

## **Chapter One: Alternate Originals: Canonizing English Translations of Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios***

*“En el qual subçedieron cosas de mucho dolor é triseça, é aun milagros en essos pocos que escaparon ó quedaron con la vida, despues de haber padescido innumerable naufragios y peligros...”-Gonzalo Fernández de Oveido y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de la Indias*<sup>1</sup>*

*“You have to wonder if any of it's true, his going around healing the Indians, performing miracles. They thought he was- well, no telling what they thought.” -Gladys Swan “Do you Believe in Cabeza de Vaca?”*

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* is a unique account of failed Spanish colonialism in what would become the American borderlands. In light of its historical relevance to the contemporary geographies of Florida, Cuba, Texas, Mexico, and the greater American Southwest, the text has had little to no bearing on the field of U.S. cultural studies for most of its printed history.<sup>2</sup> The text's antiquated Castilian Spanish resists easy integration with the English language genealogies of “American” literature, and its borderline heretical scenes of human divination still seem difficult to square with the Puritanical literary tradition, classically viewed as the canon's origin and stemming from the New England colonies. With the exception of a modest few in the U.S. interested in regional history and ethnography, the text remained an unfamiliar Other to most English speaking American literary scholars for over four hundred years, circulating almost exclusively as part of Spanish colonial and pre-modern Latin American traditions and translated into English in extremely limited (albeit key) capacities. But in a moment historically linked with the so-called “canon wars” of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the

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<sup>1</sup>“Events causing great pain and sadness occurred, and even miracles for those few who escaped or survived with their lives, after having suffered innumerable calamities and dangers...”

<sup>2</sup> This point is made evident by the 1975 publication by José B. Fernández on the life of Cabeza de Vaca, which identifies the explorer as “the forgotten chronicler,” and is one of the earlier texts to make the argument that the man and his narrative should be taken seriously within the field of U.S. history.

text found new life as an essential part of the U.S. literary tradition, equally well represented in academic discourse as in literary anthologies and popular histories. Alongside several other key Spanish language texts, Cabeza de Vaca's work has since emerged as part of a new foundation for a hemispherically oriented notion of American literature, and a new origin point for virtually any serious attempt to trace the national literary roots of the United States.

Of course, it is not the *original* versions of these texts that hold this newfound place at the canon's beginning, but rather texts *in translation* that have found their way to the American literature anthology, and generally in the abbreviated form of excerpts. Various translations of *Naufragios* (represented by a variety of names including *Castaways*, *The Relation*, *The Account*, and *The Narrative*) now serve as the very groundwork of a new national narrative that is bolstered and made more inclusive by the addition, but also promise access to essential truths of early European contact with the Americas through a heavily mediated linguistic experience that is often difficult to address. While the ideological shift towards a new understanding of American literature has been met with a fair share of criticism and questions (notably including the challenges of repositioning the origins of American studies to also include the Spanish borderlands) few studies have addressed the importance of translation as a fundamental and irreducible issue at the heart of the new American literary canon. Slipped under and into an English language dominant national literary tradition, translations of texts such as *Naufragios* make it possible to think beyond the nationalist parameters that unproductively delineated the scope of U.S. literary studies, but also defy much of the promise of multicultural American literary studies to reconstruct the canon by requiring the text speak English. Further, reading the text in translation exposes the tenuousness with which any claim to an 'originating' text might be made, a point that, as discussed below, throws the entire process of identifying the origins of a

literary tradition (as well as retooling that tradition by altering its foundational texts) into question. Through a detailed look at both the material history of *Naufragios* and the contents the narrative itself, this chapter facilitates an inquiry into the stakes of reconstructing a literary tradition at its foundation, and of building a literary canon in translation by destabilizing the promise of finding an “original” text. Examining the plurality of source materials, textual variants, and interested cultural readings that surround *Naufragios* helps identify the original an increasingly unobtainable concept, and exposing the difficulty of attributing permanence to the ideological center of an epistemological construct such as a literary tradition.

To better understand the changes that precipitated the reexamination of the U.S. literary canon’s originating texts, one need only consider the anthologies that aim to catalog it. According to the 1994 edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, the embrace of Spanish language texts within the U.S. canon first came about “in response to significant changes in critical interest” by scholars who advocated a more complete representation of the diverse structures that supersede the national category in literary studies (Baym xxvii). These “significant changes” resulted in the need for texts to represent the geography of United States as a site of multiple and interactive colonialisms to counterbalance a longstanding national literary history beginning with Anglo Saxon contact with indigenous populations in the North Atlantic colonies. Authorized by countless literary anthologies since the early nineteenth century, this history reinforced a vision of American literature as a “natural” extension of the English language British literary canon, continually reintroducing works by William Bradford, Cotton Mather, Anne Bradstreet, Roger Williams and other Anglo-Americans as the country’s first

literary texts.<sup>3</sup> In 1987, the appearance of translated excerpts from several Spanish language colonial texts including *Naufragios* in McQuade et al.'s *Harper American Literature* marked what would become the beginning of Cabeza de Vaca's widespread appearance in nearly every anthology of American literature. In the anthology, excerpts of the text are included in the section "Literature of the New World 1492-1620," which contains a variety of European exploration narratives and a subcategory for Native American stories and songs (whose demarcated inclusion as other rather awkwardly raises the problem of the indigenous voice existing only as mediated by European contact). The section precedes the more traditionally rendered category "Literature of Colonial America 1620-1776," which is wholly representative of the standard American literary anthology mentioned above. By the middle of the 1990s, a model was established that became the new standard for American literary anthologies that begin with a "pre 1620" section that included a mix of European exploration narratives and native American texts translated into English, and are followed by a more traditional set of English colonial texts. And while changes to the canon occurred across all historic periods in the later parts of the twentieth century, none were so great as the inclusion of this new "New World" set of texts. Periodized and contained as a distinct set of colonial age literature, these texts stand apart from the introduction of other "marginal" literatures into the canon because their sustained affiliation with other national traditions and linguistic system. The exceptional status of these texts highlights the particular attention to which scholars in the U.S. paid to them, and thus their comparatively high importance to the task of overhauling the canon's origin texts.

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the evolution of the American literary canon, see Roemer. Roemer's online database project, an extensive compilation of title pages and tables of contents from a variety of major American literature anthologies is also a helpful resource.

While having a number of Spanish language texts at the foundation of the American literary canon is exciting in many respects and diversifies the canon's national affiliations, their belated inclusion just prior to a set of traditional English language texts presents a number of issues even before the question of translation is introduced. Specifically, the chronological shift from a widely cast view of the European colonial project in the Western Hemisphere to an otherwise nationally oriented set of classic U.S. texts simply replicates the ideology that English language tradition is the logical inheritor of multiple non-English colonial experiences. This move diminishes the visibility of non-English language traditions existing within a more broadly construed model of American literature, and creates a sense of false access or connectedness to a set of texts and textual interpretations that themselves have spawned an enormous (if linguistically and nationally appropriated) legacy in their own right that is occluded within the context of appropriation for the sake of de-centering the U.S. literary canon. This relationship is further suspended by the editorial processes inherent to anthologizing, which results in a series of textual excerpts removed from their original context. These excerpts are then paired with and read through the context of later texts within the tradition deemed relatable by the editor, but that in reality had very little influence over the English speaking world at the time of their publication.

This issue of reinterpreting Spanish colonial texts through the lens of an extra-linguistic and largely disparate literary tradition raises another question, concerning how exactly to integrate these texts with the rest of an already extant canon. This issue is taken up in the preface to the fourth edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (the first edition to include a pre-1620 section) which suggests that "texts such as Columbus's *Letter to Luis de Santangel* and Arthur Barlowe's *First Voyage made to the Coast of America* bear witness to the natural

wonders of the New World, a tradition that has remained strong in American writing ever since” (Baym xxvii).<sup>4</sup> In an effort to bridge together disparate colonial traditions, the reader is told that the tradition of “bearing witness” is something that emerged naturally in the U.S. literary tradition from Spanish and English language texts alike, as if a multilingual body of works had always been originating forces within a canon that for years have simply remained silent on the full extent of its influences. The passage also implies that an accurate reading of bearing witness as a systemic theme within the American literary field by relying on retroactive assumptions based what is already known about English language U.S. national literature. To know that the tradition has “remained strong” presumes familiarity with the tradition in its current form and, given the late entry of these colonial texts to conversations on the canon, can’t help but be conditioned by the knowledge of texts and ideas of later generations. At stake here is the degree to which a Spanish colonial text can act as an originating force within an already established English language literary tradition, and the degree to which meaning is molded to fit desired outcomes.

Tellingly, similar questions arise when returning to the fact that these texts are reproduced and read in translation. By reproducing Spanish colonial texts as already negotiated into the existing canon’s most demanding terms, its linguistic system, English translations occlude the authenticity of the origin text, making difference invisible and creating a false relationship between text and tradition. In keeping with the current discussion, it is possible to explore these and other issues through an examination of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*, where

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<sup>4</sup> While the quote does not explicitly refer to Cabeza de Vaca’s text, the editorial decisions to highlight those passages which most directly relate to witnessing in the New World (including one of the earliest accounts of a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico and of Buffalo in the Southwest plains) make it clear that the editors of the Norton Anthology equally situate Cabeza de Vaca’s work in this tradition.

the evolution of bearing witness as a theme underscores a mediated relationship between authenticity and interpretation that carries over to a discussion of the text's translation history. To begin to expose how the concept of bearing witness challenges the text's presumed role as an originating force within the field of American literary studies, it is first worthwhile to examine the text and its production history in more detail.

