

LA OTRA CARA DEL IMPERIO ESPAÑOL:
THE GULF COAST FAILURE TEXTS AS A SUBGENRE

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Spanish

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Nancy Whitlock

May, 2015

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify the characteristics that unify the texts written during the early Spanish exploration of what is now the United States Gulf Coast. These documents come from or are inspired by the disastrous Spanish expeditions to Florida and the region of the Gulf Coast, and they can be grouped together as a subgenre of Gulf Coast failure texts. The nine features that are found to unite the subgenre of Gulf Coast failure texts can help readers approach these texts a group with a new appreciation for the less studied documents. Teachers or scholars of colonial, Renaissance, southern, or U. S. Hispanic literature may use these characteristics as a jumping-off point, using the subgenre features to provide at least a beginning framework for exploring and analyzing such a large variety of expedition works. The Gulf Coast failure text characteristics discussed in this study are elements such as: 1) the presence of subordinate voices, 2) the lack of emphasis on the shipwreck, 3) the emphasis on starvation and thirst, 4) the use of everyday European items for other purposes, 5) the search for a city-state template (Apalachee), 6) the emphasis on geographical and natural difficulties, 7) the avoidance of work, 8) the importance of the interpreter, and 9) the various strategies to maintain Spanishness and masculinity in the wake of failure.

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INTRODUCTION

In this study I aim to identify the characteristics that unify the Gulf Coast failure texts as a subgenre, facilitating increased study and appreciation of works that often are left only to historians for examination. I consider the Gulf Coast failure texts to be those documents that come from or are inspired by the disastrous Spanish expeditions to Florida and the region of the Gulf Coast, starting in the early 1500's. The list of works included in the Gulf Coast failure texts are: a) Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* or *Naufragios* from the Narváez expedition; b) the De Soto expedition accounts by the Gentleman of Elvas, by Luis Hernández de Biedma, and the "copy" of secretary Rangel's account by historian Fernández Oviedo; c) the many documents and letters from the Tristán de Luna y Arellano expedition accounts of José de Escandón; e) Fray Agustín Dávila Padilla's history; f) Juan de Castellano's *Elegías ilustres de Indias*; g) Escobedo's *La Florida*; h) Fray Andrés de San Miguel's *Relación*; and i) José Ignacio de Toca Velasco's *Triaca producida de un veneno. Naufragio de española flota*. I propose that a study of these texts and others, grouped in a subgenre that I call Gulf Coast failure texts, is a worthwhile pursuit that will open new possibilities in our understanding of these documents. For this study, I will use the following texts: a) Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* or *Naufragios* from the Narváez expedition, first published in 1542; b) the De Soto expedition accounts by the Gentleman of Elvas (first published in 1557), by Luis Hernández de Biedma (presented to the King of Spain in 1544 but not published until 1857 in London), and the "copy" of secretary Rangel's account by historian Fernández Oviedo (published in 1535); c) the many documents and letters from the 1559-1561 Tristán de Luna y Arellano

expedition (not published as a group until 1928); and d) José Ignacio de Toca Velasco's *Triaca producida de un veneno. Naufragio de española flota* (first published in 1734).

Many of the texts studied here are relatively unknown to students of Hispanic literature. While they are vital for historians in the tracing of expedition routes and in fixing dates, with the exception of Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*, these texts are largely ignored by literary critics. I suspect that this is for the simple reason that most of the texts, compared to *Naufragios*, seem to lack the narrative interest and aesthetic features that invite literary enjoyment. A grouping of these works as a subgenre could help to make the less sensational, harder-to-appreciate texts more accessible and easier to read. For instance, it is easier to appreciate a brief soldier's declaration from the failed Tristán de Luna expedition when it is studied in conjunction with a longer soldier's diary from the failed De Soto expedition.

It is easy to question the grouping of these texts according to region. After all, at the time of the writing of many of these texts, the Gulf Coast was not known to exist as it is today. In the eyes of the Spanish empire, it remained a vague, northern territory for many years. But the regional grouping can be helpful for contemporary readers of these texts. I find that the "regional model" proposed by Francisco Lomelí is a way of grouping works that is reader-friendly and that invites a variety of academic approaches—literary, anthropological, historical. For Lomelí, grouping cultural productions by region solves a variety of problems, including the problem of the overly-exclusive canon and the problem of lack of context for students and readers. Lomelí states that "Region functions as an immediate identifier, a cultural matrix or an insular feature to which people relate. In other words, region becomes the outer visible crust of

what we study from within, providing the cultural elements of what is filtered through the creative literary act” (233). The regional grouping allows all genres and all cultural productions. Lomelí says that the regional model is “both diachronic and synchronic, dealing with written and oral sources,” and it encompasses history, anthropology, culture, race, class, politics, literature, and the arts (233). So, while many of the writers of the Gulf Coast failure texts had no real concept of the Gulf Coast as a discrete region, the regional grouping is helpful to scholars today, and it may make these texts more accessible and interesting for the contemporary reader.

But, we must be aware that the grouping of Gulf Coast failure texts by region is only a tool for study. We must avoid the anachronism of assigning a regional consciousness to explorers who had no such concept of the Gulf Coast. While the contemporary U. S. reader perceives the Gulf Coast as the swampy south, Spanish expeditionaries see it as “the North.”

In order to perform literary criticism on these texts, we must justify using literary criticism techniques on works that are not “literary.” That is, they were not intended to be aesthetic productions or imaginative productions.¹ The texts analyzed here fall into the categories of colonial discourse²: *relaciones*, *cartas*, journals/diaries, soldier

¹ In “Historicity and Literariness: Problems in the Literary Criticism of Spanish American Colonial Texts,” Margarita Zamora recognizes the problematic (and often anachronistic) nature of using literary criticism in the analysis of colonial texts and emphasizes the need to recognize the distinction between discourse and history.

² Rolena Adorno posits that the term “colonial” is inappropriate for texts written in the early colonial period, before the eighteenth century. Patricia Seed expresses a similar concern about imposing contemporary political and intellectual concepts on productions from the colonial era, identifying colonial and postcolonial discourse less as concrete fields and more as grounds for creative explorations by scholars in all areas. Walter

autobiographies, and second hand accounts or works of those who did not participate in the expeditions. The first hand accounts are not meant to entertain; the authors are not creating unified works of fiction. One important exception is *Naufragios* by Álar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, which underwent revisions and is written as a narrative for public consumption even while it is an “official” work written to the Spanish monarchy.

