

Memory and the Book in Rodríguez Freyle's *El Carnero*

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Juan Rodríguez Freyle wrote *El Carnero* (1636-1638) in order to preserve the memory of events in the *Nuevo Reino de Granada* that would otherwise be lost and forgotten. Yet the work's composition of seemingly varied, unrelated parts obscures the significance of those events and the nature of the relation between them¹. For example, knowing how to connect the first four chapters and the rest of the book is elusive, and the work's interpretation and social thrust are equally puzzling. The evident disjuncture between the opening stories about the *indio Dorado* and the incipient conquests in America, and the later chapters, which from Chapter Five on start to center on the activities of Spaniards in the *Nuevo Reino*, especially the pronounced attempts at evangelization and the events of the *casos*, force the reader to decide how to organize the disjointed parts and material. The reader must choose how to render indigenous, oral beginnings at the start of the book with a "fall" whose referent is uncertain, since it may be understood as the Christian fall from grace, or as the fall of indigenous society with the Spanish conquest, marked by the imposition of Christianity and textuality on the *Nuevo Reino*.

This breach manifests Rodríguez Freyle's attempt to pose the problem of where post-conquest Latin American textuality, books, and indeed *El Carnero* itself fit into the disjointed if not hybrid world of the *Nuevo Reino*. Do the origins of seventeenth-century Latin American textuality and *historia* (stories and history) lie with indigenous ontological and oral beginnings, or are they contingent on the textual

beginnings of the Bible, and the ontological beginnings of the Spanish conquest? Even the work's ostensible legal pleitos or *casos*, which are intended to memorialize the present in their recounting (49), originate with some source, and it is precisely the nature of this source that Rodríguez Freyle questions. *El Carnero* implies that the recounted *casos* commemorate not only present circumstances, but also past roots that make their very recounting possible. The reader's decision about where to locate those origins will determine his or her interpretation of the supposedly present circumstances narrated with the *casos*. The determination of those origins in an indigenous or European past will allow the reader to explain the circumstances commemorated with the *casos*, thereby determining whether they memorialize a present society marked by Spanish abuses, or whether they codify by their example Spain's "providential" rights in the Americas. The way that one interprets *El Carnero* as a whole and what it commemorates will depend on one's general opinions about textuality, words, and their significance.

El Carnero's concerns with origins, textuality, and language permeate all aspects of the work, especially the treatment of Castilian jurisprudence and legal discourse which seems to satirize the impotent force of Castilian laws in the *Nuevo Reino* as it shows them to be incapable of directing or organizing any form of social practice. The topics dealt with in the legal *casos* are even further removed from a connection to Rodríguez Freyle's society because they bear little

¹ Susan Herman reviews recent hermeneutical assertions by critics in "Conquest and Discovery: Subversion of the Fall in *El Carnero*", especially pp. 283-85.

relation to the main concerns of contemporaneous legal experts in America (González Echevarría 20). They do not approximate the judicial focus of the period—royal land grants (*encomiendas*), slavery, and administration (MacLachlan 58)—since they tend to emphasize domestic and community life, and circuitous personal and political events. The *casos* seem to derive from different sources than those related to the *Nuevas Leyes* (1542-1543) or the later *Recopilación de leyes de los reinos de las Indias* (1681)².

This gap may throw asunder any serious attempt on Rodríguez Freyle's part to use the events in the *casos* for didactic or exemplary purposes, since they appear to be recounted in jest as they often wind through the sordid personal events of individual lives. For instance, the *comadre* Juana García's prophesy about a man's adulterous affair appears utterly unrelated to more serious hypothetical attempts on Rodríguez Freyle's part to portray a corrupt Spanish government intent on committing barbarous deeds in the *Nuevo Reino* in the name of nationhood and social order. But Rodríguez Freyle's stories interconnect throughout the text, and the same characters reappear throughout the book, making their seeming disjuncture from legal theory and contemporaneous legal concerns part of the author's strategy to show that mundane events affect the everyday machinations of the *Nuevo Reino's* society. Rodríguez Freyle demonstrates that Castilian laws are unable to curb these ordinary and seemingly inconsequential events.

Rodríguez Freyle further suggests that Castilian legal discourse is estranged in every way from the reality of the *Nuevo Reino* because it is displaced from the origins of Latin American memory. Castilian laws falter in their impact on daily praxis because they have little meaning in the *Nuevo Reino*, and Castilian jurisprudence falls short in trying to meet the reality of colonization marked by the widespread abuse of indigenous peoples. Castilian legal codes fail to pertain to the *Nuevo Reino* that is undergirded by indigenous origins, and Castilian language is insufficient there because it cannot signify in the same way that it did in Spain. The god who had so surely undergirded every sign, letter, and word in medieval, Christian Iberia no longer serves as the buoying referent for the language of America.

