnero* also appeals to more modern reading competences, especially to our ability to conjugate disparate elements into the asymmetrical or metafictional texts that characterize the modern novel and that one critic has called "disruptional" because of their demand for accepting new structural conventions.

But let us not go too far: Mario Vargas Llosa and others may have argued that the chronicles and the *novelas de caballería* are the direct inspiration for the *nueva narrativa*.³¹ Yet, it is not quite the same thing to say that *El carnero* should be read like *Cien años de soledad* or *La casa verde*. Or, perhaps it is legitimate to apply to *El carnero* the expanded horizons of reading competences provided by the *nueva narrativa*, without our having to assert that we can only

make sense of a text like Rodríguez Freyre's through reference to contemporary fiction. Text — literary or otherwise — are meaningful because readers are able to assign meaning to them, in part on the basis of an understanding derived from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors of what the author's "intentions" were and in part because of ever-changing cultural principles for the comprehension of texts.³² If we can accept contemporary postulates concerning the act of reading — postulates that, to be sure, involve irreconcilable differences of opinion concerning, interpretation: and contextualization — there is little objectionable about arguing for approaching *El carnero* as a text that may be read without resolving the question of history vs. fiction, literature vs. document, chronicle vs. novel, or tightly structured whole vs. fragmentary miscellany.

Like so many Renaissance and Baroque texts, *El carnero* contains an explicit appeal to the reader. This appeal involves not only the formal prefatory statement, "Amigo lector," but also asides to the reader throughout the text. These asides serve both to mark transitions and to remind the reader of the guiding justification of the text he is reading:

Paréceme que ha de haber muchos que digan: ¿qué tiene que ver la conquista del Nuevo Reino, costumbres y ritos de sus naturales, con los lugares de la Escritura y Testimonio viejo y otras historias antiguas. *Curioso lector, respondo: [...]* (p.36; emphasis added.)

Bórrese, si fuere posible, de la memoria de los hombres tal hombre [Francisco Martínez Belio], o no se le de nombre de hombre sino de fiera cruel e infernal, pues dio la muerte a quien nada le debía y a quien por leyes divinas y humanas debía amparar y defender. ¿Dije borrar de la memoria de los hombres, este hombre? No podía ser, porque hay mucho averiguado sobre este caso, y se escribió largo sobre él. (p. 35 l.)

nente mestizo (Montevideo: Arca, 1967), pp. 58-76; and Esperanza Figueroa Amarai, "Guía para el lector de *Rayuela*," *Revista iberoamericana*, No. 62 (1966), 261-266.

31. For example, Mario Vargas Llosa's note on García Márquez, "*Cien años de soledad*: Amadis en América," *Amaru*, No. 3 (1967), 71-74.

32. That ideological and sociocultural principles underline our reading of literature is the thrust of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious; Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Although the second quote does not contain the trope "amigo lector" or one of its variants, it is in fact one of the many asides in which the narrator comments on the material he is transcribing, with the vocative invocation of the reader clearly understood as part of such a parenthetical statement. The effect, of course, is to assume that the reader shares with the narrator both his premises concerning human behavior and his opinions concerning the events portrayed. Such an assumption is the sine qua non of appeals to the reader, and the intent of the prologues "Al lector," "A quien leyere," and so on is to affirm this principle, if only by implication. Thus, there is nothing of special note in Rodríguez Freyle's procedure in this regard.

What is of special note in terms of the criteria for reading *El carnero* that I have been sketching in this paper is the ruling principle of the *curioso lector*: such a reader is the natural counterpart to a narrator whose stated goal is to demonstrate that, in fact, the history of the Nuevo Reino de Granada is worth telling about. As a consequence, the ideal reader that he postulates for his text is characterized by the quality of curiosity, a quality we may assume to be of greater immediacy for reading *El carnero*, than moral postures or salacious interests. Thetorically, then, Rodríguez Freyle's narrative is structured to satisfy the appeal to the *curioso lector* identified as its ideal reader, and time and again the affirmations of veracity, the allusions to documentary sources, and the interpretations of the significance of events are provided against the postulation of the criterion of curiosity: "será la relación sucinta y verdadera, sin el ornato retórico que piden las historias, ni tampoco llevará ficciones poéticas, porque sólo se hallará en ella desnuda la verdad" (p. 6).

As I have attempted to demonstrate in this introduction to reading *El carnero*, it is necessary neither to ascertain whether Rodríguez Freyle has met his goal to transcend both *historias* and *ficciones* with his text nor to determine if he has, in fact, transcribed only naked truth, in order to approach the work as effective narrative. With **all** of the reservations contemporary readers have about such **chronicles** (reservations that say more about the nature of readers than about the character of these documents), *El carnero* is far from being a marginal work that occupies a no-man's-land between fiction and history. Indeed, its singular hybridness in this regard is precisely what may make it so appealing to the student of contemporary narrative.³³

33. One may want to recall, at this point, Julio Ortega's important postulate concerning the interpenetration of genres in Latin American literature:

Veamos, así, la interacción de los géneros. Por lo menos desde los *Comentarios reales* del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, la escritura americana se constituye en la polivalencia de su formalización. La escritura dramatiza su realización en un espacio textual, que se sustenta en la historia entendida como política (la utopía incaica como horizonte realizado del orden neo-platónico); que se formaliza en una suma de textos (las crónicas que se refutan o que se insertan como un intertexto probatorio); que se autorrefiere para producirse (el relato que se desdobra y reconduce); que coincide con el tratado novelesco y filosófico, con la literatura y con la crítica; y, en fin, que revela la trama de historia y ficción, allí donde se genera el discurso cultural de una América cuya existencia y conciencia son el drama de un texto. (p. 259)

"Borges y la cultura hispanoamericana," *Revista iberoamericana*, Nos. 100-101 (1977), 257-268.