Cabeza de Vaca's New World Account:

In light of all the unknowns, there are certain facts about the account of Cabeza de Vaca that are fairly well-established. In 1527, a crew of approximately six hundred men left Spain for Cuba under the direction of Captain Pánfilo Narváez. They carried royal orders to explore, chart, and build fortresses across the Río de las Palmas and La Florida regions of "Tierra-Firme," the long coastline of the Gulf of Mexico's interior from the tip of the Florida peninsula to the Spanish settlement at the mouth of the Pánuco River near present day Tampico. After enduring a hurricane in a Cuban harbor, the surviving and still willing members of the ill-fated expedition left the final outpost of colonial control. The group made preliminary landfall near Tampa Bay in 1528, where (in what Cabeza de Vaca would later describe as a moment of disagreement and poor judgment) they separated from their boats. Searching in vain for Spanish settlements west, the conquistadors began to die in the unfamiliar environment, killed off by hurricanes, disease, starvation, and attack by native populations, until only four members remained to give an account of the expedition; The expedition's treasurer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, two military captains, Alonzo de Castillo Maldonado and Andres Dorantes, and an North African slave named Estevanico. Lost and left wandering, the four became the first non-indigenous peoples to cross much of what today would be the U.S. southwest, giving their account a particular

significance in the context of the region's colonial history. The group travelled from Galveston Bay across the Sierra Madres and through much of the Rio Grande basin, enduring hardships that included starvation and enslavement, and surviving much of the ordeal by acting as traders between native tribes and miracle workers. The four were eventually found near the Pacific Ocean north of Culicán in 1536, where they were outfitted by the governor of Nueva Galicia for return to Spain via Tenochtitlan and Veracruz.

Beyond this basic outline of factual events, remain a vast number of details, questions, unknowns, and seemingly inexplicable events raised by the testaments of the survivors. Of the men who endured this tremendous overland journey, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca is today the best remembered and most readily associated with the expedition by name, as his *Relación* has become the primary source for information related to the Narváez expedition and its aftermath. As such, the narrative has framed history's reception of the events for hundreds of years in a particular voice and perspective. While Cabeza de Vaca's account was initially compulsory, in the preface to this text, Cabeza de Vaca describes how a particular need to give account motivated his decision to do so, writing:

De mi puedo decir que en la jornada que por mandado de Vuestra Magistad hice de tierra firme, bien pensé que mis obras y servicios fueran tan claros y manifiestos como fueron los de mis antepassados... [pero] por nuestros peccados permittiesse Dios que quantas armadas a aquellas tierras han ido ninguna se viese en tan grandes peligros ni tuviese tan miserable y desastrado fin, no me quedó lugar para hacer más servicio de éste, que es traer a Vuestra Magestad relación de lo que en diez años que por muchas y muy estrañas tierras que anduve perdido y en cueros pudiese saber y ver” (*Naufragios*, 76).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “For myself I can say that on the journey to the mainland I took by command of Your Majesty, well I thought my deeds and services would be as illustrious and manifest as those of my ancestors ...[but] since for our sins God permitted that for as many fleets as have gone to those lands none ever saw itself in such grave dangers or had such a wretched and disastrous end, I had no opportunity to perform greater service than this, which is to bring Your Majesty an account of all that in ten years in the many and very strange lands that I walked lost and naked through I was able to learn and see.” Here and elsewhere, quotes from *Naufragios* come from a version of

In this well cited passage, Cabeza de Vaca explains the purpose of his account to be the recording of what he “was able to learn and see” of the Americas. In doing so, he establishes the importance of bearing witness as a primary theme of the text. Yet from the outset, the idea of bearing witness is also contextualized by the fact that the ten year sojourn about to be recounted took place while wandering “lost and naked” through the wilderness. This significant caveat amounts to Cabeza de Vaca’s admission that the expedition was a failure both in terms of his desire to replicate the “illustrious and self-evident deeds” of conquest performed by his ancestors, as well as in terms of the expeditions inability to locate the precious metals and establish the colonial outposts which would have made the journey a success in the eyes of the King.<sup>6</sup>

The admission to ‘wandering naked’ also hints at the group’s other, more taboo failure, which was its inability to maintain a level of civilized behavior that could reproduce a “culture of conquest” or an ideology of European cultural superiority to Native Americans within the context of their passage through the new world (Rabasa 46). According to the account, as the group wandered lost and further separated from one another, they not only became reliant of native populations for their very existence, but even enslaved by them at times. The dependency and enslavement of the colonist by the local represents a full inversion of the culture of conquest that allowed the ideological perpetuation of Spanish colonialism in the new world. Yet it was the acceptance of indigenous cultural practices and beliefs that perhaps presented the greatest threat

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the text whose Spanish has been modernized, however in certain instances the punctuation has been changed to more closely reflect the original based on Adorno and Pautz, volume two.

<sup>6</sup> Cabeza de Vaca came from a distinguished family from the Andalucían town of Jerez de la Frontera. The reference here to the deeds of his ancestors most explicitly invokes his paternal grandfather Pedro de Vera, who played a major role in the conquest of Gran Canaria, the largest of the Canary Islands, for Spain in 1483.

to imperial logic, suggesting that the Americas had the potential to strip Europeans of what he believed to be his inherent superiority. Given the importance of this characterization, Cabeza de Vaca's preoccupation with the stigmatizing acknowledgement of "going native" is highly visible in the language of the proem. Ilan Stavans suggests for example that the concept of "nakedness... was used to indicate an uncontaminated, natural disposition towards the environment by the natives" that highlighted the self-conscious tenuousness of Cabeza de Vaca's own status as civilized while living amongst natives (xviii). Aware of his status as one who has moved outside of the perceived limits of European civilized culture, Cabeza de Vaca's careful choice of the word "desnudo," which carries a demoralizing resonance, also suggests an apologetic appeal to his audience. Admitting to nakedness here suggests an attempt to regain dignity, and frames the narrative as an attempt to return to colonial discourse, by calling out the foreignness of the Other.

To compensate for his proclaimed failures and further the threat of his nakedness, Cabeza de Vaca offers his *Relación* as a kind of proto-ethnographic documentation of the lands and peoples he encountered. While a seemingly humble substitute for the riches and colonial acquisition originally promised by the expedition, Cabeza de Vaca probably had good reason to think that his ability to bear witness in a written account was valuable to the crown, as well as to his re-affirmation of the culture of conquest. According to Ángel Rama, recording the conquest in America helped replicate and reinforce imperial logic, and the production of an official written record of new world exploration became a way for imperial Spain to control through reason (32). By submitting his accounts to the King, Cabeza de Vaca summoned the power of letters over the new world empire as a kind of substitute or supplement for the failed physical possession of La Florida, or the extraction of any potentially lucrative resources or plunder. The geographic and

ethnographic information contained in the text not only provided valuable information that could be used for subsequent expeditions and colonial endeavors, but along with other maps and historical documents of the period participated in the creation of an kind of archive, produced for and circulated among the European educated elite in the early sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Cabeza de Vaca's ability to bear witness thus had a highly specific purpose and value related to his attempt at compensating for his failures within the logic of the Spanish imperial project. However, the question of bearing witness, and indeed how to read and interpret the idea of bearing witness in the text, becomes more complex when positioned within the larger editorial history of *Naufragios*, as Cabeza de Vaca's account became known.

The textual history of *Naufragios*:

Published in 1555, the text most widely available to the general public is actually the last of four known versions of the narrative attributed or partially attributed to Cabeza de Vaca. It is also only the second of the four versions to even include the prologue from which the citation concerning bearing witness is taken. As each version of the narrative promises an authentic claim to truth that negates the possibility in the others, the discrepancies that exist between the four versions expose the disconnect between what Gérard Genette refers to as "histoire," or events as

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<sup>7</sup> Collectively this archive resulted in a fundamentally new way to describe the Christian world's territorial dimensions. In *La invención de América*, Edmundo O'Gorman presents Spanish colonialism as "un complejo proceso ideológico" that reshaped the European worldview and shifting mankind's relationship to the world and its occupants. (135). He writes that a shift in agency brought about by the radical change in the European conception of the world replaced the model of the world as an insular "island" where humans existed as subjects of God, with that of a world composed of multiple continents that required European mastery and Christianization by spreading the gospel. This new way of thinking helped Europeans reconfigure their own role in the world, providing the rationalization of the larger project of European conquest. Political and mercantile institutions like the Counsel of the Indies (founded 1524) and the House of Trade (founded 1503) therefore served as the political force to implement this system of control over the Americas.

they occur, and “*récit*,” the narrative retelling of those events (33-35).<sup>8</sup> This disconnect highlights the instability of the very notion of bearing witness, and at the same exposes a fundamental difficulty with attaching permanence or authenticity to *Naufragios* as an originating text by dispersing meaning across multiple iterations. In other words, the variation between each narrative expresses the nature of historical truth as always imperfectly represented, and reminds us that every attempt to narrate history is a socially, historically, and politically contingent act emerging from a particular subject position.

Based on what is known of the four versions of the narrative, each presents its own highly mediated perspective of the historical events of the expedition that relates specifically to the moment of its production. The first two major summaries of the events surrounding the Narvaez expedition are the “Joint Report” of 1536 and the “Cabeza de Vaca-Dorantes Report,” probably written in 1537. The two are related in that they both are the product of multiple authors, and no record of either text exists outside of citation in secondary sources. The “Joint Report” was a collaborative effort between Castillo Maldonado, Dorantes, and Cabeza de Vaca, probably penned while sojourning and recovering in Mexico City to provide sworn testimony of the expedition for Don Antonio Mendoza, the viceroy of New Spain, and the audiencia of Santo Domingo, one of New Spain’s primary governing bodies. What is known of the contents of the Joint Report today is based exclusively on seven chapters of Oviedo y Valdés’ extensive *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, for which the Joint Report served as the primary source.<sup>9</sup> Mired

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<sup>8</sup> As advanced in the narrative theory of French structuralist Gérard Genette and others. In his discussion of literary fiction, Genette distinguishes between “story time” and “narrative time” to emphasize the difference between the events as they unfold, and the “pseudo-time” in which they are narrated.

<sup>9</sup> After having an opportunity to speak with Cabeza de Vaca in 1547 and possibly to look over the manuscripts already prepared for the first publication of Cabeza de Vaca’s own *Relación*, Oviedo added a seventh chapter to his six chapter history of the expedition, emphasizing the

in its own complex editorial history (the portion of the *Historia General* pertaining to the Narvaez expedition itself remained unpublished until the mid-nineteenth century) the *Historia General* nevertheless serves as an essential source of information concerning the Narvaez expedition and Cabeza de Vaca's narrative renderings of its outcomes, told originally in the "Joint Report" and recounted by Oviedo. Significantly, Oviedo makes no mention of the proem, or any reference to the discussion of nakedness or bearing witness contained within, a point which suggests that particular configuration to be uniquely Cabeza de Vaca's.<sup>10</sup> Even less is known about the next version of the narrative, which was probably co-authored by Cabeza de Vaca and Andres Dorantes, who "desired to present this and further information to the emperor so that they could advance their plan to obtain a royal patent for the conquest of Florida" (Adorno and Pautz 3: 5). Also lost, this testimony is known only through record of its presentation to the court. While this version of the narrative was likely the first to include a proem which would identify the King as its addressee, the text's co-authorship would have culminated in a proem that looked much different than the first-person statement that we see above. The text, for example, would likely not have included a direct comparison of Cabeza de Vaca's failures to the deeds of his ancestors.