Naufragios has features that distinguish it as novelistic. Most works studied here have not undergone extensive revisions and editions. Many are official accounts and documents that are legally required or expected in the Spanish imperial project. It is thanks to imperial Spain’s hyper-legalistic, hyper-textual society that we have these voices from failed expeditions. But, because the documents are often required in the imperial enterprise, we cannot expect to find texts whose authors radically differ with, criticize, or break with the Spanish imperial project. These texts are produced within and for the state, either for personal or legal reasons. Most texts survive because they were preserved or published by the Spanish imperial state. They exist within the Spanish bureaucracy, within the authority of the state, within Spanish law. The textual strategies for dealing with failure are subtle, making the analysis of these failure texts all the more challenging.

The classification of these writings as “failure texts” is again a tool for study. Many texts already have genres of their own—they may be *autobiografías de soldados*, legal documents, letters, or narratives. But studying them as failure texts can open new avenues of analysis, especially since most of these texts, with the exception of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*, as mentioned above, are of more historical or ethno-historical interest

Mignolo states that colonial discourse should provide possibilities to build new loci of enunciations and to learn from those living in colonial legacies today.

than of literary interest. If we can establish a literary approach to these failure texts and find characteristics that unite them as a sub-genre, then we can provide a more manageable and orderly way to approach many works that until now are more often seen as dry historical documents.

In *Forgotten Conquests*, Gustavo Verdesio states that the popular and academic tendency is to discount or ignore those conquest/exploration texts that do not include interaction with empires or city-states. Failure texts lack both encounters with major city-states and the accomplishment of conquest. They do not chronicle some great victory; instead, they are the accounts of hardships and failure that seem to “fizzle out” when compared to the amazing accounts of the conquests of the great Mesoamerican and South American civilizations. However, if failure texts have some genre-specific characteristics, we have a way to approach these texts as a group. These failure text characteristics may also provide a strategy to compare the failure texts with the more familiar chronicles and relations of Mexico and Peru. In other words, I do not propose that these texts belong only in the category of failure texts. Grouping them in this way merely provides a new way to approach these texts and to search for their literary and human interest.

In *The Armature of Conquest*, Beatriz Pastor Bodmer analyzes the “narrative discourse of failure” of Hernán Cortés’ *Fifth Letter* and of Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*. I use her analysis as a starting point for finding commonalities in the Gulf Coast failure texts. While her analysis may not directly relate to the Gulf Coast failure texts as a group, her framework for analysis and her classification of these texts as discourses of failure provide a valuable jumping off point and help to justify the grouping of these works as

“failure texts.” The characteristics of the Gulf Coast failure narratives may include several key elements such as: 1) the presence of subordinate voices, 2) the lack of emphasis on the shipwreck, 3) starvation and thirst, 4) the use of everyday European items for other purposes, 5) the search for a city-state template (Apalachee), 6) geographical and natural difficulties, 7) the avoidance of work, 8) the importance of the interpreter, and 9) the various strategies to maintain Spanishness and masculinity in the wake of failure. In the following section I will discuss these elements. In addition, I will describe the five chapters that are part of this dissertation.

Chapter 1: The Subordinate Voices of the Hernando De Soto Expedition

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the voices of the subordinates found in the three main documents left to us from the Hernando De Soto expedition to Florida and beyond. First hand failure texts are often written by a subordinate, someone other than the leader of the expedition. We do not hear from the expedition leaders in the failure texts—sometimes because they choose to leave no significant record of the expedition, but more often because they die during the expedition, leaving the account to the subordinate. In failure texts we can hear the voice of the subordinate—not the “other,” not the native or the slave, but an expeditionary of inferior rank nonetheless. A failure text written by a military subordinate poses several questions: Will we see in the failure texts complaints about superiors? Will the subordinate question the Spanish imperial system or merely the competence of his superiors? How does military and social rank affect the criticism of leadership in the text?

Chapter 2: The Subordinate Voices in the Luna Expedition and *Naufragios*

In Chapter 2, I will explore the various subordinate voices found in the many documents from the Tristán de Luna y Arrellano Florida expedition and in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*. The rich variety of petitions and letters from the Luna papers and the more novelistic narrative of Cabeza de Vaca provide us with several levels of social and military rank, from indigenous Mexicans to expedition officials. These failure texts make subordinate voices available to us, although in somewhat limited capacity. These subordinate texts are by no means as expansive or as strikingly different as texts by Guaman Poma or Miguel León Portilla's recuperation of Aztec voices, but nevertheless they do provide a rare opportunity to study productions by those who are alternatingly marginal and hegemonic. Because these subordinate expedition members have some space, especially legal space, within the Spanish imperial system, these voices are preserved in text. This subordinate discourse could well be considered minority discourse, even while the writers are members of the larger hegemonic system.

Chapter 3: The Shipwreck

In Chapter 3, I use several Gulf Coast failure texts to analyze three important thematic features of the subgenre: the shipwreck, starvation and thirst, and the use of everyday European items for another purpose. While it may seem obvious that many Gulf Coast failure accounts will narrate shipwrecks, the *extent* of the treatment of the shipwreck is a characteristic that will be useful in the study of the Gulf Coast failure texts as a subgenre. The texts that are more contemporary with the actual event treat the shipwreck relatively briefly, as just one more disaster in a long series of disasters. Texts that come later, often written by poets or historians who are not eyewitnesses, give the shipwreck a far more dramatic treatment.

For the writers of the accounts most contemporary with the expeditions, the ship is not the focus; rather, what happens on land is the priority. For instance, the Cabeza de Vaca and Luna accounts spend only proportionate amounts of time on disasters and shipwrecks. José Ignacio de Toca Velasco's epic poem of a Spanish shipwreck spends literally hundreds of lines on the dramatic details of the shipwreck. We must question the marked difference between the treatment of the shipwreck in more raw first hand accounts and in the more literary second hand accounts.

In an analysis of Portuguese shipwreck discourses, *Manifest Perdition*, Josiah Blackmore provides fascinating insight on the narrative of the shipwreck as a questioning of empire. While his analysis is highly useful, I think it is less useful with the more raw expedition texts, due to their lack of detail when narrating the shipwreck or other disasters. It is more useful with the poetic histories whose treatment of shipwreck is far more extensive, and the shipwreck seems to serve moral purposes.

The struggle to find enough food and water to survive is major theme in the failure texts. Maize becomes the gold for desperate expeditionaries. Soldiers bent on conquest are ill-prepared to hunt and gather food, and without a large indigenous population center to supply them, they inevitably begin to starve. Starvation is often a motivation for writing petitions and complaints, as in the Luna expedition documents. For Cabeza de Vaca, it is such a major theme that starvation could almost be a character itself. The constant presence of physical deprivation can be interpreted as a kind of service to the Spanish crown, or even as the religious experience of a fasting hermit.