These commentaries on language and the effects of legal discourse stem from *El Carnero's* questioning of the nature of the social and cultural relation of

indigenous America and Europe. But the work also responds to broad, changing ideas in early modern sign theory about the fixity or instability of signification and language. The early modern displacement from the medieval security about signs (words, images, language), that god lay behind or buttressed every sign, is repeatedly manifested in *El Carnero*. Rodríguez Freyle explores the social ramifications in the *Nuevo Reino* of the general loss of a medieval, Christian reliance on the stable relation between language and god, suggesting that words fail to signify like they should because god does not lie behind them. Unlike the medieval, Christian thinkers such as Augustine, who considered words veils or coverings obscuring god behind them, words in the *Nuevo Reino* do not bear the same secure referent. Castilian legal discourse is rendered impotent in the *Nuevo Reino* because its words signify or point to something meaningless in America. This response to the early modern instability of language accompanies Rodríguez Freyle's critique of Castilian jurisprudence in the *Nuevo Reino*, and his exploration of "Latin American" textual and ontological origins.

Rodríguez Freyle indicates that the Castilian language does not function in the same way in America nor in the early modern period as it did in medieval Iberia. In the medieval period, readers were assured of finding god behind the words they read. The Christian's task was to find god through reading, an activity that the seventh-century theologian and writer Isidoro de Sevilla suggested was akin to choosing the correct path on a journey: "Se las llama *litterae* (letras), que viene a ser como *legitæ*, porque van abriendo camino al que lee (*legenti iter*), o porque se repiten a lo largo de la lectura (*in legendo iterari*)" (Bk. 1, Ch. 3, v. 3, 279). Choosing or interpreting the Godly road was the Christian's goal in reading and in life. Rodríguez Freyle suggests that Latin American otherness in the face of European dominance causes the certainty of God's path behind the words that one reads to falter.

He illustrates the important breach between Castilian language and its function in the *Nuevo Reino* with the various possible events that buoy the signifiers or words of legal discourse in colonial Latin America. The disjuncture between the paradise of the opening chapters, the eventual fall, and the narrated events after the conquest suggest a gamut of possible referents pointed to by the words of the Castilian idiom in the *Nuevo Reino*. *El Carnero* indicates that they point not

2 Ots y Capdequí emphasizes the distinction between law and social reality that resulted in the virtual enslavement of indigenous people "a merced de los españoles encomenderos y de las autoridades de la colonia" (232).

to god like they did in medieval Europe, but to something else, which is the separation from the supreme and stable referent made manifest in those beginning chapters by the loss of indigenous paradise with the conquest, and by the Biblical fall from the garden of Eden. Rodríguez Freyle leaves the decision to the reader to choose the circumstances that divide signifier and referent, whether they be the loss of indigenous paradise or the Edenic beginning of human history. If the gap between indigenous paradise and the Spanish conquest undergirds Castilian language in the *Nuevo Reino*, then the reader may interpret Rodríguez Freyle's book either as elevating the providential nature of Spanish intervention in the Americas, or as criticizing it. If the Biblical story of the Fall reinforces Castilian language, then that language clearly has no effect in the *Nuevo Reino* because the Bible has neither history nor meaning in that place.

Castilian legal codes flounder in the *Nuevo Reino* because they are not consumable there, and they bear no relation to the territory's social conditions. Castilian legal codes and European discourse in general fail to coincide to the realities of Latin American culture because what lies behind them, whether it be interpreted as the Fall from Christian grace, or god, does not wholly correspond to the *Nuevo Reino*.

European textuality is also disconnected from orality, which renders it foreign to indigenous modes of communication and reading, making its effects virtually null and void in the *Nuevo Reino*. It does not form part of Latin American memory, which is comprised of different events than those of European, Christian remembrance. Even when compared to traditional, Christian accounts about memory and language such as those propounded by Augustine, *El Carnero* evidences the fact that the relation between language and memory is amiss in the *Nuevo Reino*. Augustine believed that god or the "inner word" lay behind words or signs, and the Christian's duty was to find god by locating the "inner word" in the traces of memory. One of the most likely ways to carry this out was through the activation of memory in reading, a repetitive act whose words and letters enabled a reader to reach god:

...Augustine journeyed through his memory not to find his past but to find God, his present and future. And it is clear that Augustine assumed that the way to God lay only through the re-presenting of his past in memory; he

has no interest in his past except as it provides him with a way and ground for understanding his present. (Carruthers 193).