The co-authored Vaca-Dorantes report may have ultimately been a source for Cabeza de Vaca's first solo publication of his version of the narrative in 1542 (known as the Zamora edition for its place of publication), but would have required significant changes to become the text that we have today. The Zamora edition is almost certainly the version of the narrative for which the proem was written, meaning that while the role of bearing witness was perhaps never as

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discrepancy between the agreed upon events of the narrative and Cabeza de Vaca's particular version of them.

<sup>10</sup> Because the proem is addressed directly to King Charles V, it is likely that the proem either did not exist or existed in a highly modified form at this point.

significant as it was for the earliest versions of the account, bearing witness and nakedness as specific thematic structures were not introduced to the evolution of the narrative until six years after the original statements were recorded. Concerning its difference from the previous versions of the narrative, Adorno and Pautz suggest that the rationale for publishing the Zamora edition was marked by an increased level self-interest, as the legal obligation of relating the events of the expedition receded with the completion of the Joint Report. Defeated in his aspirations to return to and colonize La Florida in 1538 by Hernando De Soto (whose earlier exploits in Peru had been far more successful by Spanish colonial standards), Cabeza de Vaca took the opportunity presented by the publication of *La Relación* for self-edification by distancing himself from Narváez expedition's failure. A close comparison of the Joint Report as related by Oviedo and the Zamora edition shows that Cabeza de Vaca newly emphasized and expounded upon his disagreement with Narváez concerning the decision to leave the ships behind and move inland after landing (Oviedo 94; *Naufragios* 91-2). Adding detail to this section of the text was important to Cabeza de Vaca's self edification as the expedition was never able to make renewed contact with the ships after this point, marking it as the moment of lost contact with the Spanish colonial model. The Zamora edition, in many places, also emphasizes the healing powers Cabeza de Vaca donned over native populations, and his subsequent ability to pacify them in large numbers, again suggesting an emphasis on retaining imperialist European values of authority of natives. The entrance of the proem at this point in the evolution of the work is therefore consistent with these changes, as the supplementation of individual narrative ("no me quedó lugar para hazer más servicio deste") in earlier versions for collective failure ("nuestros peccados") in the proem champions a similar vision of the narrator as a victim whose adherence to the culture of conquest remained steadfast. It seems that Cabeza de Vaca's intentions were

largely validated, and that the shame he expressed for his nakedness ultimately proved redemptive, as he was shortly after granted the title of adelantado, governing not over La Florida, but over the Rio de la Plata region of South America.

The final version of the text was published in Valladolid, Spain in 1555 after Cabeza de Vaca returned from the Americas yet again in failure.<sup>11</sup> This edited and updated version of the text was included alongside a second account known as the *Comentarios*, which in quick summation is another apologetic that describes the events that transpired during the course of Cabeza de Vaca's time as adelantado of the Rio de la Plata territory.<sup>12</sup> While the text of the proem remained largely unchanged between this the Zamora and Valladolid editions, the Valladolid edition included an additional proem attached to the *Comentarios* section addressed to the Infante Don Carlos, King Charles V's grandson. This second and more encompassing proem addressed the rationale for publishing the two accounts together as a way to delight the young prince with tales of hardship, adventure, and reversals of fortune. Yet these themes also suggested an appeal to a general readership. In fact, after delineating the differences between the text of Zamora edition and the Valladolid edition, Adorno and Pautz conclude that:

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<sup>11</sup> Concluding the discussion of source materials, there are also a number of significant documents and letters written to Carlos V in relation to the expedition. Significant among these are two letters written in Cuba in 1527 and 1528 respectively by Cabeza de Vaca, related to the first year of the expedition that were most likely used by Oveido for his *Historia General*. Another document is the official report of from the expedition who found the survivors at Culicán. A final text, the so called "Short Report" a document with no clear marks of authorship was found as part of the Archivo General de las Indias in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and viewed by Enrique Pupo-Walker and others as a early and incomplete account of the expedition Penned by Cabeza de Vaca. Adorno and Pautz challenge this position, attributing the text instead to Alonso de Santa Cruz.

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately for Cabeza de Vaca, the expedition to Rio de la Plata also ended poorly. Having lost the support of local administrators, Cabeza de Vaca was ultimately imprisoned for his role in the failure of the colony. In this sense, having the *Comentarios* attributed to Hernández added a level of objectivity that counterbalanced the first person narration of the *Relación*, leaving the extent of Cabeza de Vaca's influence over its construction a perennial point of speculation.

Unlike the 1542 publication which had been directed to the emperor and aimed at a mostly professional, Indies oriented audience accustomed to reading long, unbroken reports, the new edition and its companion *Comentarios*, and most especially its proem, were geared to engage a wider range of readers. The principal work was now billed as a remarkable tale of calamities (*naufragios*). Along with the accompanying narrative, it provided the armchair traveler of the sixteenth century with news from the northern and southern reaches of Spain's American empire... In this new publication readers would be entertained and edified (3: 89).

In this passage, Adorno and Pautz suggest that the primary function the act of bearing witness in *Naufraios*, as compared to earlier versions, is related more to Cabeza de Vaca's goal of keeping readers "entertained and edified" than his need to replicate colonial logic. Combining the adoption of the markedly more literary title *Naufraios* with the presentation of the expedition as a "remarkable tale of calamities," this version of the text shows a continued departure from *histoire* and further crystallization of the recit as a subjective product of the author as a method for commercial success in an effort to turn his 'failures' in the New World into something profitable.<sup>13</sup>

With limited success in his lifetime, Cabeza de Vaca's efforts were in fact realized by time. Of the four primary narratives, the Valladolid edition, or a version of the Zamora edition that references edits made in the 1555 edition, has enjoyed global circulation, serving as the definitive text for nearly every subsequent publication in the narrative's historical lineage both in Spanish and in translation. But while the emergence of a standardized version of the narrative in the form of *Naufraios* greatly facilitates its reproducibility, its privileged position as the primary text for the dissemination of the events over time and across traditions also raises a number of problems. For example, reliance on *Naufraios* as the authoritative (or only) version comes at

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<sup>13</sup> While the more literal translation of the word "naufraios" is passed over here in favor of the more general "calamities" it is probably more accurate to think of the word as carrying a double signification here, where shipwreck and calamity are evoked simultaneously. It should also be noted that the title *Naufraios* may ultimately be a reference to Oveido's use of the term to describe the expedition in his prologue to book 35, cited at beginning of this chapter.

the expense of the other sources for the Narváez expedition, and serves to naturalize and cover over the diverging truths constituted in the multiple versions of the narrative. Second, the Valladolid edition is properly speaking a fragment, removed from a larger context that included narratives of both Cabeza de Vaca's trips to the new world. As part of a larger work, the section of the Valladolid edition dealing with the Narvaéz expedition was changed in ways that suggest that the text speaks as much to its moment of publication as it does to the time of the expedition itself. Finally, the intended audience of the 1555 edition is markedly different than the text's named addressee, Charles V, as the text became marketed as a commercial product. The points outlined above undermine the idea that the final version is the most complete and therefore most reliable text, a mode of thinking has influenced interpretations of the text for centuries.<sup>14</sup>

Tellingly, the idea that the final version of the text is the authoritative version is both perpetuated and undercut by the translation, which both promises and reifies the status of the 1555 edition, but gives the reader something that is different.

### Literary Readings and the Historical Inscription

The relationship between the four primary-source versions of the account and subsequent translations can be productively approached through Sandra Bermann's writing on the temporal quality of translation, and what she refers to as the "historical inscription" that to varying degrees is carried over by historically based narratives, first from the original event to the text that describes it, and then through subsequent translations (250). For Bermann, the historical inscription is akin to Benjamin's notion of pure language as described in the introduction, insofar as it "allows the past to 'survive,'" while rendering it in a unique and always incomplete way.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Pupo-Walker 73 and Stavans 19.

The historical inscription also resembles Genette's *histoire*, as something akin to objective historical truth that is manipulated by the *recit* (Bermann 257). By identifying the original itself as a kind of translation of historical objectivity, Bermann's writing on the historical inscription helps justify the claim that, in the case of Cabeza de Vaca's account, each of the four primary sources is a separate attempt to manipulate access to an ultimately unobtainable historical truth. This revelation is important to the discussion of the text in translation as it relates to the construction of a literary canon, insofar as the historical inscription is an important issue at the heart of redefining the origins of American literature. This is particularly true given the importance of history to the origins of numerous national literary traditions, including texts by the English language colonial writers authors more traditionally placed at the beginning of the U.S. literary canon, and whose writing was more often than not grounded in the effort to preserve a historical record.

The evolution of the historical inscription through the different versions of Cabeza de Vaca's account is also directly related to the role of bearing witness in the text. Like the historical inscription, the objective truth of Cabeza de Vaca's experiences wandering across the American continent were adapted into the language of his narrative through the act of bearing witness, and like translations the multiple versions of Cabeza de Vaca's account show how bearing witness promises access to the original through a mediating force. In other words, across the four iteration of the text, Cabeza de Vaca shows an ability to control and manipulate the objective truth of his experiences for his own purposes in much the same way as Bermann's historical inscription can become manipulated through translation, even while remaining essentially connected to an objective historical event. As suggested above, one of the principle ways that Cabeza de Vaca manipulates his narrative is by exposing the tension between bearing

witness as an ethnographic endeavor, and providing information relevant to the colonial project at the behest of the crown, and as a literary endeavor meant to entertain Spain's growing reading population and profit from sales of the narrative. Moving forward chronologically, the ethnographic value of the text evolved into a more literary form. This is not to say that literature and ethnography exist or should be placed on opposite ends of a continuum. In fact, in almost all cases where the two concepts exist in a single narrative they do so in a codependent and complimentary way. Rather, the example of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative iterations simply suggest that revision and rewriting (the same processes that go into translation) can empower individuals to emphasize certain elements of the text while deemphasizing others.

