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Antonio Pérez-Romero
John Carroll University, aperezromero@jcu.edu

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THE CARAJICOMEDIA: THE EROTIC URGE AND
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF IDEALIST LANGUAGE
IN THE SPANISH RENAISSANCE

ANTONIO PÉREZ-ROMERO
John Carroll University



IN 1511 Hernando del Castillo, a Castilian working in Valencia in the service of the Count of Oliva, published what has become the famous *Cancionero General*. This large collection of poems, gathered by Castillo over twenty years, was arranged into nine sections, the last being a collection of burlesque poems called *Obras de burlas provocantes a risas*. The final section was republished separately in Valencia in 1519, with the addition of a new work entitled *Carajicomedia*. It was the first and the last time that the *Carajicomedia* saw the printing press in over three hundred years, until Luis Usóz y Ríos found the only known copy of the 1519 edition at the British Museum and published it in 1840–1843 (*Cancionero de Obras de Burlas Provocantes a Risa*). However, the Usóz edition was very limited and it too became very rare; for all purposes we could say that the *Carajicomedia*, which first saw light in 1519, was not made available again until 1974 (Pablo Jauralde Pou and Juan Alfredo Bellón Cazabán). José María Díez Borque included it in his 1977 work on Spanish erotic poetry, and three more editions of the work have since appeared, edited by Frank Domínguez (1978), Carlos Varo (1981), and Álvaro Alonso (1995). The rarity of the work is reflected in the scarcity of

assessments and interpretations—very little has been written about the *Carajicomedia*.¹

Usoz, who found the work in London, was a Spaniard who had become a Quaker and published other works by writers whom he considered Spanish religious reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He disliked the Catholic hierarchy and the Catholic faith intensely, and felt a Protestant Reformation would have cured the evils of the nation—evils that he believed were still alive and well in his lifetime. It was the elites, he maintained, who were the cause of the corruption and the vices of Spaniards; Spain was not the country of the mystical religion propounded by established propaganda, but the country of the obscenities that the *Carajicomedia* presented. He believed that the book had been written by a priest. While Usoz was a liberal who defended the bourgeois freedoms and rights—things he did not see in Spain—he was also a nineteenth-century Puritan who condemned all that he thought the *Carajicomedia* stood for. He apparently saw nothing particularly revolutionary in the work—he seems rather to have published it as an example of the general depravity of the time, modestly abbreviating the “obscene” word in the title and every subsequent reference to *Carajo* (penis) to “C——.” Today we can view the work free of Usoz’s personal opinions. The *Carajicomedia* is more than an erotic or obscene work; it is carefree, playful, burlesque, and above all meant to mock and corrode official idealism and its language.

Several modern readers do not see these subversive elements, although some of them do offer interesting observations. To Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino (*Cancionero General* 1958), for example, it seems inconceivable that a work such as *Carajicomedia* could have been published in the early sixteenth century; he calls it merely an ob-

¹ Alfonso Canales (1976) has one of the very few articles on *Carajicomedia*, but focuses on the burlesque elements, and adds nothing to the ideological understanding of the work. The same is true, from my perspective, of “Judíos y conversos en el *Cancionero de obras provocantes a burlas*” by Juan Alfredo Bellón (1983), whose main interest is to highlight the anti-semitism of the *Cancionero de burlas*. Álvaro Alonso’s short introduction to the 1995 edition of *Carajicomedia* is of very little use from the ideological standpoint—he has not incorporated, or acknowledged as valid, Carlos Varo’s groundbreaking ideas that I shall comment on briefly. Álvaro Alonso does not perceive the religious subversion of the work, and persists in considering it an erotic and crude sexual work, or a work about prostitution.

scene book, and notes that it was never included in the subsequent editions of the *Cancionero General*. Pablo Jauralde Pou and Juan Alfredo Bellón Cazabán suggest that the *Obras de burlas* section that once contained it offers us a picture of fifteenth-century social conflicts, still simmering in the early sixteenth century. José María Díez Borque writes that the poems in his anthology (which includes the *Carajicomedia*) celebrate the raw pleasure of sex devoid of all guilt, and Frank Domínguez states that the poetry in the *Obras de burlas* is full of vitality, expressed in a language completely opposed to the conventional one. For him the *Carajicomedia* is also misogynist, as it portrays women as ugly and carnal and as desiring nothing more from men than their sexual services. However, I maintain that the *Carajicomedia* may take the opposite side, and may actually convey feminist attitudes: the women discard official male idealism in all its forms. Alonso, whose introduction precedes the work's latest edition, concludes that the *Carajicomedia* is an erotic, crude, sexual work, devoid of social and political comment.

In general, most of what has been written recently is too brief and general to offer any depth; only the conclusions reached by Carlos Varo in 1981 can help us to grasp the subversiveness of the book and its connection to the political and cultural context of the era. For Varo, the work has been ignored, denigrated, and dismissed as lacking in worthwhile social or aesthetic values, but in it he finds hidden keys and masked objectives. He explains that the *Carajicomedia* parodies the ideology and style of Juan de Mena in his work *Laberinto de Fortuna*, and opposes these. Whereas Mena advocates moral strictness, the *Carajicomedia*'s anonymous author proposes moral laxity and the pleasure of sex and living. While I agree that the work is an extraordinary one, I do not believe that those keys and objectives are hidden or masked. Instead, I think this document is extremely clear in word and purpose, and that it attests to a very significant variety of subversion in the period under consideration.

