

**THE FIRST CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE:  
ALVAR NUÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA'S  
1542 *LA RELACION***

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In this paper, I will discuss the development of one type of Western captivity narrative, a Spanish one that in the context of expanding Western conquest brought (1) the need for the European conqueror to defend himself from the accusation of cultural betrayal and (2) the need to redeem a failed conqueror. For this I focus on Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's 1542 *La Relacion*.

Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca was a survivor of the failed Narvaez expedition that attempted to conquer part of the mainland of North America in 1527. The Spanish crown had authorized Governor Pamfilo Narvaez to take the territory from the cape of Florida to the Rio de las Palmas (which is now known as the Rio Grande in Texas). Part of the expedition, a force of around 300 men, entered into the interior of Florida, but only four survived the ordeals and eventually reconnected to Spanish civilization in 1536 near the Sinaloa River. These survivors [Cabeza de Vaca, Andres Dorantes, Alonso del Castillo, and the slave Estevanico] had trekked, mostly on foot, from Florida to almost to the Pacific ocean, near Culiacan.

Cabeza de Vaca's *La Relacion* presents the tale of the failed Narvaez Expedition, which set out on 17 June 1527 to conquer another Tenochtitlan, another golden city -a city they never doubted existed. For just as the English and later the Anglo-Americans imposed their "virgin land" perspective on the Americas, so to the Spanish conquerors fitted the Americas into a narrative grid that made the land and its inhabitants known;

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for the Spanish conqueror, the Americas were set in the conceptual mold of the story of the “golden city.” This particular expedition sought the golden city in the region known as Apalachen -but failed.

In the Americas, the early Spanish conqueror sought a City of Gold (e.g., Cortes, Guzman, Narvaez). In his own eyes, he was the knight who battled dark, evil forces, and sought a kingdom to cleanse with the all important crown’s blessing. His sense of moral superiority and what he accepted as his right for material profit motivated his imperial enterprise. Medieval legends and chronicles encouraged the notion that golden kingdoms existed in the Americas. They gave rise to a conceptualization of the sort that Columbus made concerning gold as a restorer, as a metaphor for renewed vigor. Lyle N. McAlister comments: “In Renaissance Hispania these fantasies [medieval tales] acquired a new vehicle in romances of chivalry whose contents, if not read by all, drifted into popular culture. Such tales had a common theme -the exploits of brave and virtuous hidalgos in fabulous lands- and a stereotypical outcome. The hero returned covered with glory and his fortune gained or restored.”<sup>1</sup> Thomas D. Hall notes about the growth of the Spanish Empire: “[T]he lure of riches, the lack of alternative paths to glory and military hubris would have led them (*conquistadors*) to proceed undaunted. This kind of closed-mindedness combined with a particular balance of class forces and conflicts made subsequent policies all but inevitable.”<sup>2</sup>

The Spanish conqueror sought kingdoms of gold: the Amazons’ kingdom, *El Dorado*, Quivira, the Seven Cities of Cibola, the “land of the Caesars,” and others. The conquering experience, it was assumed, would not change the conqueror, just test a finished product -the conqueror, a morally superior being. There is no doubt that an important element in the conqueror’s discourse was the kingdom of gold, which many times was thought to be ruled by Amazonian women. Columbus made references to Amazon-like natives in the Caribbean islands. Cortes searched for Amazons and ordered a mission to find them: “I am informed that along the coast adjacent to the town of Colima there are numerous well-populated provinces where it is believed that there is much treasure; also, that in those

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<sup>1</sup> Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World 1492-1700*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas D. Hall, *Social Change in the Southwest, 1350-1880*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), p. 51.