At first glance, the ethnographic quality of bearing witness, and indeed of even the most literary iteration of Cabeza de Vaca's text, is difficult to suppress or ignore. As previously stated, the ethnographic imperative was instrumental to the initial crafting of the text, insofar as providing information about unknown portions of the Americas helped Cabeza de Vaca redeem his failure from within the context of the Spanish imperial logic. In truth however, the appeal of knowing the unknown is an effect achieved through ethnographic exposition that has contributed greatly to the narrative's endurance across generations, as evidenced by the robust presence of the book in historical scholarship in both English and Spanish. This is true of important sections of the text such as Chapter XXIII, which deals with the customs of a particular tribe in the vicinity of the Rio Grande, whose customs marriage, childbirth, and the role of women in inter-tribal fighting have spawned significant research into gender roles in pre-colonial America.<sup>15</sup> Reading the text for ethnographic details requires a level of confidence in the narrator and an assumption that the historical inscription remains more or less intact through the narrator's act of

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<sup>15</sup> For a strong contemporary example of this research see Slater and Yarbrough.

bearing witness, or at the very least an acknowledgement that any potential biases or inaccuracies caused by the narrator can only be taken at face value given the relative absence of additional materials on the subject.

Concerning the manipulation of the historical inscription in subsequent iterations of the narrative, one of the most frequent observations made about *Naufragios* as the de facto authoritative version of the text is that its narrative resembles a work of fiction. Supporting this vision of the literary quality of the text, Jose Rabasa engages in a sustained discussion of the literary qualities of *La Relación* that have made Cabeza de Vaca “one of the most romantic of the conquistadors” (41). According to Rabasa, Cabeza de Vaca’s “writings inaugurate some of the most vivid and familiar *topoi* in representations of colonial encounters,” referring to “those discursive spaces and places of memory –barbarism, cannibalism, superstition, evolutionary stages, as well as shipwreck and its travails, saintliness, going native –that written accounts re-elaborate in the construction of a Western self and a colonial subject as its Other” (41). Consistent with the identification of the Valladolid edition’s distinct purpose of entertainment described above, Rabasa asserts that Cabeza de Vaca would have been conscious of the Romantic qualities of these *topoi*, and their power within a “plot structure...endows otherwise univocal statements with symbolism [and] transforms the facts of a *relación* into an allegory” (49). Here, the allegorical quality of the text can be said to rest in the attribution of deeper symbolic meaning to events that, at the level of historic truth, may not have carried that level of significance or even happened in the first place.

Given the allegorical quality of the text, *Naufragios* can thus be thought of in terms of what Hayden White refers to as a “historical narrative” or a history that relies on established narrative forms that cause readers to “comprehend” the text in a way that is contingent upon the

established conventions of a given genre (20). In the case of *Naufragios*, in aiming to please the Infante Don Carlos, Cabeza de Vaca relied on narrative structures already popularized in medieval Spain by the circulation of romantic and epic poetry.<sup>16</sup> One example of Cabeza de Vaca's reliance on the epic is his late inclusion of a detail concerning his captor at a time of slavery in a place he called the "Isla de Malhado" having only one eye (*Naufragios* xxi). Not only is the detail (which was not included in any of the early versions of the narrative) symbolically evocative the grotesque quality of his captors, figuration it also created an offhand reference to the oppressive and grotesque qualities of Narvaez himself, who had famously lost an eye in an earlier expedition to Mexico in an effort to relieve Hernán Cortés of his military command.<sup>17</sup> This detail makes a symbolic reference to the Cyclops of Homer's *Odyssey*, a point that emphasizes Cabeza de Vaca's conscious invocation of the epic form. This comparison of *Naufragios* to the epic is also consistent with what can be determined from its variation from the Joint Report, insofar as one of the major structural changes made between the two editions was the inclusion of events leading up to the 1528 landing in Cuba, as well as an inclusion of events that took place after the survivors finally reunited with other Europeans. The inclusion of these two components, one at the beginning of the narrative and one at the end, helps *Naufragios* to

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<sup>16</sup> Irving Leonard discusses the relationship between the culture of the Spanish conquistador and the themes of chivalry and honor popular in Iberian literature that helped shape it (30-52).

<sup>17</sup> The description of the captor as physically disfigured reinforces the commonplace depiction of unknown regions of the world as populated by monsters and/or physically deformed humans. Among these depictions is Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Chronicarum* (commonly known as the Nuremberg Chronicles), which contained a map representing at the outmost regions of the world, among other grotesque and fantastic beings, a one eyed human. Published around 1493, the text could very well have been known to Cabeza de Vaca.

replicate the structural arch of the epic, which typically begins with a departure from home and ends with a return.<sup>18</sup>

By placing himself at the center of an epic tale of New World adventure, Cabeza de Vaca found a way to make his deeds resonate in the annals of history (even as his proem claims he cannot) by depicting himself as an epic hero capable of performing miracles.<sup>19</sup> Of course, by utilizing familiar literary techniques of the time to structure his narrative, Cabeza de Vaca puts into question reliability of the text's historical inscription, and the veracity of his commitment to bear witness. But regardless of the level of objective truth found in the text, the content of the narrative has been passed down through generations as containing its own 'truth,' which even containing all the inconsistencies, slipperiness, and subjective baggage described above, serves as the original from which any translation of the text begins. With a better understanding of how the different versions of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative act like translations in their relationship to the manipulation of the historical inscription, it is possible to turn to the English language translation history of the text, which also exposes tension between the ethnographic and the literary applications of the narrative.

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<sup>18</sup> Significantly, the allegorical quality of *La Relación* discussed by Rabasa has also played a prominent role in the text's English language reception history. One can see this for example in one of the earliest histories to engage Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, Morris Bishop's 1933 "*The Odyssey of Cabeza de Vaca*." Bishop's description of the history as an "odyssey" makes a gesture towards its relationship to the epic poetry of Ancient Greece that emphasizes the constructed narrative form of the text that has not been lost on subsequent scholarship. The importance of the text's epic quality within the English language tradition helps to naturalize its im/position at the foundation of the American literary tradition by appealing to both its literary aspect and its bearing on familiar Western European traditions.

<sup>19</sup> Ilan Stavans' interpretation of the "myth of the conquistador" is that it more closely approximates the modern novel than the classic epic (x). Stavans calls the narrative "a veritable descent into chaos... In modern times, this type of literature is made famous by books like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, in which the European traveler finds himself, unexpectedly, at the edge of the earth, alone and lonely and unsure of his culture" (ix-x).

Early Translations:

*The narrative of Cabeza de Vaca is very difficult to translate for the reason, that the criticism by Oveido about its lack of clearness is too well founded...It is as if the author, in consequence of long isolation and constant intercourse with people of another speech, had lost touch with his native tongue. –Adolph Bandelier*

When considering the status of the English translation of *Naufragios*, it is worth noting that the ability of the translator and the translation to bring new meaning to the text has its own particular history that can be traced at least as far back as its several key forays into nineteenth century American English. Faced with a substantial gap in both culture and time, early ethnographers of the American borderlands became interested in Spanish colonial texts like *Naufragios* that provided insight into the history of regions newly added to the U.S. territory, and also in making these primary texts available to English language readers.<sup>20</sup> During the nineteenth century, Cabeza de Vaca's narrative was translated into English twice, and in both instances the translation can be associated to a desire to gain political control over contested borderland regions. The publication dates of these two translations (1851 and 1905 respectively) provide a historic framework for the legacy of the translation that is inseparable from major historical events in the development of the U.S./Mexican borderlands, when changes prompted anxieties and desires within the U.S. public sphere over the conversion of this culturally diverse and foreignized region into a part of the national body. As the two nineteenth century translations played a significant role in the sudden rush of translations into English in the nineteenth and two-thousands, comparing these translations helps set the stage for further inquiry into the

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<sup>20</sup> Taken as a whole, the nineteenth century revival of Cabeza de Vaca's text through translation is interpreted as an extension of what Anna Brickhouse and others have identified as the "hispanophilia" of nineteenth century literary production, demarcated by an increase of fiction that appropriated the setting of the pre-colonial Spanish Americas, and other literary works that reflected the "various transamerican historical and literary inheritances" of Spanish American within the literary tradition (Brickhouse, 7).

translated text that now assumes a central spot in the American literary tradition. Given their dates of publication, the two translations also help recover a lost dialogue between nineteenth century U.S. imperial interests throughout the Gulf of Mexico and the more commonly discussed U.S. continental expansion into Northern Mexico.

The first translation is Thomas Buckingham Smith's 1851 *Relation of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca*. Smith's interest in the regions and peoples of Florida resulted in the translation of not only *Naufragios*, but also texts that included several linguistic surveys of indigenous languages, including a comparison of the Seminole and Mikasuke languages, and the recovery and translation of several notable published and unpublished Spanish documents relating to early Florida history (such as the Knight of Elvas account of the DeSoto expedition). Smith was a prominent lawyer and government official residing in St. Augustine who openly advocated American development throughout the state. In this role, he acted as a co-author of the U.S. national lands committee treatise authorizing the draining of the Everglades in 1848 to increase the availability of land for American settlement. Given his political and professional aspirations, it is not difficult to connect his desire to make the polylingual history accessible to English language readers to a development strategy for the state. In its original publication of one hundred copies, Smith's translation was also accompanied by, and largely a vessel for, updated maps of Florida's gulf coast region he produced himself, suggesting a strong correlation between the translation of the text and the consolidation of power over sparsely populated and difficult to access areas (Stavans xxvii).

As an agent of U.S. land interests in Florida, Smith was without a doubt acutely aware of the yet unresolved Seminole Wars, which raged in Florida from 1835 to 1842 and continued unresolved until Andrew Jackson took Pensacola in 1856, and the ramifications of this conflict

on continued U.S. settlement and development of the region. During this period, Seminole Indians resisted governmental relocation programs and fought viciously against U.S. forces marching against them.<sup>21</sup> Native familiarity with local topography made Smith's maps a valuable commodity for the advancement of U.S. forces into border regions within the political boundaries of the state, but beyond the reach of U.S. settlement and authority. In this sense, Smith's translation of *Naufragios* was not only an explicit Anglicization of Floridian historical documents (and by extension a metaphorical conquest over history itself), but also participated in the Anglicization of contested areas claimed as both U.S. territory and Seminole tribal lands. Here the theme of geographic and political control through the construction of an archive is achieved in part through an act of translation.