Varo lists three main points in which the work contests the official world: first, the conscious desire to enjoy sex; second, the condemnation of ecclesiastics, who abandon themselves to the vices and sins they preach against; and third, the refusal to conform to Queen Isabella's political centralism and traditional values. But Varo does not elaborate on these interesting points. He also maintains that the work attacks the clerics but not the Church's beliefs. I disagree: the evidence that Varo presents argues more convincingly against

this assertion. I will try to show that while the *Carajicomedia* does not condemn any dogma directly, the worldview it presents clashes blatantly with official religious ideology. While Varo's study is important for its identification of the subversive political nature of *Carajicomedia*, it provides no detailed and systematic analysis of the work, or any details of the world that the *Carajicomedia* is supposed to oppose. Above all, as I will discuss below, it does not consider two main subversions I have identified in the text.

Carajicomedia

The anonymous *Carajicomedia* is a powerful, early sixteenth-century antidote to the staid official world and its idealist language and literature. We will compare this work to the *Laberinto de Fortuna* (1444) by the fifteenth-century writer Juan de Mena (1411–1456), who represents the world of the elites.² In this extraordinary cultural text we hear the unrestrained voices of the oppressed and powerless—and all others who opposed the culture of doom and gloom imposed by the elites. The latter have time, money, and power to waste in lofty language and principles; in their overwhelming material satisfaction, they seek out dreamy supernatural realms, where they plan to continue with their material satisfaction after leaving Earth. Their idealism, the result of material sufficiency, is irrelevant to the lower classes, who fight for daily survival and seek to overcome their alienation. Through parodic and profane language, the *Carajicomedia* destroys two vital beliefs: the focus on the after-life, and the idealization of society and culture. These, I believe, are very powerfully evident in Juan de Mena's *Laberinto de Fortuna*, the work that the *Carajicomedia* parodies. Elite culture and its supporters speak and write of great moral, religious, and cultural ideals, but follow material objectives. They subject ordinary people to miserable austerity in this world, offering the airy promise—if they have behaved—of enjoyment in the next. But the burlesque author violently peels off the masters' mask of respectability as they plunder and hoard material assets and establish their social, economic, and political control.

² Juan de Mena was born in Córdoba and studied in Salamanca and Rome. He worked for Juan II, King of Castile, as an official chronicler and Latin secretary. His style is overblown and highly erudite.

The work is very open in its criticism and opposition; from the very beginning—in the prologue—there is blatant subversion of the system. The anonymous author claims that the book's writer is a friar—the Reverend Father Bugeo Montesino (1981 edition 147). This name is a deformation of Ambrosio Montesino, a prominent religious writer of the time. We are told that Father Montesino will imitate the exalted language of the very famous poet Juan de Mena; but this language is immediately defiled when we learn that the work is addressed to the penis of the noble knight Diego Fajardo. The author uses the Spanish word *carajo* which is, to this day, a vulgar term for penis, and is present in the title of the work *Carajicomedia—Comedy of the Penis*:

Síguese una especulativa obra intitulada “Carajicomedia”, compuesta por el Reverendo Padre Fray Bugeo Montesino, ymitando el alto estilo de las “Trezientas” del famosísimo poeta Juan de Mena. Dirigida al muy antiguo carajo del noble cavallero Diego Fajardo, que en nuestros tiempos en gran luxuria floreció en la ciudad de Guadalajara, por cuyo fin sus lastimados cojones fueron llevados y trasladados en la Romana ciudad, cuya vida y martirio la presente obra recuenta. (*Carajicomedia* 147–48)

Nothing could be further from Mena's exalted and idealist usage of language and literature than this ironic and corrosive language. From the perspective of official ideology, the concepts and vocabulary of the *Carajicomedia* are the epitome of vulgarity and baseness. At the same time, this work is a mocking and contemptuous send-up of the many obsequious works that authors dedicated to members of the elites. It makes fun of the virtues and great deeds lauded in the dedications of such works, and parodies Mena's dedication. What could be more vulgar than dedicating the work to Don Diego Fajardo's penis? Father Montesino's dedication also subverts a pillar of the official order—its religion. It mocks the lives of the saints, as well as Rome, the Holy See of the Church.

This poet starts his parody of language when he writes that the noble organ “en gran luxuria floreció”—flowered in great lechery. In this context, the verb *florece* has a connotation of high principle and describes the acts of people of great moral or intellectual strength; it appeared frequently in descriptions of the great virtues in the traditional lives of saints (*Diccionario de Autoridades* II 768). The mockery of lofty language and religion continues when he says that Don

Diego's injured testicles (*cojones*) were taken to the city of Rome; the life and martyrdom of those injured testicles—like holy relics—further parodies hagiography. Father Montesino, our distinguished author, tells us that it is a pious and contemplative work of humor (*Carajicomedia* 148). The impiety of that statement is obvious; the subversive populace and other opponents of the system, through the satirist's pen, are telling the dominant classes that their tricks and stratagems are transparent and risible, and that they can no longer trust them. The elites preach high moral principles but do not follow them. They denigrate this earthly world, while indulging in the pleasures of temporal wealth and power.