In extreme suffering and need, Spanish expedition members resort to desperate measures, using European items in unusual ways. But failure texts are not like the

accounts of ingenious pioneers cleverly taking advantage of everything around them. Instead, the attempts to re-purpose European objects often fail. Eating leather boots and tack gives no sustenance, and the horsehides tanned to hold water rot away and are useless. The uselessness or loss of many European items on the Gulf Coast can teach us about the writers' attitudes about the clash of the old and new worlds, and of their vulnerability when faced the loss of all Spanish accoutrements.

Chapter 4: The Search for a City-state Template

In Chapter 4, I aim to examine three more commonalities of the Gulf Coast failure texts: the search for the city-state template (most often Apalachee), geographical and natural difficulties, and avoidance of work. The top priority for the first Florida expeditions is finding Apalachee, which is imagined as a wealthy city-state like Tenochtitlán or Cuzco. Expedition leaders have a Cortés-style conquest in mind, and their insistence on finding a wealthy city-state is the tragic flaw that brings suffering and disaster. De Soto is criticized for his refusal to establish a base, so great is his desire to find a great city. The principal failure in the failure texts is the failure to find and conquer the wealthy city-state. All shipwrecks and disasters would be forgotten in the shadow of a successful conquest. Therefore, failure texts must be studied from the perspective that they are overshadowed by the texts of successful conquests. The expeditions that cannot find or follow the template for successful conquest of a city-state must in some way excuse themselves within the text. Suffering takes the place of success, and merit is proved by selfless service to God and king, not by victory in conquest.

Because of the grouping of these writings as regional, Gulf Coast texts, the landmarks and geographical descriptions are of special interest. The storms, insects,

swamps, difficult waterways, and diseases remain present for Gulf Coast dwellers even to this day. According to Beatriz Pastor, descriptions of nature become more hostile, destructive, and uninviting within a discourse of failure. Nature is less of a landscape to behold, and more an obstacle. Pastor states that “the landscape disappears altogether as an aesthetic concept...to be replaced by the environment” (124). The environment can be impressive or admirable, but it is overwhelming and often deadly. An added bonus for Gulf Coast readers who are also Gulf Coast dwellers is the opportunity to connect and identify with these natural wonders and threats.

In the face of failure to conquer a city-state or find major population centers to support their physical needs, the expeditions suffer greatly. Strangely, agriculture is almost never discussed in any of the Gulf Coast documents. It is even more surprising that there are few mentions of agriculture in texts like the petitions of the Luna expedition, which was to have been a legitimate colonizing project, not just a military conquest. Lack of sufficient food supplies and outright starvation are the main themes of the petitions of the Luna expedition members. The men, from high-ranking to the Mexican Indians of the expedition, complain that Luna’s only concern is traveling inland, and the only hope of food lies with the unlikely arrival of a supply ship. This concern receives the greatest treatment in the texts. In Cabeza de Vaca’s account and in the De Soto expedition accounts, there is almost an obsession with finding maize. Maize is a sign of indigenous civilization, a reason to hope to find that illusive city-state. That desperate need and hope for maize, and a seeming lack of concern for growing their own supplies, provides an opportunity to analyze the expeditionaries’ attitudes toward social status,

agricultural work, and the real task of colonization. Also, it may provide a way to compare and contrast the Spanish concept of colonization with that of other empires.

Chapter 5: Preserving Spanish and Spanishness in the Wake of Failure

In Chapter 5, I examine the role of the incompetent or competent interpreter in the Gulf Coast failure texts. Also, I aim to identify strategies of maintaining Spanishness and masculinity in the wake of failure. Several Gulf Coast failure texts include a chain of interpreters, some discovered left behind from previous expeditions. The interpreters or guides provide almost a “cast of characters” that links the Gulf Coast expedition texts. Destiny hangs on these interpreters, and in most texts they are treated as far more important than even the shipwrecks and disasters. The surprising discovery of a Spaniard left over from the Narváez expedition extends the life of the De Soto expedition. That interpreter’s death and treacherous interpreters who follow severely limit and harm the expedition. The treacherous or incompetent interpreter or guide often is the cause of the most drama in the failure narrative.

The failed expeditions’ dependence on interpreters offers rich material for the analysis of the European Renaissance vision of language and difference. The fact that in failure narratives an expedition’s fate often turns on good or bad interpreters is especially interesting, given the other extreme dangers that the expeditions face. Also worth extensive study is the *subordinate* expedition member’s narration of the difficulties with incompetent and treacherous interpreters, and its relationship with their criticism of the expedition leadership. It is useful to keep in mind that in Cortes’ letters recounting his Mexican victory, interpreters play no large role. The role of the interpreter, especially the treacherous one, is a useful way to contrast the failure and victory texts.

A close study of these failure texts can provide tools to analyze each writer's struggle to maintain his place in the Spanish system of masculinity and honor. Analysis of these works can help to answer the question "How is Spanishness performed when one loses his sword, his authority, his companions, his clothes, his faith community, and even his language?" Cabeza de Vaca's nakedness and performance of "woman's work" as a trader is an extreme example (already analyzed by Jonathan Goldberg). The weakness of the men of the Luna expedition is more subtle and difficult to examine. The failure texts that show Spanish masculinity and honor in jeopardy may offer more nuanced details of the social context of the conquest period, opening up a more accurate picture of the Spanish mentality of the early Renaissance. When the requirements of Iberian masculinity are compromised—military endeavors fail, swords are lost, imperial service comes to nothing, clothing is stripped—what are the results and what are writers' strategies to deal with these results?

In conclusion, the nine features discussed here, among others, can help readers approach these Gulf Coast failure texts as a group with a new appreciation for the less studied documents. Teachers of colonial, Renaissance, southern, or U. S. Hispanic literature may refer to these characteristics as a jumping-off point, using the sub-genre features to provide at least a beginning framework for exploring and analyzing such a large variety of expedition works.