parts there is a district inhabited by women without men. It is said that, in the matter of reproduction, these women follow the practices of the Amazons described in the *istorias antiguas*. To ascertain the truth of this and the rest related to that coast will be a great service to God, our Lord and their Majesties.”<sup>1</sup> Nuño de Guzman sought the Amazons also. In a letter dated 8 July 1530, he states: “From thence ten days further I shall go to finde the Amazons, which some say dwell in the Sea, and some in an arme of the Sea, and that they are rich and accounted of the people for Goddesses, and whiter than other women.”<sup>2</sup> Garcia de Pilar first came with Cortes, then later became Nuño de Guzman’s interpreter (for he was fluent in Nahuatl). He mentions that the Guzman expedition, which entered the Michoacan and nothwest area, reached Cihuatlan, a city of women, which they had hoped to be a city of gold.<sup>3</sup> Peter Martyr, a councilor of the Indies, wrote that Juan Rivera (a trusted servant of Cortes) had heard of a region in the northern mountains inhabited by women. “What might argue in favour of the truth of the truth of this story,” he states, “is that the land is called Yguatlan; for *ygua* in their language menas women, and *lan* means master. Hence it is believed to be the country of women.”<sup>4</sup> Whether his language analysis was correct or not, his conclusion was that this proved the existence of an Amazon kingdom which meant a city of gold.

In 1539, Fray Marcos de Niza was sent by the viceroy of New Spain on a reconnoitering expedition to the northern land, reaching the area known today as the United States’ state of New Mexico. The next year (1540), the Coronado expedition followed. Fray Niza was in search of the Seven Cities of Gold, and he reported seeing a grand city, larger than Mexico City with decorations of turquoise. It was called Cibola, and was thought to contain many people and some very large houses. When the Coronado expedition entered the region, Fray Marcos’ fiction was exposed. But on hearing rumors of kingdoms, Coronado continued to search; he in turn sought Quivira, a place supposedly overflowing with gold, a place that even became established on European maps without its existence ever

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<sup>1</sup> Irving A. Leonard, *Book of the Brave*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Parry & Robert G. Keith, eds. *Central America and Mexico*, vol. III of *New Iberian World*. (New York: Time Books & Hector & Rose, 1984), p. 554.

<sup>4</sup> Parry & Keith, eds., *Central America and Mexico*, vol. III, p. 210.

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being confirmed. In the Argentinean area, Ruy Diaz de Guzman reports what the Francisco Cesar expedition (1529-30) claimed was “a province with a large number of people that were very rich in silver and gold,” which became known as the “land of the Caesars.”<sup>1</sup> The search for the kingdom of *El Dorado* (the gilded king) was undertaken by Gonzalo Pizarro (brother of Francisco Pizarro) in 1541. The province was supposedly located where cinnamon grew and was purported to be a very populous and rich land. He wrote to his “Sacred Cesarean Catholic Majesty”: “I decided to go and conquer it and explore it, both in order to serve our Majesty and in order to broaden and increase Your Majesty’s realms and royal patrimony, and because I had been made to believe that from these provinces would be obtained great treasures whereby Your Majesty would be served and aided in meeting the great expenses with which Your Majesty is faced every day in his realms.”<sup>2</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca first came to the Americas as treasurer of the Narvaez expedition; his job was to make sure that His Majesty got the *quinto real*. That expedition sought the golden kingdom of Apalachen, a province that supposedly contained much gold.<sup>3</sup> Then later as *adelantado* and governor of the province of Rio de la Plata, Cabeza de Vaca learned about the Xarayes, a people who acquired silver and gold from natives who were “further on.”<sup>4</sup> He set out to conquer this kingdom that lay beyond the territory of the Xarayes.

The Kingdoms of gold -of wealth- were tied to the themes of regeneration and redemption. Although silver, in both volume and value became the predominant metal being exploited in the Americas, the term “gold” held the mythical power. Gold became a metaphor for the promise of renewed vigor, power, and fortune. “Gold,” wrote Columbus, “constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it has all the needs in this world, as also the means of rescuing souls from Purgatory, and restoring

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<sup>1</sup> Parry & Keith, eds., *Coastlines, Rivers, and Forests*. vol. V, p. 424.