El Carnero demonstrates that the gap between el *Nuevo Reino's* indigenous past and colonial present makes reaching god through the non-oral, early modern models of reading a fruitless activity.

Rodríguez Freyle creates great tension between the Christian ethics of reading as an act to reach god, and the utter failure of language to arrive at the "inner word" or to present a consistently truthful narrative. Christian thinkers such as Isidore and Augustine suggested that language resembled the truth behind it, but Rodríguez Freyle demonstrates a significant fissure between them. Moreover, in the same way that Christian thinkers considered worldly books analogous to God's book, *El Carnero* points out that the Biblical story of the Fall and the allegorical reading of history are no longer useful in explaining events in the contemporary *Nuevo Reino*. What lies behind the façade of the word in *El Carnero* is not another analogous yet divine story about a Christian god, but rather a different referent.

Rodríguez Freyle anticipates the difficulty in understanding how to put together the various materials and events dealt with and described in his book, when in Chapter Five the narrator addresses the reader's doubts about the relation between the events of the Old Testament, and the indigenous customs and conquest of the *Nuevo Reino*: "...¿qué tiene que ver la conquista del Nuevo Reino, costumbres y ritos de sus naturales, con los lugares de la Escritura y Testamento viejo y otras historias antiguas?" (82). He calls these European writings and stories loans ("ropas y joyas prestadas") for the retelling of the stories in his own book, which he refers to as a *doncella-huérfana*, an orphaned book at the threshold of marriage, and of her introduction to society. Rodríguez Freyle suggests that this *huérfana* wholly pertains neither to America nor to Europe, but that her publication ("sus bodas y desposorios") connotes the linking or marriage of these two continents. Rodríguez Freyle uses the orphan metaphor to refer to both his book and the *Nuevo Reino*, indicating that the bicontinental and bicultural nature of the orphaned book and territory renders their stable explication difficult to determine³. Rodríguez Freyle opens *El Carnero* to a variety of interpretations when he explains that the best way to organize the wedding is to

3 Herman links the "orphaned maiden" to Rodríguez Freyle's text, while Chang-Rodríguez connects her to *Nueva Granada* ("Prólogo" 180). See Herman's discussion of this question on 291-92.

employ the “ropas y joyas prestadas”, and to choose the most beautiful flowers for the guests’ tables. He then remits to the likings and interpretation of the reader (the *convidado*), that she or he should choose the most pleasing “flower” or story and make it his or her own, “haciendo con ella lo del ave de la fábula” (82). The reader should do the same as a songbird, which is to orally reproduce the *fábula* or story.

Hence, Rodríguez Freyle instructs the reader to choose the book’s “flowers” or episodes according to her or his preference in order to recount them to others. Whatever “flowers” the reader elects will reveal that reader’s partiality towards the commemoration of certain events recounted in *El Carnero*. The flowers or episodes that Rodríguez Freyle refers to have significant ramifications for the book’s self-proclaimed motivation as a receptacle of memory to advise the public about the events in the *Nuevo Reino* so they will not be forgotten (49). The freedom to choose among the variety of “flowers” in the book not only indicates the uncertainty of what is memorialized by *El Carnero*, such as the conquest as providential, Spanish abuses against indigenous peoples, or lost indigenous customs, it also suggests that the reader’s choice will reveal something about the reader. The reader’s election of the flowers of memory shall demonstrate what the reader holds true about the nature of language, texts, and their social function. By extension the way in which the reader regards those things is crucial to her or his identity.

The link between flowers, memory, and the reader’s identity was a commonplace in medieval formulations of memory, and in this way Rodríguez Freyle relies on traditional, medieval notions in his instructions to the reader about how to read his book. The book, memory, and the role of the reader were inseparable in the medieval period, as the reader was expected to commit what she or he read to memory, thereby making the material his or her own. It was thought that two steps allowed one to arrive at a complete, correct reading, the philological level involved in the *lectio*, in which an individual read alone, sometimes out loud, but not for enjoyment or pleasure, and the second step of the *meditatio*, which utilized memory and meditation as the reader was expected to “eat” the text. In the *meditatio*, the text was chewed, digested, and consumed, becoming part of the individual’s own experience and identity (Carruthers 156-88).