Chapter 1

The Subordinate Voices of the Hernando De Soto Expedition

In this chapter I aim to prove the presence of the voice of the subordinate in the Gulf Coast failure texts of the Hernando De Soto expedition to Florida and to examine several examples of how those voices are expressed textually. The first characteristic of the Gulf Coast failure texts, the voice of the subordinate, is especially interesting in that the subordinate voice is so rarely present in conquest narratives. Unlike letters, accounts, and other documents from successful conquests, the failure texts are often written by a subordinate, of lower social or military rank. We do not hear from the expedition leaders in the failure texts—sometimes because they choose to leave no specific record of the expedition, but more often because they die during the expedition, leaving the account to the subordinate. In failure texts we can hear the voice of the subordinate—not the “other,” not the Native American or the slave, but subordinate nonetheless. A failure text written by a military subordinate poses several questions: Will we see in the failure texts complaints about superiors? Will the subordinate question the Spanish imperial system or merely the competence of his superiors? How does military and social rank affect the criticism of leadership in the text?³

The three De Soto expedition documents examined in this chapter have in common that they are all journals or accounts of the expedition, written during or soon after the actual events. The information in all three documents should be similar, but the

³ I use the term “subordinate” here instead of “subaltern” to avoid confusion with the postcolonial concept of the subaltern proposed by Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. However, some colonial academics prefer the term “subaltern.” Gustavo Verdesio values previous contribution to subaltern theory by Spivak and Homi Bhabha, but also points out that Latin American colonial studies demand a different concept of subalternity than that conceived in the British Empire in the 19th century. Verdesio proposes that the Latin American colonial subject and the Asian Indian colonial subject differ dramatically. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel goes even further when she proposes that the project of empire constructs differing levels of subalternity, nuanced and distinct depending on circumstance.

differences among them should illustrate the military and social rank of the writer and his own personal interests in writing the text. Writers may not consistently take the subordinate role throughout the works. In the same work one may be subordinate, or a superior, a mere on-looker, or a participant in the action. This complication makes the Gulf Coast failure texts even richer and more complex, more ambiguous and ambivalent. For example, the Gentleman of Elvas' account of the De Soto expedition may come from several points of view: a military subordinate, a Portuguese, an Iberian conquistador, a detached and thoughtful observer of Spanish errors. The stakes for the writers of failure texts are different than the stakes for Cortés and other successful conquistadors. Their purpose may be mixed. At one moment a writer may defend himself by playing the hapless subordinate of an incompetent leader, and on another occasion he may play the forceful conqueror.

The Hernando De Soto Expedition to La Florida

When reading the eyewitness accounts from the De Soto expedition to La Florida, we do not hear from De Soto himself. De Soto, like many failed expedition leaders in the Gulf Coast region, perishes during the expedition. Failed expeditions must be recounted by underlings, other members of the expedition who survive. We know details of the De Soto expedition thanks to four documents: an account written by a Portuguese knight from Elvas, a member of the expedition; a shorter account by Luis Hernández de Biedma, who accompanied the expedition representing the Spanish crown; an account by De Soto's secretary Rodrigo Ranjel, which was lost but "copied" by historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in the 16th century; and a fragment of an account by Father Sebastián de Cañete, a priest who accompanied the De Soto expedition (Milanich xv).

(The famous Inca Garcilaso de la Vega account is secondhand and written long after the expedition, so it will not be considered here.) I will use the English translations of the documents provided in Jerald T. Milanich's *The Hernando De Soto Expedition* (1991).

a) The Gentleman of Elvas Relation

The Gentleman of Elva's account, *Relaçam verdadeira dos trabalhos q ho governador do Fernão de Souto e certas fidalgos portugueses passaram no descobrimento da prouicia da Frolida. Agora novamete feita per hu fidalgo Deluvas* (1557) is likely by one of the eight Portuguese gentlemen who joined De Soto on the Florida expedition. The account does not exist in manuscript form, but "the published account was supposedly based upon Elvas' notes, kept during the expediton" (Galloway 18). While many historians posit that Elvas was not as close to De Soto as Rangel, the Elvas account offers great detail (18).⁴ The Elvas account from the point of view of a military subordinate/subordinate will provide a very different voice from those of the successful conquest accounts.

First, the Gentleman/Knight of Elvas praises Hernando De Soto's reputation: He had "courage and good qualities," and in Peru, "According to the report of many persons who were there, he distinguished himself over all the captains and principal personages present, not only at the seizure of Atabalipa (Atahualpa), Lord of Peru, and in carrying the City of Cuzco, but at all other places wheresoever he went and found resistance" (in Milanich 25-26). Elvas recognizes De Soto as a discreet man: De Soto is "by nature not profuse" (26). While the Gentleman of Elvas' opinion remains similarly positive throughout his account, he judges the other Spaniards harshly, often setting himself and

⁴ Patricia Galloway's article "The Incestuous Soto Narrative" offers an analysis of theses works' authorship that could put into question my own analysis of the subaltern voices.

his Portuguese companions apart from the Spaniards in the expedition. Here we can hear the voice of the “other,” the non-Spaniard, who is different even while he is a participant in the expedition. According to Elvas, the Portuguese are well-prepared and serious, while the Castilians are all show and no substance. While in Spain, De Soto “commanded a muster to be made, to which the Portuguese turned out in polished armor, and the Castilians very showily, in silk over silk, pinked and slashed” (31). For Elvas, the Castilians lack the basic necessities for a military endeavor: “The greater number of Castilians were in very sorry and rusty shirts of mail; all wore steel caps or helmets, but had very poor lances” (32). Elvas is careful to show the contrast between the prepared Portuguese and the pitiful Castilians, and here we hear his voice as “other.” Throughout the Elvas account we see that while he generally maintains loyalty and admiration for Governor De Soto, his criticism of his Spaniard colleagues is sometimes harsh. This Portuguese “outsider” does not find much fault with his leader; he reserves the worst criticism for his soldier equals. This will contrast greatly with the Oviedo/Ranjel relation, analyzed later, which highlights the importance of social rank in relation to the criticism of the expedition leader.

The actual enterprise of expedition and conquest is not problematic for the Gentleman of Elvas. Rather, the moral behavior of Spanish soldiers subject to criticism. Elvas seems careful to protect De Soto’s honor and reputation, never questioning De Soto’s competence. Within the social hierarchy of the time, a relative outsider, a Portuguese gentleman, can easily find fault with Spaniard equals and inferiors, but not with the Spanish governor. In addition, since he is a participant in the expedition, his criticism must be measured, and he must not implicate himself in any failings. (We will

see in the analysis of Cabeza de Vaca and the Luna papers that Spaniards may more freely criticize their leaders.) In addition, De Soto's success in the conquest of Peru may inoculate him from some criticism (which will not hold true in the Oviedo/Ranjel relation, as we will see later).

Elvas does not reveal his own hunger for gold. When the native guides kidnapped from Florida and brought back to Cuba say "by signs, that there was much gold in Florida, the Governor and all the company greatly rejoiced, and longed for the hour of departure" (41). Elvas does not include himself by using "we" here. He continues his criticism of the Spanish soldiers by portraying them as incompetent. Early in the Florida expedition, the Indian guides and interpreters taken on the coast, "through the carelessness of two men who had charge of them, got away one night" (45). The expedition suffers greatly when there are no interpreters and guides, and the fault lies with the Spanish men.