<sup>2</sup> Parry & Keith, eds., *Coastlines, Rivers, and Forests*. vol. V, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. (Zamora: Agustín de Paz & Juan Picardo, 1542), sig. Avii(a).

<sup>4</sup> Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Nafragios y Comentarios*. (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1906), p. 294.

them to the enjoyment of Paradise.”<sup>1</sup> Cortes once asked Teudilli, Moctezuma’s agent, if Moctezuma possessed gold. Teudilli responded **yes**, and Cortes stated, “send me of it (gold), for me and my companions have an illness of the heart that only gold can heal.”<sup>2</sup> Cortes like Columbus saw gold as the means for redemption -as did many Spanish conquerors who set foot on the Americas.

The textual Cabeza de Vaca begins as a Spanish conqueror, the Emperor’s treasurer ready to guarantee the *quinto real*. He sets out with the expedition to spread the Christian faith, enlarge the empire, and -in the process- acquire wealth: the mythical model for this conqueror is the knight in the tales of Amadis, who is aristocratic, supporter of the monarchy, and destined by fate to conquer and cleanse a kingdom. Succinctly, Amadis was a prince who upheld the king’s authority, a man with a sword who sought and expected to find a kingdom to cleanse, a process that would allow personal and monarchical vitality, political strength, and fortune. Earlier romances had supported and mirrored a feudal society. But *Amadis* reflected the monarchical world view as the natural order: the *Amadis*, novel of the monarchical spirit that inculcated the duties of the good vassal.<sup>3</sup> These Amadis tales were given flesh by Cortes’ conquest of Tenochtitlan, a place described by Bernal Diaz as “an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis ... It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first R. glimpse of things never heard of or seen before.”<sup>4</sup> The exception to the rule, one may say, was taken to confirm the mythical idea of the existence of cities of gold and of the validity of the Amadis-type conqueror.

But the failure of the Narvaez expedition made the conqueror’s narrative unworkable, mainly because the Amadis-type conqueror could not function in the setting of failure. Due to the failure, Cabeza de Vaca was

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. (New York: A Mentor Book, 1926), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco López de Gómara, *Conquista de México*. tomo I. (Barcelona: Daniel Cortezo y Vía, 1887), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Amadís de Gaula*, tomo I. (Buenos Aires: Editorial C.O.P., 1940), p. xi. [Translation by writer of the article]

<sup>4</sup> Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. J. M. Cohen. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1963), p. 214.

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forced to reinterpret the type of being who symbolized regeneration and redemption. This was imperative, for without such reinterpretation Cabeza de Vaca could not fit into the Spanish Imperial environment. *La Relacion* ends up presenting the reader with two models, then; one was Pamfilo de Narvaez (the warrior/knight), the other Cabeza de Vaca (the ascetic/gentleman, which ends up being favored in the narrative).

One very important thing that occurs in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative is that the Spaniards come to be at the mercy of different Native American tribes. The theme of captivity arises and with it the question of possible betrayal.

The Puritans developed captivity narratives, which were edited to give a didactic interpretation that showed the demonic forces seeking the destruction of God's chosen.<sup>1</sup> So the pattern showed the faithful (generally a woman) tested, taken into the wilderness by demons (Native Americans), tempted to betray her faith and culture by such things as the offer to join the tribe or the offer to eat human flesh -which if accepted by the captive would mean that she would cease to be God's creature; then, following this narrative's development, at the last moment the captive accepted without question the will of God and was rescued by the grace of God. Thus, the former captive, having experienced grace, returns to her community with faith and acceptance of her place in God's plan. The former captive demonstrates she did not betray her culture.

In Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, there are examples of Spaniards deserting the expedition (such as Theodoro who by doing that also abandoned his people, his culture, and joined the natives), examples of Spaniards who became cannibals (such as what occurred on Malhado Island), of the Spaniard Oviedo refusing to get away from a Native American tribe.<sup>2</sup> All of these incidents reveal acts of cultural betrayal. These Spaniards ceased to have legitimacy in the Spanish Imperial context.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: the Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860*. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 95, 100, 101.

<sup>2</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. sigs. Cii(a0), Cii(b), Cvii(b), Cviii(a), Diiii(b).

As for Cabeza de Vaca, there comes a point in *La Relacion* when he asks a Native American tribe to take in the barely surviving Spaniards, which they do. At that point, there is no doubt that the image and power of a conqueror are gone. In fact, the model of the Amadis-style conqueror in *La Relacion* -as represented by Panfilo de Narvaez- was bankrupted by that point. This occurred when the expeditionaries were at sea on barges. Cabeza de Vaca asked from his barge what were Narvaez's orders. To which Narvaez replied, "Each man should do what he thought best in order to save his life."<sup>1</sup> In other words, **it's every man for himself**. With this statement, Narvaez -who had the strongest men on his barge- relinquished his authority as the men struggled at sea on their makeshift boats.<sup>2</sup> The expeditionaries had embarked on these boats in Florida and had set off in the direction of Panuco -a distance they thought was short. Instead, most ended up shipwrecked on the coast of what many people believe is present day Texas.

It is after this shipwreck that from the Spaniards' point of view the captivity begins, for now they were in danger of being absorbed by the environment and/or the Native Americans. For Cabeza de Vaca, his narrative not only had to somehow explain or -rather convince- his readers that the failed expedition had not been a failure, but that (1) he did not betray his culture, meaning basically not betray monarch and Christian faith, and (2) that he was redeemed.

The question was how could Cabeza de Vaca do this narratively, especially with the specter of the renegade up and about. The renegade was the ultimate evil which led to the deadliest of betrayals; he was the one who became the "other," one who had allowed himself to be absorbed by a foreign environment from which he repudiated his monarch and Christian faith and for whom there could be no redemption.

An example of the renegade was the Spaniard Gonzalo Guerrero, who like Cabeza de Vaca set out to conquer and like Cabeza de Vaca ended up shipwrecked -Guerrero though in Yucatan (1511). Guerrero, like Cabeza de Vaca, had been a slave of the natives and then ceased to be one. But

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<sup>1</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relacion*. sig. Ciiii. [All translations from Cabeza de Vaca's *La Relacion* are by the writer of this article]

<sup>2</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relacion*. sig. Ciii(b).

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unlike Cabeza de Vaca, Guerrero became a leader, a man “free and accepted by his captors as a member of the native community.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike Cabeza de Vaca, Guerrero rejected the Spanish imperial endeavor. When the *adelantado*, don Francisco de Montejo, heard that Guerrero was among the natives, he wrote to him: “to remind you that you are a Christian, redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior, to whom and for whom I, and you, should and do give infinite thanks. And particularly you, you who are in such a special position and capacity to serve God and our Emperor, our Lord, in this the pacification and baptism of these people.”<sup>2</sup> But at that moment, Guerrero had a native name, Nachancan, spoke the tribal language, had tattooed his body, cut his ears and tongue as was customary in the tribe, and made their sacrifices: he had become the “other.” Unlike Cabeza de Vaca, Gonzalo Guerrero led natives against the crown, married a native woman, and begot half-castes. During a battle in 1528, Guerrero (the “bad Christian sailor”) was said to be killed by Alonso de Avila.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, Cabeza de Vaca in his narrative constantly reassured the reader that he had *not* abandoned his monarch, his faith, his culture. The reader of *La Relacion* is identified as the Emperor; the appeals were made to His Majesty, to Caesar, to Emperor. Cabeza de Vaca pointed out that the ordeal he went through was God’s judgement; therefore, it was not his fault the expedition failed.<sup>4</sup> He stated that he roamed the wilderness and traveled with the barbarous tribes because he had no choice -yet, he added, that he took advantage of this to acquire information that would assist His Majesty in conquering the land; he, in fact, even gave advice on how to conquer.<sup>5</sup>