If reading was to be moral and useful in medieval society, it had to entail both the quiet study of the *lectio* and the oral meditation of the *meditatio* (Carruthers 184). Readers were expected to retain what they read in the storage bins of memory, which were situated in the head. Remembering or activating one’s memory was accomplished by accessing these storage bins or files with the participation of one’s emotions (174). The modern distinction between that which was read in a book and an individual’s experience was nonexistent in the medieval period (169), and remembering was a sentient activity with profound cultural implications. Reading was not merely a private, isolated act, but also involved the participation of others through collective memory. The plethora of *florilegia* or *compendia* compiled throughout the middle ages and the early modern period attest to the fundamental importance of collective memory. *Florilegia* were promptbooks for the trained memory, compilations that memorialized the “flowers”, the *dicta* and *facta*, that needed to be ordered and preserved in memory (174 and 181)⁴. In order to create all manner of written and oral discourse, medieval people accessed the flowers of memory, the *dicta* and *facta* that constituted public memory, in order to produce verbally and through writing.

In a similar way to these medieval notions about memory and promptbooks, perhaps *El Carnero* is a kind of *florilegia* whose flowers or *casos* have repercussions for the reader’s identity and ethical convictions, as sympathetic to the indigenous plight or as favoring Castile’s legal and providential efforts to bring order to the *Nuevo Reino*. The reader’s decision about what *El Carnero* memorializes will have consequences for the identity of the *Nuevo Reino* and of *El Carnero* itself, both figured as the *doncella-huérfana* undergirded by indefinite origins with an insecure referent. Yet at the same time that books and signs no longer point to the certitude of god behind them, *El Carnero* suggests that in an increasing textually dependent society they are crucial for the survival of memory which constitutes individual and collective identities. In other words, words and texts cannot be discarded easily merely because they are unstable, for they establish and reestablish individual and collective identities. Hence, *El Carnero* may not be cast off or disregarded because it is a disjointed, orphaned child, rather it forms part of a lineage whose origins are ultimately knowable to the reader. Despite

4 For a discussion of the “flowers of reading” trope, see Carruthers, especially 38.

its borrowings from Castilian works such as the Old Testament, Rodríguez Freyle's book has commemorative value and is consumable because it bears relation to colonial memory and society in the *Nuevo Reino*.

Nowhere is this series of questions about the role and value of texts, memory, textuality and orality more pronounced than in the episode about the court constable Juan Roldán, a keen officer who serves under the president, don Lope de Armendáriz (Chapter 13). The story is concerned with two separate events: the first is public and involves the marriage of Inspector Monzón's son, an event that causes the father great discomfort. But Rodríguez Freyle advises the reader that "otra fue la ocasión", seemingly displacing the story's focus onto the second area of development which is private and internal, entailing the plethora of papers that travel to Castile without first proceeding through the authority of the Inspector: the judges obtain "nuevas plazas fuera del riesgo de la visita" (197). The Inspector orders that all documents reach his hands before proceeding on to their final destinations, which causes Armendáriz great consternation. Roldán promises President Armendáriz that he will deliver a document to Cartagenas without the Inspector's henchmen robbing it from him. At this point, the picaresque story of Roldán's robbery and bad luck begins, inverting the usual picaresque model that deals with the lower classes: here, Roldán becomes a *pícaro* for those in authoritative positions. When Roldán is forced to hand over the document to Monzón's men, the inspector discovers Roldán's trick-nothing is written on the paper.

The story is a pretext for the implicit questions in *El Carnero* about the function of texts and the significance of language. One of the most provocative aspects of this "legal case" concerns the paradoxical appearance of nothing, or in formal logic, of the empty set represented by the blank pages that the Inspector "reads". Inspector Monzón inexplicably reads and gains some understanding of this invisible text lacking in grammar and words. The empty pages in this passage are in sharp contrast to the remarkable significance of language, grammar, and rhetoric in conventional scholastic thought. It was widely believed in the medieval period that the *speculum* or glass of the *trivium* (the study of the three language arts, rhetoric, grammar, and logic) represented the only verifiable, epistemological relationship between human beings

and god (Colish 3). Medieval Christians looked to words to lead them to god, believing that these visible signs were like a filter or glass that obscured the path to god, at the same time that they made the encounter with god possible. Rodríguez Freyle's own inclusion in this episode as a grammar student at the Inspector's house underlines the communicative and theological significance of the *trivium* (200).