While Elvas' criticism is mild in comparison with that of the Oviedo/Ranjel relation, Elvas does differ with De Soto's decisions after meeting the Cacica with the rich land and abundant pearls. While everyone agrees that settlement of the Cacica's lands would be a good decision, De Soto has higher ambitions. Conquest, not colonization, is De Soto's priority:

To all it appeared well to make a settlement there, the point being a favourable one, to which could come all the ships from New Spain, Peru, Sancta Marta, and Tierra-Firme, going to Spain; because it is in the way thither, is a good country, and one fit to raise supplies, but Soto, as it was his object to find another treasure like that of Atabalipa, lord of Peru,

would not be content with good lands nor pearls, even though many of them were worth their weight in gold...(64-65).

Elvas' point of view here could be compared to Cabeza de Vaca's at the end of Naufraguios. Both show a mercantilist view, as opposed to their superiors' priority of conquest.

Elvas has questioned De Soto's ambition for conquest, and he goes on to criticize his inflexible leadership and suggests that De Soto's stubbornness overrules common sense:

The Governor then resolved at once to go in quest of that country, and being an inflexible man, and dry of word, who, although he liked to know what the others all thought and had to say, after he once said a thing he did not like to be opposed, and as he ever acted as he thought best, all bent to his will; for though it seemed an error to leave that country, when another might have been found about it, on which all the people could have been sustained until the crops had been made and the grain gathered, there were none who would say a thing to him after it became known that he had made up his mind (65).

Colonization, safety, and sustainability are Elvas' priorities, while De Soto's priority is finding another Peru. After this criticism of De Soto's stubbornness, Elvas questions more deeply the character of De Soto, when De Soto repays the Cacica's kind welcome by taking her prisoner, and at the same time, Elvas suggests that some Christians in the group have committed atrocities on the Indians:

On the third day of May the Governor set out from Cutifachiqui; and it being discovered that the wish of the Cacica was to leave the Christians, if she could, giving them neither guides nor tamemes (carriers), because of the outrages committed upon the inhabitants, there never failing to be men of low degree among the many, who will put the lives of themselves and others in jeopardy for some mean interest, the Governor ordered that she should be placed under guard, and took her with him. This treatment, which was not a proper return for the hospitable welcome he had received, makes true the adage, For well doing...(66).

While Elvas' moralizing is gentle in comparison to Oviedo's "re-write" of Rangel's relation, it is poignant. Still, when compared with the extremely violent nature of De Soto's attempt at conquest in La Florida, Elvas' criticism is infrequent. Rather than being scandalized by violence and the constant taking of slaves and women, Elvas' tone is more matter-of-fact.

Elvas continues his criticism of disobedient Spanish soldiers. The Spanish men mistreat natives who are generous: "While they were conversing (De Soto and the Cacique of Acoste), some infantry went into town after maize, and not satisfied with what they got, they rummaged and searched the houses, taking what they would..." (73). The men's bad behavior and the Indians' anger against them forces De Soto to go "against his nature" and betray the cacique.

Elvas documents De Soto's fear of failure and of the consequences that failure could bring. De Soto is single-minded and manipulative. After the bounty of pearls are lost in the fires of a great battle with the Indians, De Soto conceals that vital information

to salvage the expedition and even expand it, and to salvage the reputation of the Gulf Coast, La Florida, as worthwhile of conquest:

[De Soto] caused Juan Ortiz to keep the news secret, that he might not be interrupted in his purpose; because the pearls he wished to send to Cuba for show, that their fame might raise the desire of coming to Florida, had been lost, and he feared that, hearing of him without seeing either gold or silver, or other thing of value from that land, it would come to have such reputation that no one would be found to go there when men should be wanted: so he determined to send no news of himself until he should have discovered a rich country (110).

According to Elvas, De Soto controls and manipulates information, spinning a present failure and loss of treasure into the future possibility of a rich land.

De Soto often must answer for or suffer because of the bad actions of the infantry. When four Spaniards steal from the Indians of Chicaça, Governor De Soto intends to punish them as examples. But De Soto is misled by the dishonesty of the interpreter Juan Ortiz (incompetent and dishonest interpreters is a failure genre characteristic that will be treated later). The Spaniards indulge in bad behavior and go unpunished: “When about ordering them to be taken to the town-yard to be beheaded, some Indians arrived, sent by the Chief to complain of them. Juan Ortiz, at the entreaty of Baltasar de Gallegos and others, changed their words, telling the Governor, as from the Cacique, that... they were in no fault” (114). Through Elvas, a subordinate voice who is experiencing life as a regular soldier, we see the intrigue and dark side of daily life of the expedition.

The incompetence and cowardice of the infantrymen is further criticized by Elvas after an Indian attack. De Soto is not blamed directly in this instance (we will see a markedly different account with Oviedo/Ranjel). The lower and higher ranks are guilty: “That night it had been the turn of three horsemen to be of the watch, two of them of low degree, the least value of any in the camp, and the third a nephew of the Governor, who had been deemed a brave man until now, when he showed himself as a great coward as either of the others; for they all fled” (95). Incompetence and bad behavior is not limited to the low infantrymen—even the nephew of the Governor is implicated.

In an unusual instance, De Soto’s strategic planning is criticized by the men, according to Elvas. He refrains from directly criticizing De Soto, however, putting the criticism in the mouths of the general group: “Every one thought the Governor committed a great fault in not sending to examine the state of ground on the opposite shore, and discover the crossing-place before making the attack” (100). Throughout the account Elvas makes use of the strategy of putting the criticism of authority in the mouths of others. We will see the same strategy in the Biedma account.

Elvas criticizes the cruelty of “some” infantrymen in an attack on Nilco: “Some persons were so cruel and butcher-like that they killed all before them, young and old, not one having resisted little nor much... To the ferocious and the bloodthirsty, God permitted that their sin should rise up against them in the presence of all—when there was occasion for fighting showing extreme cowardice, and in the end paying for it with their lives” (163-164). De Soto escapes such harsh criticism; it is reserved for fellow soldiers. For Elvas, the cause of the expedition’s failure may lie with the men’s greed,

brutality, ill-preparedness, and greed. The sum of these bad acts may be failure, and De Soto is mostly only indirectly implicated.

Elvas recounts a dignified death for Governor De Soto, calling him “the magnanimous, the virtuous, the intrepid Captain” (166), but fear and despair of their current desolate situation overcomes the men and they do not visit the moribund De Soto. De Soto names Luys de Moscoso to be sworn in as the new Governor of the expedition. For Elvas, Luys de Moscoso lacks the gravitas and force of De Soto: the men held it “certain that Luys de Moscoso, who was given to leading a gay life, preferred to see himself at ease in a land of Christians, rather than continue the toils of war, discovering and subduing, which the people had come to hate, finding the little recompense that followed” (170). With Moscoso, Elvas takes the gloves off and is openly disdainful. De Soto, as the natural leader and Governor, is spared harsh judgment by Elvas. Because the Gentleman of Elvas would consider Moscoso as a mere colleague, his leadership is always in doubt. Moscoso leads by consensus, which Elvas scoffs at. Luys de Moscoso does continue De Soto’s brutal style of encountering the Indians, with cutting off limbs of Indians, attacks, kidnappings, burning villages, and threats.