In his work, Father Montesino methodically parodies the individual stanzas of Mena's poem, and the *Carajicomedia*'s corresponding stanzas become what we can call "counter-stanzas." For example, in the first stanza of *Laberinto de Fortuna*, Mena exalts King Juan II of Castile with grandiloquence: the King is powerful; a virtuous new Caesar. Before him all must bend the knee:

Al muy prepotente don Juan el segundo,
 aquél con quien Júpiter tuvo tal zelo
 que tanta de parte le fizo del mundo
 quanta a sí mesmo se fizo del çielo;
 al grand rey d'España, al Çésar novelo,
 al que con Fortuna es bien fortunado,
 aquél en quien caben virtud e reinado,
 a él, la rodilla fincada por suelo.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 57)

In the *Carajicomedia*'s first counter-stanza, Father Montesino calls Don Diego's penis *impotente* (powerless, impotent), a clever mimicry of *prepotente* (omnipotent). He continues, matching Mena's meter and rhyme line for line. The person whose organ had delighted so many *coños* (*coño* is the Spanish vulgar form for the female sexual organ) that it is now incapable of "raising its head to heaven" (having an erection):

Al muy impotente carajo profundo
 de Diego Fajardo, de todos ahuelo,
 que tanta de parte se ha dado de mundo
 que ha quarenta años que no mira al cielo;
 aquel que con coños tuvo tal zelo
 quanto ellos d'él tienen agora desgrado,

aquel qu'está siempre cabeça abaxado
que nunca levanta su ojo del suelo.

(*Carajicomedia* 150)

In his commentary on the stanza, Father Montesino mocks both the unrestrained praise for the monarch in Mena's first stanza and the mighty and virtuous deeds of the saints as recorded in the *Vitae Patrum*. Instead, he tells us, we can read the great deeds of Don Diego Fajardo in the *Putas Patrum* (*Putas*, whore). Fajardo, we learn, had great devotion to Venus; like the saints he left the "vanities of this world." Then he went from whore to whore:

... Y para esto es de saber que este Diego Fajardo fue un cavallero de Guadajara, de noble linaje, en cuyo nacimiento crueles señales mostraron su vida.

Del qual afirma una gran puta vieja que oy en la dicha cibdad reside, que fue su partera, que nació la lengua sacada y regañado y arrecho. Assí mismo se lee de su vida en el "Putas Patrum" que, desde doze o treze años, tomó tanta devoción con Venus que, dexadas las obras militares y vanidades d'este mundo, las más noches andava desatacado de puta en puta. (*Carajicomedia* 150–51)

This obscenity, blasphemy, and mockery indicate a very clear contempt for the king—the highest representative of elite society—whom Mena had praised so effusively. Furthermore, Father Montesino voices total disrespect for the most sacred beliefs of religion. As with Christ and other prominent holy figures, auspicious phenomena announced the birth of Don Diego Fajardo. An old whore who lived in the city bears witness to the miraculous birth of Don Diego—sexually aroused—as a portent of things to come. After a life of sexual prowess, he became old and impotent; when he knew he was going to die he called together a lot of *coños* and "preached" to them, but they all laughed. However, before the penis expired, Don Diego admonished others to take his *carajo* to the Coliseum at Rome. Grabbing his testicles and making the sign of the cross, Don Diego's prodigious organ expired. Father Montesino composed the *Carajicomedia* in memory of Don Diego and modeled his work on the treatises that clerics crafted to eulogize holy figures. Such chronicles described how their subjects had lived in this world, generally displaying hatred for it as they expressed eagerness for the next. The *Carajicomedia* inverts the model, exalting the great fun that the

penis had in this world, while rejecting the official religious optimism for a better afterlife.

A brief look at the work confirms the use of this model, as Father Montesino recounts his subject's progress and decline. In stanza III Don Diego asks Lust (elevated here to the level of deity) to recover his lost potency—as all the *coños* in the world now greet him with derision:

O tu, Luxuria me sey favorable,
dándome alas de ser muy furioso.
Y tú no consentas tal caso injurioso,
en este tan tuyo y tan amigable,
qu'estoy tan perdido, irrecuperable,
que ya no s'espera de mí más simiente;
soy aborrecido de toda la gente,
que no ay en el mundo coño que me hable.

(*Carajicomedia* 153)

As in all the other counter-stanzas, the *Carajicomedia's* author deals with the basest, most carnal eroticism in irreverent and vulgar language. The mocking irreverence continues in stanza IV with an outrageous comparison of the great deeds of Don Diego's penis to the great feats and virtues of El Cid, the national hero of official Spain. In stanza V Don Diego again asks Lust to restore his potency, parodying Mena's stanza VI, in which the poet appeals to the immortal Apollo for strength and inspiration (*Laberinto de Fortuna* 60). In stanzas VII and VIII the *carajo* appeals to a more worldly source for help—he asks an old whore to restore his sexual power, “to make the veins of the virile instrument to lengthen, to thicken,” and has his owner, Don Diego, tell the old whore how unpleasant it is to be sodomized. Pathetically, in stanzas IX and X, Don Diego pleads with the whore to help him avenge those *coños* who mock him (*Carajicomedia* 156–57).