Looking more closely at the translation itself, it becomes clear that Smith was also motivated by a desire to rationalize the narrative through paratextual materials beyond his maps and inserts, including extensive footnoting and an appendix of several translated official documents related to the narrative, such as a treatise on Native Americans in Florida, Cabeza de Vaca's royal instructions in his role as treasurer, and Missionary letters proclaiming the recovery of the lost expedition members. The 1871 publication of Smith's translation, printed shortly after Smith's death and for the first time in a public edition, includes a biography of Smith that contextualizes his role as translator within the context of his life, and an introduction by the editor on the occasion of Smith's death. In this introduction, Smith's translation is described as one that "intended to be literal," with an acknowledgement made in a note to the reader to the importance of the text to Florida, and the Southwestern United States, and "the lovers of our early history," with "our" made clear through context to refer to English speaking white

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<sup>21</sup> A comprehensive set of contemporary texts concerning the role of U.S. expansionist policy on relations with the Seminole tribe can be found in Belko.

Americans (Smith iii-x). Smith's annotations are thorough, referencing where appropriate areas of divergence between the 1542 and 1555 editions (Smith refers to the edition as dating from 1550) as well as areas where Oveido's text adds to or contradicts Cabeza de Vaca's narrative. The principle focus, like the focus of much of his other work on the Spanish colonial period, is the accurate mapping of particular native tribes described in the text along with their associated languages and habits, and much of this work is achieved through sourcing and cross referencing with other scholarly texts. The concentration on the ethnographic adds to the sense that the text requires a rationalizing presence in the form of paratextual interjection to maximize the intellectual value and utility of the text.

This also means that the least conceivable elements of the narrative are particularly relevant to this discussion, as they posed the greatest threat to the integrity of the historical inscription. In this regard, one of the most challenging sections of the narrative is Chapter XXII of the Zamora edition, which in a very dense portion of the text details both Cabeza de Vaca's resurrection of men, and his recounting of the mala cosa that he claims the local population described to him. Looking at examples from different areas of this chapter and how different translators engage the text provides a basis from which to discuss how the Smith translation engages the task of translation, as well as how it compares to other subsequent English language translations of the text. The language of the "original" 1555 edition of the narrative describes how Cabeza de Vaca was called upon to heal the sick after others of the Susola tribe they had been living with described "relief" of headache after receiving the sign of the cross and a blessing from Castillo. Implored in the words of Smith to "perform cures" Cabeza de Vaca explains:

[y] quando llegué cerca de los ranchos que ellos tenían, yo ví el enfermo que íbamos a curar que estaba muerto, porque estaba mucha gente de derredor de él llorando y su casa

desecha, que es señal que el dueño estava muerto. Así, cuando yo llegué, hallé el indio los ojos vueltos y sin ningún pulso, y con todas señales de muerto; y según a mí me pareció y lo mismo dijo Dorantes (157).

Which Smith translates as follows:

Coming near the huts, I perceived that the sick man we went to heal was dead. Many persons were around him weeping, and his house was prostrate, a sign that the one who dwelt in it is no more. When I arrived I found his eyes rolled up, and the pulse gone, he having all the appearances of death as they seemed to me and as Dorantes said (121).

Looking at the grammatical composition of the translation, it seems that Smith favored a simplified style which breaks thoughts up into smaller and more straightforward sentences, choosing for example the concise “coming near there huts” for “quando llegué cerca de los ranchos que ellos tenían.” This style is further exemplified by the period inserted between the ideas “I perceived that the sick man we went to heal was dead” and “many people were around him weeping and his house was prostrate,” where one does not exist in the Spanish. Where the Spanish creates a relationship between the recognition of death and the weeping and the flattening of the house, Smith’s text suggests that the identification of death is tied primarily to visual observation of the body. The cultural practices of weeping and the flattening of the house thus become a distinct issue whose truth is conditioned by, but not a condition of, the observation of death implied in the Spanish.

The translator’s decision here relates to his primary goal, which is to establish Cabeza de Vaca’s authority as a witness whose cultural superiority permits a reliable ethnographic account. Establishing death on objective analysis rather than the cultural practices associated with death after creates an image of Cabeza de Vaca as someone whose perception is grounded in reason and scientific practices. Conflating the two, as the Spanish does, disperses the subject position of the speaker so that it also operates within the logic of the cultural practices that are being

observed, as they become a condition or confirmation of the state of death. The scientific quality of objective analysis in Smith's translation is reinforced in the final segment of the translation, which confirms the defining qualities or "appearances of death" "as Dorantes said" as if in reference an authoritative voice. The Spanish is more ambiguous, with "lo mismo dijo Dorantes" referring to the appearance of death ("me pareció") rather than to death's empirical signature.

Creating a rational and scientific speaker, Smith's translation linguistically isolates the cultural practices of the Susola tribe relating to the mourning of the dead from the perceptive authority of the European speaker/observer. To further capitalize on this turn, Smith includes a footnote that draws the narrative as translated into conversation with contemporary historical work *The Spanish Conquest of New Mexico* by W. W. H. Davis. After the statement, "many persons were around him weeping, and his house was prostrate, a sign that the one who dwelt in it is no more" the work by Davis is cited to confirm that "[t]he same custom prevails among the Navajo Indians, who either burn or pull down the lodge in which a person dies" (127). Against the findings of different nineteenth century Anglo "authority" on the Southwest, Smith is able to give greater academic meaning to his translation through a comparative ethnography that contextualizes what is known of Navajo cultural practice with what Cabeza de Vaca's narrative relates concerning the Susola. And while the reliability of Cabeza de Vaca's voice in translation is necessary to make this comparative move, it is also reified by its very introduction into the discursive space of nineteenth century cultural science, and by making a significant contribution to a knowledge base concerning the recently opened territory of the new western half of the United States, as well as on the eve of defeat for the Florida Seminole.

Published just over fifty years after the first publication of Smith's *Relation of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca*, Fanny Bandelier's 1905 *The Journey of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca* is the

second translation of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative into English, and like its predecessor is conditioned by the background and interests of its translator. Fanny Bandelier was an anthropologist interested in indigenous Mexicans and native groups of New Mexico, and particularly the Pueblos. Her work in the field is often diminished by the figure of her husband, nineteenth century archeologist, anthropologist, and self-proclaimed "explorer" of Spanish America, Adolph Bandelier, who also wrote an introduction issued with the translation in lieu of the aforementioned proem. While the couple often worked on ethnographic research and translation projects together, it was Adolph who, according to the gendered constraints of academic production at the time, was generally credited with their collective findings. Because translation was not perceived at the time as requiring the same level of intellectual originality as an anthropological study, the fact that the Bandelier translation is attributed to Fanny stands both as a rare testament to her contribution to the intellectual work of the couple, as well as to the limitations placed on her influence. While translation credit is given to Mrs. Bandelier, the publication of the work still requires male authorization in the form of a preface, which also becomes the space for the masculine tasks of analysis and interpretation. The Bandelier translation is part of a larger corpus of writing that at various times combined historical evidence, scientific observation, and fiction to create a picture of the pre-colonial past of the American Southwest. While the Bandeliers relied heavily on Spanish language colonial texts for descriptions of tribes prior to extensive European contact, their writing is often tinged with a discourse of the exotic that romanticized southwestern geography and history that links them their contemporaries (most notably longtime friend and epistolary correspondent Charles Lummis).<sup>22</sup> Like Smith's translation, the Bandelier translation can be tied to the imperial history

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<sup>22</sup> This vision of the Bandeliers' work is supported, for example, by Adolph Bandelier's 1890

of the U.S., but in this case to the consolidation of power over the Southwest borderland territories as they transitioned to U.S. statehood and stabilized the position of the modern border.

Reflecting this difference in historical moment, there is a shift in focus in the Bandelier translation from a preoccupation with the reliability of Cabeza de Vaca as a narrator as described in the Smith translation, to his veritable unreliability. This transition is particularly evident in the introduction, which cautions English language readers that “very serious objections to the credibility [of the narratives] arises from the fact that all are based upon recollections only, and not upon journals or field notes of any kind” (xvi). The warning here, accompanied by a number of detailed critiques, corrections, and inquiries into the veracity of specific moments in the narrative, suggests that that the text’s more “unbelievable” elements were to the detriment of scientific documentation and therefore a shortcoming of the text. Yet by diminishing the authority of Cabeza de Vaca over the ethnographic observation of pre-colonial America, the Bandeliers also created a space for their own cultural authority.<sup>23</sup> This point is also made clear in the introduction, which states in no uncertain terms that “a perusal of the narrative shows that the forlorn wanderers were *not* –as it has long been admitted- the ‘discoverers of New Mexico.’

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novel *The Delight Makers*, which combines romantic fiction with long interludes pertaining to Bandelier’s anthropological and linguistic findings. Comments like the following discussing a character’s reticence on a particular topic are common: “If the Indian is not an ideal being, he is still less a stolid mentally squalid brute. He is not reticent out of imbecility or mental weakness. He fails properly to understand much of what takes place around him, especially what happens within the circle of our modern civilization, but withal he is far from indifferent toward his surroundings. He observes, compares, thinks, reasons, upon whatever he sees or hears, and forms opinions from the basis of his own peculiar culture (202).”

<sup>23</sup> As an extension of this point, it should be noted that the Bandeliers were indeed aware of the multiple iterations of the text leading up to the Valladolid edition, and hint at their recognition of the difficulty of pinpointing an original within that history during their discussion of the narrative versions. Their recognition of the indeterminate gap between the objective history as absolute original and any version of the narrative is only emphasized by their observation that the text was not the product of thorough note taking as described above. The Bandeliers’ claim to have consulted both the Zamora and Valladolid editions in the production of their translation, although close textual analysis suggests otherwise.

They never saw, nor did they claim to have seen, any of the so-called ‘Pueblos.’ They only heard of them, in a more or less confused manner” (vi). Identifying the Spaniards as “confused,” and refusing them the discovery of New Mexico provides a historical corrective to the early history of the Southwest that at once undermines the lineage of the Spanish imperial project in the region and creates a space for (their own) Anglo authority on the subject. Making this move would have been particularly important at a time when control over the borderlands was concentrated on establishing American superiority over the still vibrant Mexican and Spanish influences of the region. In this sense, the transition between the Smith and Bandelier translations highlights a shift in concern from the desire to garner evidence concerning Native American culture and geography to a desire to discredit Spanish authority in that same academic space.