In the face of extreme hunger and disorientation, Luys de Moscoso is less than admirable as a Governor who “longed to be again where he could get his full measure of sleep, rather than govern and go conquering a country so beset for him with hardships” (183). While Elvas does not mention any dissention against De Soto, Luys de Moscoso’s fitness to lead and his popularity with the men is always in question:

There was likewise much discontent. Many grieved to go back, and would rather have continued to run the peril of their lives than to leave Florida

poor. They were not equal, however, to changing what was resolved on, as the persons of importance agreed with the Governor (Moscoso). There was one, nevertheless, who said afterwards that he would willingly pluck out an eye, to put out another for Luys de Moscoso, so greatly would he grieve to see him prosper (185).

So with the death of De Soto, the men's morale, cohesion, and perseverance suffer, and Elvas allows us to hear the voices of some subordinate dissatisfaction. While no doubt there was some dissent and much suffering under De Soto's command, the complaining voices are heard *after* his death, under Moscoso's command. In the absence of a proper, qualified Governor, Elvas lets loose more dissenting voices.

Elvas lets his readers know that the Spanish men pay a price for having burned towns, for as they return, "with great difficulty could they find maize to eat" (185). They "repent" of burning villages in Naguatex. Conditions are so bad that Francisco de Guzman runs away to join the Indians at Chaguate, and Governor Moscoso, upon passing through Chaguate on his return, is unable to convince him to rejoin the Christians. A life among the "heathen" is apparently preferable to Moscoso's leadership (186).

Elvas continues his questioning of Moscoso's leadership through others' opinions: "Many thought it was bad counsel to have come back from the Paycas, and not to have taken the risk of continuing in the way they were going by land" (186). In the Elvas account, De Soto is quite safe from low opinions expressed by the men. Moscoso's does not fare so well. The subordinate Elvas is no longer feels so subordinate when Moscoso is in charge. Those "important persons" wield power unjustly, and Elvas is freer to criticize them.

The continuing disaster of the De Soto La Florida expedition collides with the Narváez disaster. Elvas puts the fear in the mouths of the men: They greatly feared what befell Narváez, who was lost on the coast, might happen to them also” (187). Starvation is an even greater concern, as in *Naufraños*: “But the most of all they feared was the want of maize; for without that they could not support themselves, or do anything they would. All were in great dismay” (187). For Elvas, real despair appears after De Soto’s death and under Moscoso’s command. Elvas, by comparing their circumstances with those of the Narváez expeditions, questions and criticizes the leadership of Moscoso. The complaints, however, are most often from the mouths of other anonymous subordinates. Elvas, while obviously a participant in the expedition, rarely uses first person when expressing negative opinions. He instead reports the concerns of “the men.”

The cruelty of the new Governor Moscoso is undeniable: “The next day came others from Taguanate, who likewise having confessed, the Governor commanded that their right hands and their noses should be cut off, and he sent them to the Cacique” (192). However, Elvas makes no judgment of these actions in the text. His account of the events is matter-of-fact, unsurprised, and unworried by continuous acts of brutality. Those acts, which perhaps should shock Elvas far less than the modern reader, are so continuous that one would guess that Elvas should question the wisdom and effectiveness of certain acts of violence.

Elvas does subtly unfavorably compare Governor Moscoso’s conscience with that of the men. After the Spaniards take all of Aminoya’s maize, the Indians, starving, come to beg for their own maize. “The Governor ordered, under pain of heavy punishments, that maize should not be given to them” (193). Despite Moscoso’s lack of pity, the men

do show some mercy: “Still, when it was seen that they were willing to work, and that the hogs had a plenty, the men, pitying their misery and destitution, would share their grain with them” (194). The men not only undermine Moscoso’s authority, but they prove to be more merciful. Elvas contrasts Moscoso’s pragmatic brutality with the men’s humanity.

Elvas more openly criticizes his superior when Moscoso unfairly shows favoritism toward some of the men. Moscoso is political, full of guile, choosing his favorites over men of noble and fair behavior. For Elvas, Moscoso’s self-interest is greater than his concern for the rest of the expedition. When it is time to depart La Florida, Moscoso “secretly told his friends to take the slaves” back to New Spain, looking for a pretext to carry so many natives on brigantines with so few supplies. “He made use of an artifice, saying that while they should be going down the river they might have the use of them” (195). The criticism here comes not directly from Elvas, but from the thoughts of other subordinates in the text. The subordinates, not being “persons of condition” or favorites of Governor Moscoso, complain not about their own unfair treatment, but also about the bad treatment of the native slaves:

They “thought it inhuman for so short service, in return for so much as the natives has done, to take them away, to be left captives out of their territories, in the hands of other Indians, abandoning five hundred males and females, among whom were many boys and girls who understood and spoke Spanish. The most of them wept, which caused great compassion, as they were all Christians of their own free will, and were now to remain lost (195-196).

Governor Moscoso, in addition to acting inhumanely, is mistreating people who have acquired all the marks of civilization—the Spanish language and Christianity. Elvas shows that the natives are no longer mere Indians, but rather people who belong in the Spanish empire, people with European speech and faith. This is perhaps Elvas' strongest indictment against Moscoso, even while he puts it in the thoughts of other subordinates of the expedition.

Elvas questions Governor Moscoso's leadership, finding him easily influenced by a man whom Elvas easily recognizes as a fool:

Pausing then, the Governor required that each should give his opinion respecting the voyage, whether they should sail to New Spain direct, by the high sea, or go thither keeping along from shore to shore. There were different opinions upon this, in which Juan de Añasco, who was very presumptuous, valuing himself much upon his knowledge of navigation, with other matters of the sea of which he had little experience, influenced the Governor (204).

Elvas puts into doubt Moscoso's wisdom and competence as he doubts the wisdom of the majority and follows the advice of an ignorant man. Elvas shows that the Governor's foolhardy, underhanded following of Juan de Añasco's advice brings him dangerously close to the fate of Pánfilo de Narváez, who abandoned his men, telling them to do what seemed best to each man. Elvas' fellow soldiers express extreme doubt in Governor Moscoso, almost accusing him of following in Narváez's footsteps: The men "told him that he meant to leave it he should say so, though he ought not to do that without having the consent of the rest, otherwise they would not follow his lead, but each would do as he

thought best” (206). Elvas portrays Moscoso as opposite of the commanding, decisive De Soto. He is an unsure leader, first following bad advice and then consenting to majority rule: “The Governor replied that he would nothing without consulting them” (206).