During the period Cabeza de Vaca called his captivity, he lost his European trappings, became a slave, a merchant, and a healer. However, Cabeza de Vaca maintained he continued to be a Christian and loyal to the Emperor. As slave, he does not give up hope that his captivity will end and

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<sup>1</sup> Grant D. Jones, *Maya resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial frontier*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Parry & Keith, eds., *Central America and Mexico*, vol. III, p. 504.

<sup>3</sup> Parry & Keith, eds., *Central America and Mexico*, vol. III, p. 505.

<sup>4</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Ai(b).

<sup>5</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sigs Aii(a), Fiii(b), Hi(b).

attempts to escape; as merchant he explored and sought routes to the Christian lands. He even remained in the Malhado area with the local tribe longer than he had to in order to rescue a Spaniard who in the end decided to remain with the Native Americans. But the most difficult role Cabeza de Vaca had to explain was that of healer.

Cabeza de Vaca made it clear in the narrative that he and his companions were forced to become healers: either they became shamans or they would starve.<sup>1</sup> At this point, a Native American voice is heard when he chastises them for their refusal to become shamans: **the stones and other things** -he tells them- **that spring from the fields have virtue ... men surely had greater virtue and power.**<sup>2</sup> Still, although Cabeza de Vaca insisted hunger forced him and his companions to become healer, the role of healer created an ambiguous situation for him and his Spanish companions (not for Estevanico, the black). In the role of shaman, Cabeza de Vaca faced the threat of being classified in a category considered abnormal by the Spanish Imperial authorities. Cabeza de Vaca's justification for the role was to show it as a desperate attempt to survive without becoming cultural traitor.

When healing, Cabeza de Vaca used along with the native techniques Christian ones, such as calling on the Lord and making the sign of the cross and reciting the *Pater Noster* y *Ave Maria*.<sup>3</sup> Cabeza de Vaca called attention to this, for not only was he attempting to do away with the possible accusation that he was a renegade but also the accusation that he was a backslider -giving up and failing to fulfill the cultural goals. Consequently, in order not to be accused of using native magic as healer, he attributed all cures - including a Lazarus-like one- to the Christian God; he explained he took on the role of (*fisico*) shaman in order to reach the Christian lands.<sup>4</sup> Cabeza de Vaca reassured the Emperor (his reader) that he did not give up his culture and did not intend to become the "other" as a Guerrero-type renegade.

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<sup>1</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Di(b).

<sup>2</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Di(b).

<sup>3</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Dii(a).

<sup>4</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sigs. Eiiii(a), Hiiii(a).

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There is an important point of comparison between Cabeza de Vaca and Guerrero that demonstrates their divergent paths. When Francisco de Montejo was conquering Yucatan, he asked Guerrero's help to pacify the natives; Guerrero refused. Once Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were back in Christian lands, the *alcalde mayor* Melchior Diaz requested that they remain long enough to restore things and serve God and Emperor; he requested they recall the frighten natives in the name of God and Emperor so the natives would populate and till the land.<sup>1</sup> This request was the same type that the *adelantado* don Francisco de Montejo made to Guerrero: serve God and Emperor in pacification and baptism of the natives. Cabeza de Vaca agreed.

For Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions, their captivity ended when a naked and weather-beaten Cabeza de Vaca made contact near the Sinaloa River with Spanish slave raiders. After many years in the "wilderness," Cabeza de Vaca finally made contact with his cultural cohorts and silence was his reward. When Cabeza de Vaca spoke to them in Spanish, they were stunned, were speechless, could not even ask him questions.<sup>2</sup> They were unable to believe that Spanish was coming from a being that to them looked like the "other." In his wanderings, Cabeza de Vaca had ceased to look Spanish. Appearing before the horsemen naked and in the company of natives and Estevanico the black, Cabeza de Vaca inadvertently presented a situation that challenged the slave raider's preconceived notions of the land and its inhabitants. The Spanish slave raiders could not at that moment categorize the man who stood before them. But once they recovered and realized that up to 600 natives were following Cabeza de Vaca and his companions (shamans to the natives) there occurred an important incident that has been sentimentalized.