In the same way that the words (the *speculum* or glass) that instantiate the *trivium* point to god below their surface, Armendáriz's official stamp that marks the outside of Roldán's document is a sign for something else, for something beyond the exterior official mark. But there is nothing inside. The empty set and the disappearance of grammar throw asunder all the reader's expectations about knowledge, text, and meaning because the document speaks in its silence. Just as the narrator points out that refraining from speaking is a sane act ("callar es cordura" 205), the document robbed from Roldán must be considered practical or judicious in its silence. Yet for all its understatedness, it causes a great deal of disruption and commotion, since its supposed vacuousness provokes Inspector Monzón to suspend President Armendáriz, thereby rendering the original document that reaches Cartagena meaningless because of the President's suspension. The pages of the empty set put Roldán into a never-ending limbo and Roldán himself is metaphorically transformed into "una carta vieja" (203), capable of endlessly recounting stories as a way to save his own life, although the activities of story-telling and speaking are supposedly insane.

The most important problem in this episode is that of how to read an empty set, for it is unclear how the enigmatic "nothing" can produce such grave actions as Armendáriz's passionate, insane, and irrational suspension (203). The empty set pertains to the Arabic word *sifr*, which means empty, and which represents zero in the Arabic numerical system (Curtius 345). *Sifr* became *cifra* in early modern Castilian, and it designated the engraving of the widely diffused emblems and imprints of the Spanish Baroque. This engraving was accompanied by the explanatory motto of the *mote* or *letra* (Curtius 346)⁵. The need to explain the engraving by means of the motto suggests either that the engraving signifies nothing on its own, or that its meaning is diffuse and unstable and that it requires a precise explanation. The same process seems to occur

5 The juxtaposition of hieroglyphics and cipher writing was common in Calderón's work and in theological writing (Curtius 346). For examples of this widespread early modern activity, see the *Index Emblematicus* collected by the Italian jurist Andreas Alciatus (1531).

in the episode of the court constable Roldán. The empty set that signifies nothing actually causes such disruption that it requires a precise explanation from Roldán's mouth, which could also be considered insane if one believes Rodríguez Freyle that "callar es cordura". The episode suggests that without grammar and written words, the only recourse is to talk and tell stories orally.

The absence of grammar and rhetoric in this episode are crucial to Rodríguez Freyle's exploration of memory and the book, for it underlines the ensuing lack of memory in the early modern *Nuevo Reino*. In the medieval and early modern periods, numerous metaphors were used to describe memory, such as the wax stamp or the written *tabula*, as a way of explaining how things were memorialized in the head (Carruthers 28 and 33). Each piece of knowledge that one accumulated was recalled from a particular compartment in one's memory. Words used in logic, rhetoric, and mnemonics such as *topos*, *sedes*, and *locus* referred to physical places in the brain that were made accessible by an ordering system that operated in the following way: "...somewhat like a cross between the routing systems used by programs to store, retrieve, merge, and distinguish the information in the computer's 'memory,' and postal addresses or library shelf-marks" (29). Topics offered memory its structure and content: "For whatever memory holds occupies a *topos* or place, by the very nature of what it is, and these *topica*, like bins in a storehouse, have both contents and structure. Every topic is in this sense a mnemonic, a structure of memory and recollecton" (34). In the Roldán episode, the mnemonic instrument, the topic/storehouse/letter/document, contains nothing, or in other words, memory is rendered nonexistent. But, curiously, the story continues, as the empty set or nothing has consequences for Armendáriz, Monzón, and Roldán.

If topics are places to order memory, and if pieces of knowledge or memory can be extracted from these storage bins, what can be picked out of the empty set or from the absence of memory (grammar)? The Roldán scene indicates that the empty pages are still somehow legible, but not in the way the reader expects. The episode is framed by several rhetorical topics popular during the early modern period, including the book of nature and the world as a book (Curtius 319-26; 344). It was believed that the world and nature were to be

read as a book; indeed, medieval Christians thought that secular texts were analogous to God's book because they could potentially reveal god behind them. However, the Roldán episode suggests that nature and the world can no longer be read in this way, that shared and common information between human beings (such as the word and book of god) is now illegible since information is rendered an empty set. Yet Rodríguez Freyle is not so cynical, for Juan Roldán has consumed information, takes it from his memory, and recounts it to the Inspector. But Rodríguez Freyle neglects to tell that part of the story to the reader, so that it remains outside the parameters of the book. Like the loss of the secure referent behind words, the colonial book in the Americas deals with material outside the bounds of God's book. *El Carnero* is not the book of the world because it does not exactly mirror God's book, rather it is part of the world because it is selective in its resistance to the containment of certain events and stories.