In stanza number XI, Father Montesino relates Don Diego's comparison of his aged penis with that of a young man. In his commentary to the stanza, he describes this as a beautiful comparison that offers lessons for contemplative people:

Como carajo que va en el poniente,
si halla algún coño que no sufre punta,
se dobla, se buelve, porque barrunta
su fuerça allí no ser suficiente;

empero el carajo del barviponiente,
si sus cojones el culo sintieron,
nunca descansa, hasta que vieron
el coño rompido, qu'está paciente.

Esta es una hermosa comparación, y van en ella muy devotos entendimientos para personas contemplativas. (*Carajicomedia* 158)

The language could not be more irreverent, impious, and iconoclastic. That which official culture would condemn as coarse, obscene, and ungodly, Father Montesino treats as transcendent. This trivialization of language mocks official ideology relentlessly, subverting the other-worldly ideology that debases natural human activities, especially those involving sex. Countering this denial of life and of sexuality, Father Montesino proposes an alternative ethos that brazenly exalts human eroticism in the broadest possible way.

The contrast of language is supremely significant. Mena's grandiloquent phrases, typical currency of the elites, hide reality and clash violently with the language of the *Carajicomedia*, which is brutally realistic and hides absolutely nothing. Mena's poem in the pompous and artificial tongue of officialdom is alienating because it does not express the desires and practices of the common people, of women, and of other non-elite groups. Rather, it is lost in a world that the majority neither understands nor shares. Mena's is a completely aesthetic and literary idiom, alien to most people. Confronted with his language, fed to them by church and state, ordinary people, whose collective voice we hear in this document, respond with the realism of their culture.

Stanza XIII shows their disdain for elite culture, and the ridicule to which they dare subject it:

No bien formadas mis bozes serían,
quando muy brava senty mi pixoná,
y luego me lleva la vieja matrona
a mil trincaderos que putas tenían;
y quando las nalgas no bien remecían,
feríalas ésta con duro flagelo,
tanto que andavan tan altas del suelo,
que nunca caderas en tierra ponían.

(*Carajicomedia* 159)

The effect is clear when compared to its model, Mena's stanza XIII:

Non bien formadas mis bozes serían
 quando robada sentí mi persona,
 e llena de furia la madre Belona
 me tomó en su carro que dragos traían,
 e quando las alas non bien remecían
 feríalos ésta con duro flagello,
 tanto que fizo fazerles tal buelo
 que presto me dexan adonde querían.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 63–64)

The parody is perfect. Mena deals with Belona, goddess of war, who comes in her chariot to take the hero with her; the *Carajicomedia* answers with a description of the hardening of Don Diego's penis: his *pixa* (another popular word for penis) becomes a *pixonona* (a large one). The ridicule is achieved through ingenious word play to match the rhyme. While Mena's hero is transported to the world of the gods, the *Carajicomedia*'s author is rooted in the earth, describing Don Diego's arousal. The very graphic language manifests a ferocious realism, the antidote to official language with its inherent principles.

Stanzas xiv to xx chronicle the sexual adventures and exploits of Diego Fajardo; these parallel Mena's stanzas (*Laberinto de Fortuna* 64–67), which recall mythological exploits of the Greek gods and ancient heroes, far beyond the reach of the common person:

Estando yo allí con aqueste desseo,
 abaxa una nube muy grande, oscura,
 el aire foscando con mucha espesura,
 me çiega e me ciñe que nada non veo;
 e ya me temía, fallándome reo,
 non me aconteçiesse como a Polifemo,
 que desque çiego en la gruta de Leno
 ovo lugar el engaño ulixeo.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 66)

The *Carajicomedia*, on the other hand, is so down-to-earth that its carnal objectives are within the grasp of all:

Estando yo assí con mucho desseo,
 de verme en sazón de darles holgura,
 sentí mi carajo hazerse blandura
 delante los coños, que triste me veo.
 No puedo creer, ni pienso, ni creo
 poder más bivar, según me apostemo

de ver mi carajo tan puesto en extremo,
que no m'aprovecha flotar su rodeo.

(*Carajicomedia* 161)

The *Carajicomedia*'s author follows the structure set by Mena and uses many of the same words. The difference is that where Mena uses them to idealize, the *Carajicomedia*'s writer uses them to debunk. In stanza xx of *Carajicomedia*, Father Montesino talks about the whore who cured his impotence, a woman called María de Vellasco, or Celestina:

Luego resurgen muy malas hedores,
y viene una vieja muy seca y enxuta,
en darme remedio muy sabia y astuta,
que luego potencia me muestra favores.
He más de cien años, y finge dolores
diziendo que pare, no siendo tal cosa;
ate su gesto es loco quien osa
otras maldades nombrar por peores. (162)

Mena's equivalent stanza is strikingly different, with its extreme idealistic tone:

Luego resurgen tamaños clarores
que fieren la nube dexándola enxuta,
en partes pequeñas así resoluta
que toda la fazen bolar en vapores;
e resta en el medio, cubierta de flores,
una donzella tan mucho fermosa
que antes su gesto es loco quien osa
otras beldades loar de mayores.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 67)