In the Elvas relation the men are vulnerable to bad advice as well. “Juan de Añasco, with his reasoning, concluded by getting all to consent, and deem it good, that they should go to sea” (206). After the Añasco’s plan to go to sea proves bad, Elvas puts the complaints in the mouth of the subordinate men: “Finding that the water was giving out, fearing extremity and peril, they all complained of Juan de Añasco, and of the Governor, who had listened to advice” (206). Elvas provides a detailed account of this bickering, a choice that reveals his questioning of Moscoso’s competence. The failure of the expedition, and all the suffering that comes with it, find their source in incompetent leadership. Elvas’ exposé is a subtle one, however, rarely personally questioning the leadership, relying instead on anonymous, subordinate voices within his account.

b) The Luys de Biedma Account

Luys Hernández de Biedma’s account of the “Conquest of Florida” contains significantly less detail than the Elvas account. Biedma accompanied De Soto as a representative of the Spanish crown, and his account, unlike the Gentleman of Elvas’ account, is a required document, an “official” relation of the events of the expedition. Biedma’s responsibility is to report to the Spanish monarchy, and we can expect points of view in the Biedma account that are different from those in the Elvas account. While Biedma is technically a subordinate under De Soto’s command, his obligation is to the Spanish crown. The purpose of his relation is to report to the crown. So while the

Gentleman of Elvas's account can be considered an *autobiografía de soldado*, the Biedma account has a more bureaucratic, official purpose. In this analysis of the subordinate voice, it must be recognized that Biedma's subordination differs from that of the Gentleman of Elvas. In fact, Biedma would likely be considered a "person of condition" by Elvas, or a person whose status gave him the ear of Governor Moscoso. He signs, along with Juan de Añasco, a pre-expedition letter to the King of Spain from the officers in De Soto's army. His position as an officer makes him less subordinate than Elvas or the men of lesser rank, and his official role as representative of the crown gives him certain authority.

The translation of the Biedma account used here is Buckingham Smith's, published in Milanich's *The Hernando De Soto Expedition*. Biedma's account is brief in comparison with the Elvas account, and it is more straightforward. Criticism of Governor De Soto is so subtle that it is easy to miss. Early in the account, Biedma discreetly blames De Soto for some delays in advancing into the interior lands. De Soto's order to Juan de Añasco by sea causes unnecessary suffering: "Juan de Añasco sent the people by land, while he came by sea, as the Governor had ordered, encountering much fatigue and danger; for he could not find the coast he had observed from the land before leaving" (225). When the brigantines finally arrive, De Soto commands that they sail westward to find a harbor, under the command of Francisco Maldonado:

The Governor directed that they should sail westwardly to discover a harbour, if one were near, whence to ascertain, by exploring the coast, if anything could be found inland... On this voyage he (Francisco Maldonado) was absent two months, which appeared to us all to be a

thousand years, inasmuch as it detained us so long from advancing to what we understood was to be found in the interior (225).

Unlike Elvas, who often puts complaints in the mouths of “the men,” Biedma’s complaint of delay, while subtle, is his own.

In a similar instance, Biedma finds fault with Governor De Soto when he insists on persisting on the course of a “deceitful” Indian guide: “And notwithstanding, towards the close, we began to discover his perfidy, the Governor did not desist from the course” (258). Biedma emphasizes De Soto’s strategic mistakes and the consequent delays and suffering they cause.

For the reader, De Soto loses some of his authority/authoritative strength when Biedma writes “The road had given out, and the Governor went around to regain it, but, failing to find it, he came back to us desperate” (258). De Soto has brought his men into a desperate, lost state, and Biedma does not excuse him. While some blame falls on the “perfidious Indian” (perfidious guides and interpreters to be discussed later), Biedma ultimately holds De Soto responsible. Biedma, with authority from the Spanish crown, is able to question De Soto’s strategic decisions more directly.

In the province of Tascaluza, Biedma recounts yet another mistake of De Soto, for which his men will pay dearly. The giant chief refuses to provide slaves for De Soto, and the Governor’s decision to hold the chief prisoner brings disaster: “The Governor ordered that he should not be allowed to return to his house, but be kept where he was. This detention among us he felt—whence sprang the ruin that he afterwards wrought us...” (262). De Soto threatens the chief with burning, further angering the chief (263). The resulting ambush at Mavila costs the Spaniards lives, injuries, and time: “We tarried

twenty-seven or twenty-eight days to take care of ourselves” (265). Biedma is preoccupied with strategic errors and time lost, while the Gentleman of Elvas is concerned with personal behavior and personal injustices.

Biedma’s account of Governor De Soto’s meeting with the Indian chiefs and their representatives is more hurried and more simple than in the Elvas account. In the Elvas relation, encounters with Indians always include exaggeratedly wordy praise for De Soto, always put in the chief’s or his representative’s mouth. In the Biedma account, on the other hand, there is no mention of such formal greetings and meetings. Indian praise for and submission to De Soto has no place in the Biedma account. In the Elvas account these wordy, formal greetings and pledges of service serve to exalt De Soto’s status. The De Soto of Biedma is less grand.

Biedma handles De Soto’s death almost in passing. Elvas recounts the sad occasion, how the men comforted De Soto, and how they attempted to conceal his death to maintain their image as supernatural beings for the Indians. Elvas also gives details of how Moscoso is chosen Governor after De Soto’s death. Biedma, on the other hand, narrates the event in one sentence: “The Governor, at seeing himself thus surrounded, and nothing coming about according to expectations, sickened and died” (277). For Biedma, De Soto’s brave struggle with fever and his difficult death seem not to exist. His sickness is a direct result of his inability to lead his men out of a difficult situation. The men are stuck in Guachoyanque with few provisions, no road out, and no way to reach the sea. De Soto, according to Biedma, dies of frustration and despair. The Elvas account is by far a more human, more moving story of De Soto’s death. For Biedma, De Soto’s death merits only brief mention. We could attribute this brevity to the document’s

legal, official nature, as a document destined to the Spanish crown, meant to be impersonal and factual. However, we can detect a disdainful tone when Biedma practically claims that De Soto dies from failure.