El Carnero's selectiveness and limitations serve to underline the uncontainability of orality, as many of the stories and language that escape preestablished confines in *El Carnero* are oral in nature. Not only does the ineffability of orality in the work contradict *El Carnero's* own purpose—to write events down so they will not be forgotten—it also indicates the limited role that orality plays in written culture. Yet by leaving out stories and narratives, Rodríguez Freyle ultimately emphasizes their important repercussions for the events in his book, for what lies outside the confines of *El Carnero* often has tremendous consequences either in favor of or against the legal system. Spoken language and communication are crucial for the advancing of the events in the book, and for *El Carnero's* seeming contention that the law has little to do with daily praxis and life. As Inspector Monzón and Roldán demonstrate, Spaniards in the *Nuevo Reino* do whatever pleases them, as they invent orders, demands, and documents outside the jurisdiction of the official juridical order.

In contrast to contemporaneous intellectuals who believed that law must establish the social order, *El Carnero* indicates that one of the reasons that Castilian jurisprudence fails in the *Nuevo Reino* is due to the erosion of its conventional link to orality⁶. By the early modern period, legal writers (*letrados*) did not consider

6 *El Carnero* places itself against the legal theory of intellectuals such as Juan Huarte de San Juan, who believed that laws ought to teach people what to do, and demonstrate those things that were important (467). Juan Luis Vives thought that legal codes need not accommodate themselves to human beings, but that human beings had to adapt themselves to legal principles: "...que los hombres obedezcan y sirvan a las leyes y a la equidad, que les dan la libertad máxima" (339). Fray Luis de León believed that laws contained objective models for

themselves orators, and they devoted themselves to the task of writing⁷. Despite the loss of the *letrado's* oral duties, the Castilian physician and theorist Juan Huarte de San Juan believed that it was important for readers to retain the *letrado's* writings in their memory, which lay in the head (472). The *letrado's* work comprised the following duties: "debe escribir [sic] las leyes con palabras claras, no equívocas, oscuras, de varios sentidos; sin cifras ni abreviaturas; y tan patentes y manifiestas, que cualquiera que las leyere las pueda fácilmente entender y retenerlas en la memoria" (467). *El Carnero* suggests that the breach between legal theory and daily life is related to the fact that *letrados* are no longer orators, that unlike Roldán they do not tell stories. Castilian law cannot order colonial society because, among other reasons, its unwavering textuality is culturally meaningless: it cannot contain the seeming recalcitrant society in the *Nuevo Reino* because of that region's strong cultivation of and dependence on orality.

The inefficacy of the ordering capacity of Castilian law in the *Nuevo Reino* is further manifested throughout *El Carnero* with the repeated emphasis on the consumption of signs and their meaning or meaninglessness through memory. Gold and coins function this way several times in the work, starting with its first approximately fifty pages, which are devoted to a description of the *indio Dorado*, the treasure of Guatavita, and a series of events about gold as the originating treasure of the conquest. Instead of rapaciously consuming gold like Spaniards will in the future, *El Carnero* shows how the indigenous peoples use it in other ways. For instance, Guatavita's nephew fasts for six days in order to lawfully inherit his uncle's realms (64). Indigenous abstinence and moderation are contrasted to Spanish voraciousness, since these Europeans are described throughout the book as gluttonous consumers of American riches. *El Carnero* suggests that Spaniards do not know how to consume American goods, and it emphasizes the impotence of Castilian legal remedies against those abuses.

Indigenous people ably consume gold, which is evidenced in one of the beginning episodes about the

twenty-day pilgrimage and festival, *el correr la tierra*, between five sacred lagoons (82-85). It is supposed to be a disparaging account of the festivities, which after a great deal of celebration and drunkenness end when indigenous priests and other dignitaries travel to the middle of the fifth lagoon, Guatavita, to offer it gold and all manner of treasure. The description of this ceremony is immediately followed by an account of what the Spaniard Antonio de Sepúlveda did to lake Guatavita in trying to extract gold (85). He emptied it of water and recovered much treasure, but his ensuing efforts failed because the lake was too deep and muddy. Sepúlveda died tired and penniless. The disparaging depiction of indigenous ceremony is ironic and ultimately undermined in the face of Spanish greed.

The consumption of gold in *El Carnero* is intimately connected to the consumption of words and texts in reading, and to memory, a relation the narrator indicates early on: "...que como en lo que dejo escrito traigo en la boca siempre el oro..." (7. 116). He likens his writing to jewels that he carries in his mouth, a clear allusion to the mixed or hybrid written and oral character of reading, writing, and memory. He also suggests that the consumption of gold is like a nutritious food, and that its consumption is analogous to the ingestion of the written text, which also possesses qualities similar to food. With this passage *El Carnero* itself is proposed as authentic American riches and wealth, like the treasure of memory that Rodríguez Freyle employs to recount the *casos*, and like the golden words from the narrator's mouth that comprise the text.