The shift towards Cabeza de Vaca as an unreliable narrator also extends to the depiction of the American Southwest as a place of beauty and wild mystery, and accompanies a sweeping trend towards depictions of Native Americans as noble individuals whose connections with the land gave them and their cultural practices mystical qualities.<sup>24</sup> Their displacement from the land is generally portrayed as a foregone conclusion, however regrettable in the context of the power and beauty associated with this mysticism, leaving the role of the anthropologist to recreate the allure of unreachable difference in the space of academic historiography. That the Bandeliers were interested in depicting Native American culture as an alluring and powerful force is evidenced in Mrs. Bandelier’s translation style. The translation of the passage referenced above concerning the body Cabeza de Vaca was meant to heal is also telling here. Bandelier translates the passage as:

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<sup>24</sup> This trend is explained in detail in chapter three of this work, as represented in the writing of Mary Austin, Helen Hunt Jackson, and others.

When I came close to their ranches I saw that the dying man we had been called to cure was dead, for there were many people around him weeping and his lodge was torn down, which is a sign that the owner has died. I found the Indian with eyes upturned, without pulse and with all the marks of lifelessness. At least it seemed to me, and Dorantes said the same (106).

Unlike in the Smith translation, as a result of Bandelier's word choice and grammatical decision making the visual confirmation of the dead body is completely consumed by its reliance on indigenous knowledge. Here the phrase "for there were" creates a conditional tie between the idea "I saw the man...was dead" and the cultural practices associated with death, so that the fact of death is confirmed not by external objective or scientific reason, but according to the logic of the Susola people. Further, after "the marks of lifelessness" are listed in their own sentence, a second sentence provides the rather ambiguous summation "[a]t least it seemed to me" of his overall impression of the state of the man. This contrasts to the Smith translation, which ties the visual evidence of scientific death to directly with Cabeza de Vaca's judgment concerning the body by placing the two ideas in the same sentence. Here in the Bandelier translation, Dorantes simply agrees with Cabeza de Vaca that the body seemed dead. In the Smith translation, it is the empirical evidence confirming death that is "as Dorantes said" as explained above. The net effects of Bandelier's decisions concerning translation are consistent with the idea that the text was working to discredit Cabeza de Vaca as an authoritative, reliable, and rational source. The Cabeza de Vaca constructed by the Bandeliers is consumed by indigenous logic, showing the power and pull of a culture which by the time of publication had been domesticated by generations of contact first with Europeans and later with the Mexican and U.S. national projects.

These differences in depicting Cabeza de Vaca in translation are particularly relevant to what comes next in the narrative, which has been read as both Cabeza de Vaca's resurrecting this

body and others through divine intervention, and the slightly less striking healing of a sickness whose symptoms resembled death through divine intervention. The Zamora edition suggests that “después de santiguado y solpado muchas veces” the afflicted bodies came to life and walked and ate and spoke. Referring to the bodies again as “muerto” before the sign of the cross is made and the bodies are blown upon, the narrative then proceeds to backtrack and give the explanation that the dead were actually “malo de modorra,” which Smith translates as “were sick of a stupor” and Bandelier translates as “were suffering from vertigo.” This may have been included in 1555 by a self-interested Cabeza de Vaca to reinforce a fine line between performing miracles in the name of God and necromancy or performing as a false God. Regardless, providing the reader with strong textual hints as to the reliability of Cabeza de Vaca leading up to this challenging interpretive moment helps Smith maintain course in using the text as a source for ethnographic information. For the Bandeliers it helps make the case that the pre-colonial southwest was an exotic site of mysterious deeds and collapsing social distinctions, and paints their field of research as both desirable from a marketing standpoint and important to bring a reliable Anglo authority to rationalize a region where the Spanish had clearly fell short.

### Modern Translations of the Text

Taken together, the two nineteenth century translations of Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative mark the text’s entrance into the English language tradition as mired in expansionist ideology and the domestication of the Anglo Southwest. It is important to recognize this history, and ask in turn the degree to which it weighs upon the text in translation today. Because modern English language translations and editions are either directly developed from or make reference to the work of these nineteenth century translators, there is a discernible line of influence that can

inform the discussion of how the English language version of the text operates as a foundational text of the U.S. literary canon today. While nineteenth century translators were primarily focused on ethnographic accounts of native populations, a much greater emphasis in modern translations is now placed on the text's literary aspect, as suggested both by the paratextual content and decisions made within the text by its various translators. This transition from ethnographic to literary priority is most evident two translations, both of which were published in 1993, at roughly the same time that the narrative was being adopted across American literary anthologies, and each without any explicit reference to the other.

Before continuing on to these two translations, there is one earlier twentieth century translation that is worth noting here as it played an influential role in the production of both. The first translation of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative to come after the Smith and Bandelier translations is Cyclone Covey's 1961 translation *Cabeza de Vaca's Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America*. As might be inferred by the very title of the text, Covey's translation is extremely free in its interpretation of the Spanish language text. Covey breaks the text into chapters that only loosely correspond with those provided in the 1555 edition (the 1542 edition did not contain chapter breaks) adding over twenty additional chapters, and also transposes certain episodes of the Spanish language narrative into different sections of his translation. These changes are made based on his conviction that the 1555 edition was edited by someone other than Cabeza de Vaca, and that his chapter titles and transpositions "fit the text better" (18). Finally, rather than commenting on the text from a location outside of the text such as in footnotes, all of Covey's notes on the text are placed in brackets and inserted directly into the translation "to speed and simplify the reading." The result gives the impression of casual interjection, and places Covey's voice on equal footing with the translated text that his analysis is woven into. Thus in addition to

being one of the most liberal translations of the Spanish, Covey's text provides the most visually mediated reading experiences of any of the other translations.

Given Covey's willingness to recreate the original for the sake of comprehension and ease of reading in the target language, it seems surprising that he says his work "is deeply indebted to the more literal Smith version" rather than the Bandelier version which he also had access to (19). In truth, while Covey's translation may often defer to Smith for particular choices concerning a word or phrase, the text represents an important step in the translation history insofar as it pushes the limits of domesticating translation practices to create a text easily comprehensible by a general English language reading public, sacrificing attention to the essence of the original at any cost to further this goal. A simple example suffices here, and concerning the now familiar Susola cultural practices surrounding death Covey writes "many mourners were weeping around him, and his house was set to be burned with the other possessions of the dead has no textual basis, but becomes part of the text in Covey's translation.

After its 1961 publication, Covey's translation became the default English language version of the text until 1993, when as mentioned above, two separate translations of the book were published. While the problems inherent to Covey's domesticating view of translation will be discussed in more detail below, it is worth noting that Covey did make Cabeza de Vaca's narrative accessible to the general English speaking public as no other edition had. It also helped facilitate the transition of the translated text within the U.S. national context towards the literary. While Covey's rationale for updating the translation is that he is "the first to take advantage of the scientific findings of half a century which culminate in Sauer and Hallenbeck," the translation also presents the text as a literary document as neither Smith nor Bandelier had

previously done (3).<sup>25</sup> In addition to choosing the title “Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America,” which itself promises a compelling narrative in the well established “adventure” genre. The first words of Covey’s text call the narrative an “odyssey” and “one of the great true epics of history” (9). The inclusion of inline details not present in any version of the Spanish language text also pushes the narrative further from historical accuracy.

In 1983, a republication of Covey’s text also became the vessel for an epilogue by William T. Pilkington which suggests that the value of the text as a precursor of modern American literature outweighs its historical significance. In 2003, Martin Favata and José Fernández called this argument “one of the most readable studies” of the narrative as a literary text and cite it to formulate the introduction to their own translation of the narrative, *The Account: Álvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca’s Relación* (16-7). Translated as part of the “Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage” project, the Favata Fernández translation promotes the import of the text as a Spanish language document within the English language for the first time as a subaltern voice in resistance to America’s English language hegemony. This initiative is directly evident in the chosen title, which juxtaposes the English and Spanish label for the narrative (account and relación) at either end. This move draws attention to the linguistic heritage of the narrative, and of the cultural import of Spanish speaking peoples to the early history of the lands that would become part of the United States. As part of the Recovery Project, Favata and Fernandez recognized Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative as a crucial historical document relating to the precolonial American world, but also as a progenitor of a tradition of latino/a letters. It is therefore no great surprise that Favata and Fernandez rely so heavily on

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<sup>25</sup> Sauer and Hallenbeck’s research suggested that, rather than wandering hopelessly from place to place, Cabeza de Vaca and the other survivors followed indigenous footpaths that were still identifiable, creating new possibilities for mapping their route and situating the account within greater “scientific” context.

Pilkington's essay, and more generally the idea that the narrative has a fundamentally literary quality, as literary tropes and themes provide a straightforward trajectory that holds the tradition together. In fact, Favata and Fernandez justify the value of their updated translation by claiming that, "[a] new translation is needed to present in English the qualities off storytelling in the oral tradition which are found in the original" (20).

The other 2003 translation, by Enrique Pupo-Walker, is also invested in promoting the text's literary quality. The title given to the translation is *Castaways*, suggesting a complete suspension of literal translation in favor of presenting the narrative according to familiar literary tropes of the adventure genre. Supporting this reading, Pupo-Walker chooses "the primal task of naming" as a trope that "links Cabeza de Vaca's Relación to myth as well as to powerful imaginative writings represented today by Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1966) and Mario Vargas Llosa's *War of the End of the World* (1981)" (xxx). While Pupo-Walker's presentation of a Spanish colonial text as "seminal to the Hispanoamerican narrative tradition" is far less controversial than its identification to seminal of the U.S. literary tradition, doing so as a way to introduce an English language translation (and with reference to two great works of Latin American literature according to their translated title) is curious, and perhaps has the greatest bearing on the replication of a Spanish language Latin American literary tradition in English as a result of the Boom novel. The decision to highlight the theme of naming, when contrasted against the theme of witnessing discussed in the Norton Anthology is also telling in regards to the text's ability to fill different roles according to different traditions in the same moment.