The *Carajicomedia* author makes a profane and blasphemous comment about this woman in Latin and Spanish in his commentary to the stanza: "Inter natos mulierum non surrexit major puta vieja que María la Buyça"—among those born of women none was a greater old whore than María la Buyça. This is a corruption of the words that Jesus used to praise John the Baptist in the Gospel of Matthew: "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). Stanza XXI continues the mocking; in fact, both poems use the same first line: "Later it was restored." And the word-for-word parallel appears again in the fourth line of the verse, the only difference being that the

Carajicomedia's earth-bound writer makes clear precisely which part was lost and then gained back. Not for him the transcendental world of the gods! His restoration is human and carnal:

Luego del todo fue restituyda
mi antigua potencia, que perdida era,
y por la venida de tal compañera
se cobro mi pixa, qu'estava perdida.
Esta por tal ha sido escogida,
que, con la maldad de su falso gesto,
hiziera a Virgilio el engaño del cesto,
pues otros mayores ha hecho en su vida.

(*Carajicomedia* 163)

Luego del todo ya restituida
ovieron mis ojos su virtud primera,
ca por la venida del tal mensajera
se cobró la parte qu'estava perdida;
e puesto que fuesse así descogida,
más provocava a bueno e honesto
la gravedad de su claro gesto
que non por amores ser requerida.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 67)

Devoid of inhibition, counter-stanzas xxii to xxxiii continue the story of Don Diego's encounter with the old whore who had restored his potency, with the same cruel mockery of everything that Mena represents. One stanza in that sequence (xxviii) is accompanied by an extremely interesting commentary which tells the story of a cowboy, Satilario, who sodomizes a demon (in the form of a young man). Satilario enjoys the encounter immensely, and manages to outwit the demon who sought to lead him to damnation:

Deste Satilario se lee en el "Tripas Patrum" ser un rústico vaquero, llamado Satilario por ser gran saltador, el qual, estando un día en un peñascal con grande dolor de la yngres, tendidas las espaldas en tierra y untándose el vientre y yjadas con manteca, con la flotación de la mano y calor del sol alçósele la verga. Y estando en esto, fue caso que un diablo que passava por allí a tentar un santo hermitaño, mirando desde una peña el camino que avía de llevar, vido debaxo de la peña Satilario, de la manera que avedes oydo; de lo qual muy gozoso dixo: "Aquel vellaco villano está agora encendido en luxuria; yo le saltaré en el vientre, y le rebantaré y llevaré su ánima". Y dicho esto, dio un gran salto sobre el pecador vaquero que bien descuydado estava. Y acertándole con los pies

en el ombligo, resvaláronse, y fuesse deslizando hasta que se hincó el miembro de Satilario por el culo. Lo qual sintiendo Satilario, le apretó y tuvo firme, llamando a bozes sus perros. Lo qual viendo el diablo, y mirando su desastrado caso, y sintiendo venir los perros ladrando, començó a dar grandes voces, diciendo: "Satilario, suelta". El qual, teniédole rezio, con feroz boz respondió: "Nunca, si el carajo no quiebra". Y assí le tuvo hasta le remojar. (*Carajicomedia* 167)

We see again the shamelessness, the free and easy manner with which the author deals with a scandalous subject. What the author wants to emphasize—as the voice of the people—is that they enjoy fully all forms of sexual relations, including homosexuality. Sodomy was punished by death at the time; and Mena, in one of his stanzas, condemns it sharply, as he does all the sexual freedoms praised by his shadowy counterpart:

Eran adúlteros e fornicarios,
e otros notados de incestuosos,
e muchos que juntan tales crimosos
e llevan por ello los viles salarios,
e los que en efectos así voluntarios
su vida deleitan en vano pecando,
e los maculados del crimen nefando,
de justa razón e de toda contrarios.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 111)

In the comparison of Mena's work and the *Carajicomedia's* parody of it, perhaps the most striking effect is the confrontation of the ethereal, idealizing, and alienating world of Mena with the real, tangible, and visible world in which ordinary people live.

Stanzas xxxiii to the end recount the adventures of Don Diego's *carajo* with an assortment of characters. Among these is a woman named Francisca de Laguna from the city of Segovia, and the parody of Mena's erudite stanza is biting and merciless. In stanza xxxiv, Mena writes of the five zones of the earth, and the strange beasts and people, monsters, and true and feigned shapes that Fortune encounters:

De allí se veía el espérico çentro,
e las çinco zonas, con todo el austral,
brumal, aquilón, e la equinoçial,
con la que solsticia contiene de dentro.
Vi más contra mí venir al encuentro

bestias e gentes d'estrañas maneras,
 mostruos e formas fengidas e veras,
 quando delante la casa más entro.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 73–74)

Father Montesino, on the other hand, in his counter-stanza, brings those zones down to earth and lasciviously gives them sexual equivalents as women's organs. Those *coños* come to encounter Don Diego's *carajo*, and he tells us he would have more stories to tell if he penetrated them:

De allí se veyá el espérico centro
 De Rabo d'Azero, con todo su austral,
 la Napolitana, con su aquilonal,
 y quanto sus coños encierran de dentro.
 Y vi contra mí venir al encuentro
 a la Rosales, con otras ramerás,
 y otro conclave de muchas caseras,
 que avrá que contar, si por ellas entro.