El Carnero is a storehouse for memory, providing protection for the jewels, gold and flowers of texts that its narrator carries in his mouth, and that go into composing the book itself. Consuming *El Carnero* and making it the reader's own shall give him or her access to collective memory. Rodríguez Freyle posits *El Carnero* as trained memory, not as an aberrant or stray work, but as one that forms part of a lineage of texts and that constitutes a link in the chain of memory. Rodríguez Freyle suggests that *El Carnero* as trained memory and as a storehouse is what makes it compelling. In the same way that trained memory was traditionally

(Continuación nota 6)

the ethical organization of the world (Kottman 107 and 111). The gap illustrated in *El Carnero* between laws and their application is further manifested in the contrast of the ethical and practical social ordering of Castilian jurisprudence and the focus of Latin American indigenous law, which was indifferent to compelling different regions to conform to a singular judicial system: "...ni siquiera se intenta regular la vida jurídica *privada* de aquellos territorios con arreglo a un sistema peculiar, distinto del elaborado en las leyes de Castilla" (Ots y Capdequí 311).

7 See editor's notes in Huarte de San Juan: 435, 15n.

figured as a storehouse and a treasure-chest "into which the jewels, coins, fruits, and flowers of texts [were] placed" (Carruthers 246), the narrator who bears gold in his mouth fashions *El Carnero* a vessel for those treasures.

But *El Carnero* is also a receptacle for what it recognizes as duplicity, randomness, and disorder. At the same time that the work suggests its own characterization as an archive of ordered, collective memory, albeit of a hybrid variety, it repeatedly remits to the numerous signs that appear arbitrarily, such as posters and coins, which constitute elements that invade and disrupt the social order, and the arrangement of collective memory. In Chapter Eleven, for instance, the episode of the false coin follows the case of the anonymous announcements (*libelos*) mysteriously pasted to doors and buildings against the Royal Court (170 and 174). Both episodes propose a series of questions and problems with respect to money, memory, the text, and consumption. The poster case emphasizes the wrongful detention of a man who had supposedly put up the announcements, and the same thing occurs with the false coin. The shop owner Juan Díaz is detained as the minter of false coins, but his detention does not solve the mystery of the minted coins. The gold coins (*tejuelos de oro*) deceive by their mark or sign and in this way their "reading" according to their exterior markings hides and falsifies their true value. The weight of the coins does not correspond to their external attributes, and moreover, "no tiene[n] ley" (176). Their false weight underscores the problem of the fabrication of a product outside the control of official and ostensibly hegemonic institutions. It also underlines the difficulties involved in the interpretation of signs. Juan Díaz is castigated by whipping, and the coins are recovered and *consumed* by the authorities. But the problem of the false coin is not resolved because some of Díaz' relatives had learned to falsify them. The confiscation of the coin does not assure its appropriate and even lawful treatment, for just as the royal and lawful coin is employed or consumed by the public, so does the false one continue to be used in transactions.

Although the false coin cannot be controlled, its identification makes it part of collective memory because it is included in *El Carnero*. Rodríguez Freyle tries to show that even arbitrary or "false" signs are important for the cultivation of memory, for he suggests that the recognition of duplicitous signs allows readers and viewers to identify stable ones. The

episode indicates that in order to identify deception or falseness in coins, texts, and life, one also must be able to recognize truth and goodness. Like readers who ingest different words and texts in order to differentiate between them and to locate god, the public must "ingest" coins of different value to distinguish between true and false ones. Despite the efforts to control (*aguilatar*) gold, the false coin persists in reappearing and the narrator motions to the reader of signs as having the responsibility to recognize the value of gold: "He advertido esto [the persistence of the false coin] para que, si algún tiempo volviere esta moneda, se prevenga el daño" (178).

This episode demonstrates *El Carnero*'s preoccupation with the indeterminacy of reading signs, especially those that appear in an arbitrary way. Like Castilian legal codes, random signs such as the coins and the *libelos* do not belong to a sign system or chain of signification that automatically renders them meaningful in the *Nuevo Reino*. But they are necessary because when they are contrasted to signs that are culturally valuable, individuals are able to distinguish the rectitude of good signs from the corruption of bad ones. But it is the duplicity of signs, the difficulty in determining good and bad signs that Rodríguez Freyle focuses on throughout *El Carnero*, implicitly asking readers what happens when the security of the direct connection between signifier and signified is thrown asunder.