To convey the literary quality of the text in translation, Pupo-Walker deploys a technique not found in any other English translation of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative to engage with the

narrative's challenging syntax and famously opaque meaning. In particular, Pupo-Walker's translation latches on to the narrative's tendency to string together multiple thoughts in long sentences that spill-over into the next with "a quality of tentativeness" that "adds to its literary tone."<sup>26</sup> There are many examples of this in the translation, including one that concerns the latter portion of the resurrection chapter as described above, when the narrative compares the healing practices of Cabeza de Vaca and the other Spaniards to a figure referred to a "mala cosa" who according to the text visited the regional tribes and heal human ailments by cutting and reaching into the flesh, removing and burying portions of entrails and cracking and resetting bones. The description in Spanish is broken down into a few sentences, which like the clauses within them build upon the previous, as displayed here at length to demonstrate the full effect of the translation:

[Q]ue decían que por aquella tierra anduvo un hombre que ellos llaman mala cosa, y que era pequeño de cuerpo, y que tenía barbas aunque nunca claramente le pudieron ver el rostro, y que quando venía a la casa donde estaban, se les levantaban los cabellos y temblaban, y luego parecía a la puerta de la casa un tizón ardiendo. Y luego aquel hombre entraba y tomaba al que quería de ellos, y dábales tres cuchilladas grandes por las ijadas con un pedernal muy agudo, tan ancho como una mano y dos palmos en luengo. Y metía la mano por aquellos cuchilladas y sacábales las tripas; y que cortaba de una tripa poco más o menos de un palmo, y aquello que cortaba echábalo en las brasas, y luego le daba tres cuchilladas en un brazo, y la segunda daba por la sangradura y desconcertábaselo. Y dende a poco, se lo tornaba a concertar, y poníale las manos sobre las heridas, y decíannos que luego quedaban sanos, y que muchas veces quando bailaban aparecía entre ellos en hábito de mujer unas veces, y otras como hombre, y quando él quería, tomaba el buhío o casa y subíala en alto, y dende a un poco caía con ella y daba muy gran golpe (159-60).

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<sup>26</sup> Common to the sixteenth century Spanish travel report, this quality of the original texts is well reported by almost every English language translator. Exemplary of the critique is Harold Augenbraum's comment in a translator's note to the "Penguin Classics" edition, from which these comments concerning the relation between syntax and tone are drawn. In addition, Augenbraum notes that, "The author frequently includes the several ideas in one long sentence 'sentence,' which, in itself, may be composed of a series of independent and dependent clauses that have few natural breaks, i.e., the stopping points expected by the reader when a single action or thought comes to an end (xli).

Broken into four sentences with seventeen clauses that begin with the conjunction ‘y,’ the text has an effect that, prior to Pupo-Walker, translators had dealt with by breaking the text down into more digestible sentences. Smith for example breaks the text into six sentences with five ‘and’ clauses, Favata and Fernández into twelve sentences with one ‘and’ clause, and Bandelier chooses to break the section into six sentences with six ‘and’ clauses. Covey separates the “Badthing” section from the resurrection passages by making it its own chapter, and this piece of the narrative is broken up into nine sentences, with two ‘and’ clauses and contains a paragraph break. In a departure from other translations, Pupo-Walker not only preserves the “literary” quality of the text created by the long strings of clauses, but actually embellishes it by making the entire section one long sentence, including twelve ‘and’ clauses. The passage in translation reads as follows:

They told us that there was in that land a man whom they call Bad Thing, and that he was small of stature and had a beard, though they could never see his face clearly; and that when he came to the house where they were their hair stood on end and they trembled; and then a firebrand, burning, appeared at the door of the house, and then that man entered and took whatever he wanted from them and gave them three great slashes in the side with a very sharp flint a handbreadth wide and two long, and that he put his hand into those slashes and pulled out their entrails, and that he cut off a piece of intestine a handbreadth wide, more or less, and threw it into the fire; and then he would cut them three times on the arm, the second cut being at the elbow, and then he would dislocate it; and soon after that he would set the arm in its place again and lay his hands on the wounds; and they told us that they would then be healed, and that often when they were dancing he appeared among them, sometimes dressed as a woman and at other times as a man, and that when he wished he could take a hut or house and lift it into the air and then, a little later, let it fall with a great crash (73-4).

Pupo-Walker’s translation takes what due to its content has become one of the most important and controversial sections of the narrative and pushes its literary quality by creating a text that flows effortlessly from one idea to the next, creating suspense that draws the reader forward and deeper into the storyline through a suspension of full pauses.

One point that deserves to be raised concerning the two translations from 1993 is that providing correct factual data concerning the Narváez expedition becomes increasingly important as the translation of each pushes towards a more literary interpretation of the narrative. Stavans identifies this point when he writes concerning the two translations that, “their agenda, evident in the ethos that informs the translation as well as the introductions that precede them, is to somehow set the record straight” (xxx). Using paratextual citations as all of their predecessors have, the result of pushing the translation towards the literary is a repressed determination to provide accuracy in a text famous for vagueness. While promoting the content of the narrative as akin to fiction, the reassembling of the historical inscription becomes vital to the life of the translation. The result of course, is a reaffirmation of the notion that the text is read through the historical moment of its translator, as the words of the original are parsed, interpreted, and in certain cases disregarded giving ultimate authority over the “truth” of the expedition to the secondary academic historiography that accompanies the reception and evolution of the text through time.

Perhaps no translation speaks more clearly to this point than the one published in 1999 by Rolena Adorno and Charles Pautz as part of an exhaustive three volume survey of materials concerning the Naravaez expedition that centers on the 1542 edition of the narrative and their new translation and annotation of the text. Concerning the translation itself, Adorno and Pautz supply the text that is closest to the original. While a separate publication of just the translation and commentary in English exists (with the intention of making the translation accessible to the casual reader) the fully scholarly edition of Adorno and Pautz’s translation is printed side-by-side with the Spanish, with a concerted effort made to mirror the syntax as closely as possible and translate each word with the highest level of accuracy. Exemplifying the level of accuracy

aimed for in the translation, in the “mala cosa” passage Adorno and Pautz translate the word “sangradura” as “crook of the arm” and include a footnote citing the Academia Real Diccionario de la lengua española, which defines the term as “the bend of the arm opposite the elbow,” as if to avoid any confusion over the word’s relationship to the term “bloodletting” (1: 167 n4).

Regarding the inclusion of this extensive body of related primary sources and secondary information, the text highlights the tension between accessibility of the original and its contexts and an overdetermined assessment of what is and is not relevant to a ‘complete’ understanding of the text based on a desire for academic authority through understanding that is born from the same impulses as those of the early ethnographers.

While the Adorno and Pautz translation provides the reader with the greatest experience of proximity to the language and feel of the original (particularly the academic edition which allows easy movement and cross-reference between the English and Spanish) the text is therefore not free from its historical moment. Not only is every supplemental text included and arranged according to decisions made by the editor/translators, but there is a determination to provide explanations for what is described in the narrative using contemporary fields of knowledge to do so that places the narrative in the same category as all the translations that come before it. In the “resurrection” section, for example, Adorno and Pautz cite the work of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss to suggest in a footnote that “Cabeza de Vaca and his companions might not have been perceived as great shamans because they performed cures, but rather performed cures because they were taken to be great shamans” and that “group expectation is a critical element in the shamanic complex...organized around the poles of the intimate experience of the shaman on one extreme and group consensus on the other” (1: 163 n5). Concerning the “mala cosa” section, Adorno and Pautz cite Paul Radin when claiming that, “[i]n anthropological terms, the trickster,

that is, the figure of the creator and destroyer without reference to divinity. The trickster is considered to be one of the most ancient expressions of humanity. His earliest forms are found among the natives of North America, and he is characterized by isolation from society and sexual transformation” (1:167 n2). In both these instances, contemporary knowledge systems and modes of interpreting the past are deployed to “make sense” of the events of the narrative.

Cabeza de Vaca as Translator:

With a better understanding how translations are contextualized by their historical conditions, and how even the original itself can be a slippery and imprecise construct, it is possible to reassess the role of Cabeza de Vaca’s translated narrative when placed at the center of an American literary tradition. To do so, it is worth returning to the final translation of the text, *Chronicle of the Narváez Expedition*, which is described as a “revised and annotated” version of the Bandelier translation by Harold Augenbraum and edited by Ilan Stavans. More than any other translation, Augenbraum’s narrative primes the text for its belated inclusion into the heart of the American literary canon as an English language text. Published by Penguin Publishers as part of their “Penguin Classics” series in 2002, the Augenbraum text has become a favorite for American literary anthologies, and is now used in both the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* and the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* among others.<sup>27</sup> Thus, When reading

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<sup>27</sup> Suggesting that the text be read as a proto-Chicano/a narrative in 1993, Juan Bruce-Novoa was experimenting with the idea that a Chicano/a literary history might extend back to the colonial period. Having helped put this idea onto more solid footing across the academy since that time, it’s exciting within the context of this project that an emergent view of Chicano/a history has also now been written into the heart of the American canon. However, reading the text as a work of proto-Chicano/a literature is also notably relevant to the politics of making the text speak English, suggesting the value of Bruce-Novoa’s reading of the text to continued study of the text in translation. The very fact that a debate concerning Chicano/a narrative surrounds the text

the text in translation as part of the American literary canon one doesn't access the original, but in the same way that the translator's choices concerning paratextual discourse and peripheral materials can influence the meaning of a text in translation, one accesses the post-national ideal of a reconstructed literary history. The fact that Augenbraum's translation is considered a revision of Bandelier's highlights an issue that is relevant to the detailed translation history provided above, which is that while each translation brings new meaning to the narrative, it also carries traces of the translations that came before it, as well as of the larger trajectory of the narrative's legacy in English. This idea is important to the specifics of the role of English language renderings of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative within the American literary canon for several reasons.

In the first sense, the fact that the translation history of *Naufragios*, particularly the early translations, is closely correlated with American expansion as described above means that subsequent translations carry the burden of that legacy. Thinking about the temporal aspect of translation, there exists generally a palpably imperialist quality to the idea that narrative can be "rewritten" in a way that accommodates the needs of the present, and the fact that Stavans and Augenbraum chose the Bandelier translation which is mired in expansionist circumstances as the basis for their revision does not help their movement away from this imperialist legacy. To move forward with any potential benefit of giving English language speakers access to Spanish language colonial texts, the imperialist aspect of translating the text can and should be tempered by applying a foreignizing technique that renders the text in translation as different from the rest

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through secondary scholarship suggests that within large circles of its critical readership his reading has left a trace on contemporary interpretation.

of the English language literature that still overwhelmingly dominates the American canon.<sup>28</sup>

This is not a particularly easy task, primarily because the full restitution of the original is impossible given that the contemporary modalities for reading, understanding, and interpreting are impossible to completely abandon, and localized meaning can never be perfectly recreated.