(*Carajicomedia* 170)

Striking even today is the casual discussion of sex and sexual adventures and, above all, the complete absence of guilt. Guilt was one of officialdom's main tools for tormenting the people's consciousness if and when they enjoyed sexuality and worldly pleasures, thereby controlling and exploiting them more effectively. The *Carajicomedia* shows us a universe where that tool is totally disabled by the subversion of the common people.

It is curious, but not coincidental, that the *Carajicomedia* features seven whores, all named Isabel. All these women are remarkably the same, and Carlos Varo (1981) suggests that they all symbolize Queen Isabella of Castile, whose appetite for power could not be satiated. The modern editor believes that the *Carajicomedia* has very strong hidden political undertones against Queen Isabella, that, he says, have not been noticed before. While his interpretation suggests that he sees the work as an anti-feminist tract, I argue that it is, in fact, the opposite. Calling seven whores Isabella may direct disrespect at the monarch, but it surely acknowledges the remarkable power and influence that that queen possessed and her potential as a model for feminist ambition fulfilled. Thus one could argue that the queen must be condemned—not because she is a woman, but because she is the supreme ruler, and the main pillar of the system he is attacking.

The sexual prowess with which the anonymous satirist endows these Isabels is not meant to defame them—he should not be seen as a misogynist. The presence of the “whores” highlights women’s subversion of a system in which, perhaps, only whores would be permitted to acknowledge some degree of pleasure in sexuality (certainly not the “decent” majority!) and of an intolerant other-worldly ideology. Their desire to live and to experience and enjoy all aspects of humanity, including those normally forbidden, is so powerful that even when old, decrepit, and unable to perform, these women will not abandon their desires:

Cerca de Eufrates vi las moabitas,
beatas y monjas, que algunas avía
que saben caldeo y aun astronomía,
y tantas de artes, que son infinitas.
Vi otras putas, a quien, vejez, quitas
color, hermosura, y das disfavores,
más no los desseos, ni ajenas colores.
Perdona mi mano si no son escritas.

(*Carajicomedia* 173)

Of one prostitute, Father Montesino tells us that she “is retired, but not in her desires” (179). Of another, he portrays her desires as so insatiable, that after 70 years of giving herself to sex, she wore a sign on her head, saying that she wanted sex until she died, and even that would not be enough (180).

Although the writer pokes fun at pompous language to trash the system, he also uses it humorously to sing the praises of the world, and ironically, to dignify all that is sexual and “vulgar.” The two following stanzas demonstrate his use of cultured words and names to glorify the base and mundane. They also show how effectively he duplicates and relentlessly mocks the rhyme, meter, and ideas of Mena’s model:

Buscando una puta mis ojos cansados,
topé con aquella que Grazia dixeron,
cuyos ojos jamás no se vieron
onestos, seguros, ni bien sosegados;
y los sus carrillos tanto llorados,
alegres, risueños, los vemos en pronto.
¡O puta taymada, sallida d’Esponto,
do sastres y abades son bien regalados!

(*Carajicomedia* 177)

En la menor Asia mis ojos tornados
 vieron aquella Gracia, do fueron
 las gentes que al rey Bitinio vinieron,
 dando socorros bien galardonados;
 los campos de Frigia tanto llorados,
 Aicaria e Isauria vimo en pronto,
 Lidia, Panflia e tierra de Ponto,
 do Naso e Clemente fueron relegados.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 78–79)

In the commentary to the *Carajicomedia* counter-stanza—itself a parody of prissy academic style—our Father Montesino calls the whore’s vulva a “hospital for penises,” and a “hostel for balls.” And a few stanzas later, he describes these women as healers of cold and frozen male sexual organs (180). These are ferocious affirmations of the world and a suggestion that it is ailing. The writer, in fact, stresses that the concerns that trouble humans most are the worldly and sexual. In the same commentary, he makes a more serious accusation—he contends that whores are a great consolation to the clergy (178). Although they preach celibacy as the best state and advocate contempt for the world, they engage with great gusto in what they condemn; this is another way in which the anonymous author removes the hypocritical mask of the system’s keepers. He continues to draw the Church more directly into the spotlight, parodying the lives of saints and the heroes of official religion. He creates counter-heroines, one of whom is Sazeldona, a prostitute who lives in Guadalajara in “praise of human lust” (179). Another is the whore, who, on her way to visit a friar lover, sees Don Diego Fajardo and, not wishing to be recognized by him, is miraculously “filled with the Holy Spirit” and starts to limp (181). Another whore, Cáceres, has great experience in the trade, and a lot of praises can be read about her (207). Yet another whore, Estaña the nun, is the “servant to the servants of God” (211)—a parody of religious language if there was ever one!

In stanza LVII, the author cites a story about two Valladolid whores named Mariflores from “Putarco’s Chronicle of the Most Illustrious Whores.” This is a clever transformation of the work of classical historian Plutarch (46-c. 125) who wrote *Lives of the Illustrious Greeks and Romans*. By removing the l from *Plutarcho* (Spanish for Plutarch), he creates *Putarco* (a great male whore), which is perhaps what the author thought of official culture.