What are the cultural repercussions when a reader cannot judge the value of good and bad signs? The stamp on the pages does not signify what it should in the case of the court constable Juan Roldán, and the disjointed relation between the stamp and the empty set provoke a series of political dismissals. Other ruptures include Roldán's refusal to eat, perhaps because he knows there is nothing to consume (199). The Inspector sits down to eat the pages and his food only to find that his consumption is of nothing, or the empty set (200). Curiously the uncovering of the empty set and the disjuncture between signifier and signified do not even seem to be part of the legal *pleito*, since Roldán announces the end of the case after he is accosted by the Inspector's henchmen: "Pues con eso se habrá acabado el pleito" (199). The story that follows that statement has no base in the *caso* that Rodríguez Freyle supposedly recounts. *El Carnero* extends beyond the parameters of the *pleito*, making it analogous to the empty set with the stamp or sign that does not correspond to its contents. Like the mark on the gold coin that does not relate to its

value and weight, the stories told in *El Carnero* extend beyond the point where they are supposed to end. It is not that signs do not have meaning, but rather that, like the mark and the stamp, they signify something beyond their visible, exterior manifestations, that is, intangible networks and chains that escape the control of the authorities who try to rule the social order.

El Carnero's force lies in its recognition of these ineffable chains and networks that defy the book's containment. After page 192, Chapter Twelve, the narrator says several times that the cases are narrated not so they should be imitated, but as an example: "...no para imitarlos, sino para ejemplo" (193). But the nature of their exemplarity is unclear, since the reader must decide whether they support the providential nature of the conquest, or whether they criticize its abuses. Rodríguez Freyle tries to show that they may achieve both results, and that one interpretation depends upon the other. Because the events of the *casos* ostensibly may be interpreted in a variety of ways, the truth about the events in the *Nuevo Reino* are left up to the reader's judgement. Rodríguez Freyle does not assert a relativist explication of the truth about the conquest, but instead he relies on conventional beliefs about interpretation and individual identity stemming from medieval exegesis: the "flowers" that his readers choose in *El Carnero* will reveal their own character and identity, as well as the features of the *Nuevo Reino*.

The ability to determine the value of signs was much at issue in colonial Latin America. Its repercussions could even be a matter of life and death, as evidenced in a passage from a seventeenth-century sermon by Father Luis Frías, given the first Friday of Lent in 1614:

Dijo el padre Frías que era mayor pecado dar un bofetón a un moreno que a un Cristo, y volviendo a repetir esta razón, dijo y volvió a decir que era mayor pecado dar un bofetón a un moreno por ser éste hechura e imagen viva de Dios, que no a aquel Cristo, señalando con la mano el Santo Cristo que está a la derecha del Altar Mayor, porque dar un bofetón a un negro es dárselo a una imagen viva de Dios y dárselo a un Cristo es a un pedazo de palo o de madera, imagen muerta que tan sólo significa lo que es. (Rupert de Ventós 57).

The ability to differentiate between the worth of inanimate materials and human beings is at the center of *El Carnero*, for readers learn how to do so by activating memory. The traditional ethics of reading and interpretation require viewers and readers to order and choose the flowers of memory in a correct manner to approach God's truth. Seeing the way to that truth

beyond the *speculum* or glass of the worldly book and sign can only be carried out when the flowers or treasures of memory are in order. To determine that path through a wood statue of Christ over God's living image of a human being is, according to Father Frías, to choose the wrong road to the truth. In a similar way, to interpret Rodríguez Freyle's stories as favorable to Spanish acts in the *Nuevo Reino* may be to likewise select the erroneous path to the truth, a determination that Rodríguez Freyle ultimately leaves to the reader.

The political repercussions of reading and interpretation are intimately linked to the identity of the reader in *El Carnero*. In this way the book's value far extends its pretense as a mere archive or treasure chest of memory, for it is the memory that it contains and protects that has the greatest worth, whether it be the memory of god, the memory of an indigenous past, or both. And once again, the reader's opinion about the nature of the memory stored there will have personal and political repercussions. Yet if readers are certain about Rodríguez Freyle's supposed elevation of his book as a precious archive of memory, they only need to contrast that belief to Father Frías's conviction about inanimate objects. It may be that books are like the wood statue of Christ, dead images that only signify what they are and that must be considered less important than God's living images that are human beings. Like Father Frías's sermon, *El Carnero* repeatedly suggests that while the origins and cultural worth of texts and signs are crucial to cultural and individual identity, they are always superseded by the value of human life.

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