However, another issue that emerges from considering the English language translation in its entirety is that, while individually each version of the text proclaims a certain authority over the original as described above, when taken as a group a body of information emerges that is sometimes contradictory, sometimes complimentary but creates a diversity of voices concerning the text's meaning that is far more valuable than any individual rendering. This means that reading through the translations one would become increasingly conscious of the implications for example, of the "mala cosa" to the Susola community as Cabeza de Vaca described it reported to him. Concerning the text in translation itself, one can also say in a more classically Benjaminian rendering of this point that each translation helps illuminate more perfectly the "pure language" behind the original, already obscured by the evolution of the narrative through its four iterations. In this sense, the only truth at the origin is an historical inscription that can only be reconstructed is the combination of its multiple fragments. Of course, much of this is lost when the text in translation is presented on its own and in an abridged format as part of an anthology. But studying the translation history alongside the translation provides a way to foreignize the original

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<sup>28</sup> The difference between the two strategies is perhaps most efficiently expressed by their distinct tactics in dealing with the "disjunctive concept" or the concept for which there is no clear parallel in the target language. First advocated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his 1813 treatise *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* [On the different methods of translating] foreignizing translation is typically achieved by "bending" the parameters of the target language towards the disjunctive concept, giving a word a new function outside of its typical meaning. This technique is presented as an alternative to a domesticating translation, which typically employs paraphrasing, or using multiple words and concepts that do not necessarily exist in the original language to explain the disjunctive concept.

while also beginning to reconstruct the truth of the historical inscription whose value to the origins of the canon give the text its primary relevance from the perspective of a contemporary English language audience. While never a perfect scenario, the key to positioning the text in translation at the center of the American literary canon may be providing a paratextual reading of the text that foreignizes the narrative from the tradition rather than imposing integration, while also drawing attention to the translation's historic trajectory. In the final section of this chapter I propose a reading of the narrative that may be useful for engaging this task in the future. To do so, I return to the model of the Spanish colonial text as an originating force for the American tradition of bearing witness as described above and challenge it, offering instead a reading of Cabeza de Vaca as a colonial translator.

Within the structure of the colonial project, Cabeza de Vaca actions suggested a definitive break from established Spanish practices concerning linguistic difference and the encounter with the Other, that themselves invite comparison to the role of the translator. This point is made clear from one of the earliest moments of prospective contact between Europeans and Native Americans. As a part of his protest against Panfilio Narvaez's decision to leave the ships behind and move inland after being knocked off course (the moment that sealed the expedition's fate by stranding and separating its members), Cabeza de Vaca writes that "sobre todo esto íbamos mudos y sin lengua por donde mal nos podíamos entender con los indios, ni saber lo que de la tierra queríamos" (88). The assertion here that the group was travelling "mute and without language in an area where we could hardly make ourselves understood by the Indians, or learn about the land what we wanted to know," suggests that the need for translinguistic understanding was essential for gaining the knowledge necessary for the safety of the Spaniards, as well as for ensuring the expedition's success in contributing to the archive of

knowledge about the new world. While the official position of the Spanish courts on the treatment of Native American populations was almost always a point of contention during the colonial period, policy at the time of the Narvaez expedition required that a formal document be read at the moment of disembarkation and at first encounter with native populations. This document declared Spanish authority over the land and offered natives a choice between compliance and subservience to the crown or subjection to war, death, or enslavement. This “requerimiento” gave Spaniards a self-imposed agency over Amerindian populations through a speech-act that would not have been understood by native populations. The importance of the requerimiento and its paradoxical inutility underscores the relevance of language to the very foundation of the colonial project, which invested the complete power of legal authority into the untranslatable sign.

By suggesting increased dialogue and mutual interaction between European and American populations as a mutually beneficial endeavor, Cabeza de Vaca was actively distancing himself not only from Narváez and his poor decision making regarding the immediate context of the trip, but also from the ‘blinded’ officiating power of the Spanish monarchy that the one-eyed Narvaez represented within the narrative. Here Cabeza de Vaca literally and metaphorically distances himself from the imperial gaze embodied by the visually impaired Narvaez that would obligate dominance over an inferior race through the language of the requerimiento. This moment of overlap between linguistic and visual modes of colonial power stands as a turning point for Cabeza de Vaca in the text, where the one-sided agency of the colonial project of the Americas is eschewed in favor of a space between cultures. Cabeza de Vaca’s ability to act as translator and mediator between tribes developed into a life-saving profession ultimately gave him a purpose within the Amerindian cultural system across the gulf

coast and into the interiors of present day Texas, allowing him to survive through some of his most difficult years in the Americas. Upon his return to the Westernized world, Cabeza de Vaca's role as intercultural translator may well have influenced his advocacy of both figurative and literal understanding between the old and new world, a point that is evident in the way that his text presents the Americas to his European audience and also in his future treatment of Native populations in Rio de la Plata.<sup>29</sup>

Within the text itself, the power and importance of translation to Cabeza de Vaca also governs the multiple and various attempts to describe objects and concepts that were unknown within the European world at the time. Forced to define that for which no words existed, Cabeza de Vaca was often engaged in a task that superseded the concept of bearing witness in the typical sense. Rather, Cabeza de Vaca took concepts that were unfamiliar or unknown within the Spanish epistemological framework and made a place for them within the structure of language. Because the emphasis on ethnography was, as we have seen, meant to substitute for a failed expedition, his description of unknown plants and animals serve as some of the most frequent examples of this, and in several cases a native word or concept is given in his narrative and followed by an attempt to define it within the logic of the European mind. We see this for example in his description of a prickly pear:

...y que para esto era menester que yo me detuviesse con ellos seis meses, que era tiempo en que aquellos indios ivan a otro tierra a comer *tunas*. Esta es una fruta que es del

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<sup>29</sup> Several critics have identified this issue as a key element of the 1555 co-publication of the *Commentarios* and *Naufragios*. See for example Ralph Bauer's reading of the text, which emphasizes Cabeza de Vaca's reversal of the European colonial logic through a call for non-violent conversion as the primary tactic for strengthening Spanish authority in the Americas. This failed vision for an "empire of peace" between Europeans and Amerindians is discussed by Bauer as the central issue that prompted Cabeza de Vaca's arrest in Rio de la Plata (Bauer 32).

tamaño de huevos y son bermejas y negras y de muy buen gusto. Comenlas tres meses del año, en los quales no comen otra cosa alguna. (138).<sup>30</sup>

The inclusion of the Taino word *tunas* in this description of the “prickly pears” indigenous to the South Texas coastal region suggests the task of describing objects foreign to Europeans in familiar terms, as in the comparison of the prickly pear’s size to an egg. The ability to translate indigenous words for plants, animals, places, and peoples into language familiar to Europeans gave early explorers of the Americas like Cabeza de Vaca a special role in the invention of America, beyond and in conjunction with subjugating natives and establishing forts and colonies; namely, the ability to turn the “foreign” into a readable text. Here again, the visual and the linguistic become blurred, as Cabeza de Vaca desire to bear witness pushes him into a place where he must exist within and between both linguistic systems.

Likewise, Cabeza de Vaca also served as a translator of European cultural practices to native populations. For example, Cabeza de Vaca claims that in response to the description of the mala cosa, the group told the native peoples that “si ellos creyessen en Dios nuestro Señor y fuessen christianos como mosotros, no ternían miedo de aquél ni él osaría venir (160). Describing how the Spaniards “had them understand that, if they believed in the Lord our God and were Christians like us, they would have no need to be afraid of him, nor would he dare return to do those things to them” Cabeza de Vaca is able intervene here, acting as an intermediary between the visual evidence of those who claimed to have seen this evil spirit, and the verbal promise of protection by an unseen Christian God by introducing an unknown concept into the cultural and linguistic framework of their regional belief system. As later explorers and

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<sup>30</sup> “...and it was therefore necessary that I stay with the them [the Taino people] for six months, during which time these Indians would go to another region to eat tunas. This is a fruit about the size of an egg that is vermilion and black and very pleasant to eat. They eat them three months out of the year, during which time they eat nothing else.”

colonists would discover, this mode of translation served a more powerful role in the preservation of the colonial project than the *requerimiento*.

While Cabeza de Vaca's desire to "give account" of his time in the Americas is highlighted in the text's proem, the importance of translation to the negotiation of linguistic, cultural, and ecological differences between the Americas and Europe cannot be ignored. It distinguishes his task from the more direct act of bearing witness that is suggested by the Norton Anthology to be an essential aspect of the text's connection to the American literary tradition. The relevance of translation to the way that Cabeza de Vaca presents himself in his text underscores a limitation of the concept of bearing witness, where the power of observation is more akin to the imperial gaze of the one-eyed Narváez. In contrast to the direct access promised by bearing witness, translation implies a high level of mediation between the audience and the events of the narrative. Evidence of Cabeza de Vaca's willingness to mediate the relationship between audience and event can also be found in his decision to republish the text for commercial production, when the general reading public replaced the Spanish monarch as the intended audience, who then became addressee in name alone. In this sense, identifying Cabeza de Vaca as a translator provides a way to helpfully engage the text in English as a non-English language America origin text.

Re-inscribing translation as a thematic precedent at the origin of the American literary tradition creates greater opportunities for opening the canon to new texts and kinds of texts, like those that, for example, emphasize cultural and linguistic plurality. The difference represents an ideological shift from a canon that recognizes the role of Spanish language and culture in the colonial development of the U.S. to a canon that recognizes translation and transculturation as fundamental themes in a new era in American literary studies. Ultimately however, the decision

to approach the text in this fashion only reinforces the idea that the text is made from the present moment, and that the origins of a tradition continue to be and to become what is required to make sense of what comes after. Still, in all cases, both the utility and inevitability of reading and interpreting from the present must be checked by acknowledging the shortcomings of both interpretation and translation. This can only be done through a reinvestment in original contexts and a conscious effort to embrace difference by exposing the limits of recreation.