An argument took place between the slave raiders and Cabeza de Vaca's group over the natives who had followed the shamans. The slave raiders wanted to enslave the natives. Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were against this. This episode in the narrative can be misunderstood; taken in a very sentimental manner, a reader may be tempted to attribute to Cabeza de Vaca the title of "defender of Indians" or the motive of wanting to liberate the Native Americans. These are misreadings of what actually

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<sup>1</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Hv(b).

<sup>2</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Hii(b).

happened. Although the issue of enslavement of the natives sparked the argument between the two Spanish groups, neither the slave raiders or Cabeza de Vaca's group questioned the right to conquer. What the two Spanish groups argued about was not native rights but, instead, which group had the authority of the Emperor and therefore authority over the Native Americans. It focused on Spanish authority: who was serving the monarch, who was being the **good vassal**. And they fought over the term *christiano*.<sup>1</sup> There was no question that the natives have to submit; the point was to which party.

The authority issue was important in Cabeza de Vaca's captivity narrative, for Imperial authority was connected to the notion of redemption. In Cabeza de Vaca's captivity tale, the warrior ceased to be a viable role; the ascetic role -the healer- surfaced and ended up being favored. Asceticism provided Cabeza de Vaca with the condition that affirmed his success in this faraway land. Emphasizing the ascetic/healer did not lead him to merge with the native. The reverse, in fact, is pictured in the narrative by Cabeza de Vaca, who identified himself with his culture completely by proclaiming his religious mission: God willed he go through hardship so he could lead them out of captivity.<sup>2</sup> Falling back on the Christian tradition of the suffering holy ascetic, Cabeza de Vaca presented a man who remained loyal and therefore legitimate, unlike Narvaez. In addition, the ascetic was associated with some chivalrous expectations which had been part of the warrior. The ascetic Cabeza de Vaca suffered hardships but did not stray nor renege on his culture or his Emperor. He demonstrated his fidelity, valor, and faithfulness, even though he failed to conquer new lands.

Saint Augustin's *City of God*, with its pilgrimage through a hostile world on his way to the holy city, echoed in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative. As an ascetic, Cabeza de Vaca also echoed back to the New Testament idea of Christian life as estrangement from the world. St. Augustine in *The City of God* describes a person's earthly journey as being that of a pilgrimage: the journey of a stranger in the midst of the ungodly. And in Christianity pilgrimage was endorsed as a worthy form of asceticism. So the ascetic Cabeza de Vaca wandered among the barbarous tribes in a strange country

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<sup>1</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sigs. Hiii(b), Hiiii(a)

<sup>2</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relación*. Sig. Dv(b).

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seeking the land of the Christians. The conqueror Cabeza de Vaca who sought the golden city changed for a time into the ascetic seeking the holy city in the Christian lands, the former Tenochtitlan now the Spanish city of Mexico.

In *La Relacion*, we read about a faithful man falling into captivity in a far distant land, a hostile and non-Christian land where he is tempted to abandon his Christian faith and his loyalty to his Emperor by the offer to become a tribal member. At the beginning of *La Relacion*, Cabeza de Vaca is the Spanish conqueror. But later, after being shipwrecked, he interacts with the Native American (the “other”) differently. He becomes a slave, a trader, a healer and, therefore, has to deal with the native intimately. But because the conqueror comes to know the native, does not mean he will become the native. The conqueror rejects identification with the native at the same time that he seeks information about him that will aid in exploiting the land. Although Cabeza de Vaca comes to know the native, even participates in the native’s culture, all his acts are justified as European. For instance, Franciscan monks -who came to the Americas and dressed poorly, went about bare foot, and ate what the natives ate- did so not to become the native but rather to change him. Their acts were justified as those which promote European civilization. Likewise, Cabeza de Vaca does not reject the Imperial endeavor of submitting the Americas to the crown.