The work continues to laud the great sexual prowess of women. For example, a woman called Marina has already burnt out two husbands, and is working on a third, a man called Navarro. When Navarro kills a man out of jealousy and is forced to flee from Valladolid, a “devout” friar finds out about it, and decided to console Marina. He brings her to the monastery, where the ensuing events portray a merciless attack on the clergy and their hypocrisy. The friar, after doing his best with her and failing to satisfy her insatiable sexual appetite, calls for help. Six novices come to the rescue, performing “meritorious work.” The language mixes sacred terms and ideas with the coarsest of vulgarity, and the effect is vicious and cruel:

Y ella preguntando por su marido, y él respondió: “Señora, vuestro marido yo lo he de ser esta noche. Por eso no recibáys pasión, que cierto yo tengo muy cargados los lomos, y aquí no se puede hazer otra cosa, que en devociones para vuestros finados se corregirá”. Visto por ella la dispusición y bermejez del frayle, consintió en sus preces, y luego cenaron, y entremezclaron a bueltas las siete obras canónicas, con tanto hervor de devoción que si el frayle rezava un salmo o verso, ella rezava dos y aun tres; y metía coletas y otros responsos, en tal manera que los dos llegaron al quinzeno salmo; y después dixeron el “miserere” y el “retribue dignare”, y el “regen cojón de ombre bivo”, y “venite adoremus”, y otras devociones, hasta que el frayle, conociendo la gran devoción d’ella y él no saber bastante, acordó de invocar el auxilio de algunos novicios; los quales, por ser la obra meritoria, venieron seys, los quales ayudaron mucho al tentado frayle, y por su trabajo d’ellos algún tanto se amortiguó la carne de la susodicha. “Et ideo dicit textus” saciando con priesa los cultos de Apollo. (*Carajicomedia* 196)

The blending of sacred and profane continues. Where Mena preaches chastity and laments the vanity of this life, the *Carajicomedia* author lauds the almost saintly behavior of his subjects, and envisions a time when their sexual services will be provided free of charge:

Aprendan los grandes bevir castamente,
non vençan en viçios los brutos salvajes;
en vilipendio de muchos litnatges,
viles deleites non viçien la gente.
Mas los que presumen del mundo presente
fuigan de donde los dapños renascen;

si lindos cobdiçian ser fechos, abraçen
la vida mas casta con la continente.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 102)

Aprendan las putas bivar pobrememente,
n'os tengan, mancebos, por brutos salvajes,
no piensen cegaros con sus ricos trajes,
así como engañan la más vieja gente.
Vean el carajo, arrecho, valiente,
y nunca sirváys por donde rechacen;
saquen dineros de necios que pacen,
hodedlas en balde con buen continente.

(*Carajicomedia* 201)

Going further, the anonymous writer responds to Mena's defense of the sanctity and virtue of monogamous marriage. The alternative posed is sexual freedom, which the writer presents as a "holy virtue":

Venidos a Venus, vi en grado espicial
los que en el fuego de su juventud
fazen el vicio ser santa virtud
por el sacramento matrimonial.
Abaxo de aquéstos vi grand general
de muchos litnatges caídos en mengua,
que non sabe cómo se diga mi lengua
tantas especies e formas de mal.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 110–11)

Venidos a Venus, vi en grado caudal
los que, en el fuego de su juventud,
dizen hoder ser santa virtud,
por el tocamiento matrimonial.
A todas partes vi gran general
por gula del coño caydos en mengua,
que no sabe cómo se diga mi lengua
quál d'ellas todas será principal.

(*Carajicomedia* 202)

Clear and open language describing sexual enjoyment is epitomized in the commentary to stanza LXXI. Here Father Montesino's commentary recounts the experience of a woman named Mari-blanca, who reveals her ideas, impressions, and feelings about sexuality:

Es muger muy retrayda de Vergüença y que tiene gran abstinencia de Castidad. Léese d'ella que, siendo amiga de un estudiante, una mañana

estando en la cama y aviendo él acabando de passar carrera, ella se hincó de rodillas en la cama, puestas las manos contra el cielo, mirando a un crucifixo, y hichéndosele los ojos de agua, con devoción a grandes bozes dixo: “O Señor, por los méritos de tu santa pasión, si merced en este mundo me has de hazer, sea ésta que en mis días no carezca de tal ombre como éste”. Dízese más . . . que al tiempo que tiene el carajo en el cuerpo, que se querría hallar en un teso o cerro, que está fuera de la ciudad media legua, por dar gritos a su placer. (*Carajicomedia* 204)

The desire for aggressive and unrestrained expression of sexual pleasure cannot be stronger, and the author parodically resorts to the language of religion to phrase it. While this would be the epitome of indecency and profanity in the eyes of the Church, perhaps it suggests both the transcendence and the honest earthiness of the encounter.

The women of the *Carajicomedia* have little in common with the depersonalized, ethereal, and “pure” women of official poetry, who are easy to visualize as cool marble statues of idealized beauty and stoic silence. Instead we see active, colorful, and ferociously alive flesh-and-blood women with the freedom and self-assurance to shout without shame at the great carnal enjoyment they obtain from their lovers. Here there is no evasive language, no moral guilt, and none of the hypocritical trappings of denial and sin delivered by official propaganda. We see only the unbridled desire to live and to experience worldly delights. It is not far-fetched to view these “whores” as representatives and defenders of Renaissance liberated women.

After the *Carajicomedia*'s “climax” in the transcendent sexual experience of Mariblanca's ecstasy, which gives the work both its anecdotal and ultimate significance, the concluding stanzas recount the end of Don Diego Fajardo's sexual potency. Then another fictitious cleric, Fray Juan de Hempudia, takes over with comments on Diego Fajardo's penis (220). His stanzas are a final panegyric to the life of sexuality and worldliness that the book has been preaching. Fray Juan relates the sadness of seeing so many penises separated from their corresponding *coños*, and entreats the latter to mourn the great loss:

Arlança, Pisuerga, con más Carrión,
gozan de nombres de ríos; empero,
después que juntados, llamámoslos Duero,
hazemos de muchos una relación.
¡O coños, vosotros la grand perdición
del fiero carajo devéys de llorar,

pues fue solamente sobre cavalgar,
su saña ya muerta, con su complisión!

(*Carajicomedia* 222)

Stanza cvi is an apotheosis of the author's achievement in the work: rejection of official other-worldliness, and impassioned defence of uninhibited sexual pleasure. Mena's equivalent stanza, which follows, is hopelessly idealistic, mythological, and unrealistic:

Desplega tus venas, pues ¿ya qué tardamos?,
cojones y lomos levanten los remos,
y por este tiempo que aquí no hodemos,
hodamos de forma que fama tengamos;
y pues tan ganosos ya todos estamos
a yr a hoder, sin falta ninguna,
parezca a los coños sin dubda alguna,
non que nos fuerçan, mas que los forçamos.

(*Carajicomedia* 226)

Desplega las velas, pues, ¿ya qué
tardamos?
e los de los barcos levanten los remos,
a bueltas del viento mejor que perdemos,
non los agüeros, los fechos sigamos;
pues una enpresa tan santa levamos
que más non podría ser otra ninguna,
presuma vos e de mí la Fortuna,
non que nos fuerça, mas que la forçamos.

(*Laberinto de Fortuna* 149)

The character Don Diego Fajardo wants to die doing what in life he did best: *joder* (the popular Spanish word for the sexual act, less strikingly vulgar than the usual four-letter English translation). We witness a final playful battle of the *carajos* and *coños*, who fight to defend the joys of sex:

. . . los fieros carajos, alçadas las alas,
sañudos, feroces, entran sin escalas,
dando empuxones, a modo de guerra.

(*Carajicomedia* 227)

The description of this battle is almost elegant. The author borrows Mena's language and concepts to deconstruct his idealism, as he exalts the worldly:

Los coños, veyendo crecer los rabaños,
y viendo carajos de diversas partes
venir tan arrechos con sus estandartes,
holgaron de vello con gozos estraños;
los quales, queriendo hartarse sin daños
de aquellas tan nuevas y dulces estrenas,
acogen de grado a los gordos de venas,
también a los otros que no son tamaños.

(*Carajicomedia* 227)

In the final three stanzas, the *carajos* fight valiantly against the *coños*, and in the end, the *coños* win the battle. Their triumph highlights three notable themes of the work: 1) spirited mortal combat to defend the world—the *carajos* die *jodiendo*, having sex, affirming their belief in life, 2) the joys of sex, and 3) the great sexual prowess of women:

O bolvemos a ser sometidos
so aquellos coños, hasta que muramos,
hodiendo siquiera, porque bien podemos
ser destotnados, mas nunca vencidos;
pues ya que tú vees que estamos perdidos,
débiles, floxos, sin señas de guía,
buelve, hodamos con tanta porfía,
hasta que nos falten vigor y sentidos.

Fajardo, a la bozes, se mueve a desora,
y buelve su carajo con flacas saetas
contra los coños, por hartar sus setas,
ca fue de temor piadad vencedora;
avía luxuria dispuesto la ora;
los floxos carajos a entrar se tornaron,
los coños hambrientos así los tragaron,
que ninguno d'ellos ni canta ni llora.

(*Carajicomedia* 229–30)

The *Carajicomedia* is an unusual work whose deep social, political, and ideological undertones have been completely neglected by modern scholarship. Through a brief comparison with the work it parodies, we become aware that the *Carajicomedia*'s author was a subversive who opposed the ideas of the official world as expressed and propounded by Juan de Mena in the celebrated *Laberinto de Fortuna*. We could posit the *Carajicomedia* as representing the anonymous author's merging of two major subversions. First, his rank-and-file characters reject cul-

tural idealism, one of the main tools with which the powerful justified their rule, accumulated privilege, and kept everyone in line. Second, they reject the official ideology of contempt for the physical world through open and unabashed sexual activity. The passion for life of the *Carajicomedia* characters, evident in the extreme presentation of their eroticism, counters the equally extreme officially sanctioned hatred for worldliness. After all, what could be more opposed to cultural idealism than playfully articulated ideas on sex and the complete and guilt-free enjoyment of erotic pleasures?

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