Cabeza de Vaca avoided being absorbed by the wilderness; he did not become a cannibal. He accepted God’s will; he went through a trial during which he gathered information on the inhabitants that would assist the Emperor in conquering them -and Cabeza de Vaca gathered information about where golden cities lay. For instance, he mentioned in *La Relacion* one to the south and another to the north. (The latter one spurred the Fray Niza reconnaissance and the Coronado expedition.)

Here was Cabeza de Vaca’s redemption. Cabeza de Vaca bought himself back by offering the locations of golden cities to the Monarch. In the narrative, God had led him out of captivity, and Cabeza de Vaca demonstrated he did not betray his culture by offering information about the unconquered land and advice on how to conquer the natives.

Upon his return to Christian lands, Cabeza de Vaca requested the patent for Florida, convinced that a golden city was there. De Soto got

Florida. It is important to note that many members of different failed expeditions -despite their hazardous experiences- sought to return to the Americas and continue their search for wealth. They started out believing in the golden city and after the ordeal still believed in it. Governor Narvaez, who did not survive the endeavor, exemplifies the pre-ordeal position. In *La Relacion*, he declared the conqueror's duty and embraced the myth of the golden city. In his reply to the prophecy of the *mora de Hornachos*, Narvaez stated that all who marched with him would battle and conquer many lands and very strange people, and it was certain that many would die conquering them; but he insisted that those who survived would be rich, for he knew the land.<sup>1</sup>

Of the men of the Narvaez expedition (with the exception of the slave Estevanico, whose voice in the text was virtually silenced), who survived -eventually wandering about naked- experienced hardships but never gave up their previous conception of the Americas as being the land of the golden city. Not only, for instance, did Cabeza de Vaca on his return to Spanish civilization seek the patent for Florida but also the right to explore the "northern lands" for the golden city which Viceroy Mendoza undertook with the Coronado expedition.<sup>2</sup> As for his companions, Andres Dorantes, after the ordeal, turned his slave Estevanico over to the viceroy, served in the conquest of Jalisco, and awaited a joint command with Cabeza de Vaca.<sup>3</sup> Estevanico was used by the viceroy Antonio de Mendoza in an attempt to acquire the wealth of the city of gold. Estevanico encouraged Fray Marcos' reconnoitering expedition by fueling the myth of the golden city.<sup>4</sup> Alonso del Castillo married a wealthy widow and was granted half the rents of the Indian town of Tehuacan.<sup>5</sup> Cabeza de Vaca was sent to South America to the Rio de la Plata area where he sought "El Dorado."

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<sup>1</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La Relacion*. Sigs. Ii(b), Iii(a).

<sup>2</sup> Henry R. Wagner, *The Spanish Southwest, 1542-1794*. (Albuquerque: The Quivira Society, 1937), pp. 43, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Cyclone Covey, trans., *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1961), p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> A. Curtis Wilgus, *Latin America 1492-1942*. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Reprint Corp., 1973), p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> Covey, p. 141.

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The European expansion into the Americas fueled the Western Renaissance. From the conflict between the Europeans and the Native Americans, from the European struggle to not only conquer the land but to justify this conquest, there developed several different types of narratives. The captivity narrative was one. The English, specifically through the Puritans, developed one -which influenced the development of what later became the New Adam myth in the United States. Cabeza de Vaca's captivity tale offered a narrative model for other failed Spanish conquerors, who turned out to be many (e.g., Oñate, Coronado), and later in the popular culture of the United States, it influenced the romantic image of the Spanish conqueror.

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