As for the new Governor Moscoso, Biedma mentions him only once, immediately after De Soto's death: "He left us recommending Luis de Moscoso to be our Governor" (277). While Elvas gives details of Moscoso's decision-making processes, his mistakes, and his political maneuvering, Biedma does not mention Moscoso again. Biedma leaves out the difficult decisions and interpersonal drama that Elvas includes in his account of Moscoso's governorship. It is likely that Biedma and his opinions were favored by Moscoso because of Biedma's official position. He is probably a "person of condition," as Elvas puts it. Therefore, any mistakes or wrong steps by Moscoso may have implicated Biedma in the decision. Here we can see that the degree of subordination has a great deal to do with the criticism (or lack thereof) of the expedition leadership.

c) The Rodrigo Ranjel Relation

Unfortunately we do not have the original of the Ranjel relation. Rodrigo Ranjel, the private secretary of De Soto, wrote an account that is now lost. However, we have Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés' "copy" of the Ranjel relation.⁵

The Ranjel relation cannot be considered an eyewitness, first-hand account, as it is filtered through Oviedo. Oviedo's voice is heard loudly throughout the account, making the Ranjel document quite different from the Elvas and Biedma accounts. Oviedo uses the Ranjel "copy" to judge De Soto's actions. The voice of the Ranjel copy judges De Soto's actions not as an eyewitness, but as a more distant observer, removed

⁵ Here I will use Edward Gaylord Bourne's translation, found in Milanich's *The Hernando De Soto Expedition*.

from the original events of the expedition in both space and time. While Ranjel is a subordinate of De Soto in the role of his personal secretary, Oviedo is not subordinate. In fact, Oviedo's role as an official historian gives him an authority that is completely different from De Soto's authority. Oviedo derives authority from at least two sources: he has authority as a writer of history, and he takes Ranjel's authority as an eyewitness and participant in the expedition by producing a "copy" of his diary. In the preface to *Historia general*, libro XVII, capítulo XXVI, Oviedo claims this authority. Ranjel, the eyewitness and participant, "gave an account to the royal audiencia of all these things, and it asked him and charged him that he should tell me (Oviedo) in writing and give an account of everything" (Milanich 351). Oviedo is receiving a legally valid version of events from Ranjel, since it comes as testimony to the royal audiencia.. Oviedo then claims authority as official historian. He receives Ranjel's account "as chronicler of their Majesties of these histories of the Indies." He clarifies his responsibility as a historian to gather together accounts and include "in them this conquest and discovery in the North, that it might be known" (351). As historian, Oviedo provides the account of "so many novelties and strange matters" to delight the "judicious reader" (351). But perhaps more importantly, he provides "a warning to may who are likely to lose their lives in these Indies following a governor who thus has control over the lives of others" (351). Even in the preface we see that Oviedo takes a stance of moral superiority over De Soto, backed by his authority based on an eyewitness source and his official capacity as "chronicler of their Majesties."

Oviedo's preface from his *Historia general* shows his concern for moral reflection from those involved in the expeditions. According to Oviedo, Ranjel writes

“every thing which happened” partly because “every Christian ought to do so, to be able to confess, and to recall to memory his faults, especially those who are engaged in war” (Milanich 350). Oviedo classifies these exploration activities as war, and he adjusts his judgment of De Soto accordingly.

Oviedo/Ranjel begins the relation with De Soto’s appointment as Governor of Cuba and Adelantado of Florida. De Soto’s fame as one of the leaders of the conquest of Peru and the riches he acquires there cause him to be “well received by the Emperor” in Spain, to be well married, and to receive governorship of Cuba along with permission to conquer the North (now known as the Gulf Coast region). No time is wasted in the indictment of De Soto’s leadership, and while we cannot be sure whether the criticism is Ranjel’s or Oviedo’s, it is more than likely Oviedo’s opinion. It is unlikely that such sweeping criticisms come from a first-hand diary. In the first disembarkment of De Soto he makes an error, according to the text: His disembarkment “was really heedlessness and excessive zeal, or a lack of prudence on the part of the Governor; for such work belongs to other persons and not to him who has to govern and rule the army” (355).

The Spaniards’ war on the Indians is characterized as excessively cruel, even while the “Indians are as agile and as good fighters as can be found among all the nations of the world” (361). De Soto’s killing of such fighters is not noble: “This Governor was much given to the sport of slaying Indians” (362). His past is “blood-stained,” from Castilla del Oro to Nicaragua, then in Peru and La Florida (362). Oviedo blames him for throwing male and female Indians to the dogs (*aperrear*) just for guiding badly or giving faulty advice (363). The Governor is portrayed as bellicose and often unnecessarily violent.

Later in the account, we can see many occasions when Oviedo breaks through the Rangel account, and we can assume that Oviedo will not hesitate to inject his own opinions and analysis. Looking for an explanation for Vasco Porcallo's departure to Cuba, Oviedo/Rangel state, "Vasco Porcallo, upon his return from this raid, had something of a clash with the Governor (which is concealed in this narrative), nor was the historian able, on account of certain considerations, to find any one who could inform him what he said to him" (364). Oviedo's voice overpowers the Rangel account when he complains that he is unable to uncover the details of the intrigue between De Soto and Porcallo. He subtly takes Porcallo's side in the mysterious argument by writing of Porcallo, "The departure of this cavalier was regretted by many since he was a friend of good men and did much for them" (365).

Immediately after this relatively subtle criticism of De Soto, Oviedo/Rangel overtly frame De Soto as a skillful liar. De Soto orders Baltasar de Gallegos to write false good news to encourage the men, against Gallego's nature as "a man of truth." Gallegos compromises between his loyalty to his superior and his own honesty by always writing two letters, "one truthful, and the other of falsehoods so skillfully framed with equivocal words that they could be understood one way or the other" (365). De Soto, for Oviedo/Rangel, is deceitful and manipulative, an expert in giving men false hope and in taking advantage of their greed:

Those letters, although they promised no particular thing, gave hopes and hints that stirred their desires to go forward...Wherefore as the sins of mankind are the reason that falsehood sometimes finds reception and

credit, all became united and of one mind and requested the invasion of the land, which was just what the Governor was contriving (366).

For Oviedo/Ranjel, the continuing of the expedition is based on falsehood, manipulation, and greed. The push further into the Gulf region, then, should be ill-fated, sanctioned by neither truth nor God.

Oviedo/Ranjel write in praise of Ranjel, who bravely follows Governor De Soto's orders against his own prudent judgment. A greedy De Soto, apparently believing that he had found riches, orders a reluctant Ranjel:

And when he saw the roads broad he thought he had his hands already on the spoil and ordered one of his knights, named Rodrigo Ranjel, because, besides being a good soldier and a man of worth, he had a good horse, to return to the camp for more soldiers to accompany him, and this the esquire did so, although not without misgiving of what might happen, since for the Governor to stay with only ten horsemen seemed to him too few; and he sent that gentleman alone and through a land of enemies and bad trails and where, if any found him, he must die or rush through... and since he felt ashamed to ask for company he bowed his head and obeyed (368).

Ranjel, following the Spanish code of honor, obeys his Governor. He waits to register his hesitation only in the text. Ranjel, as subordinate, must submit to De Soto.

Oviedo/Ranjel, in a different position entirely in the re-writing of the relation, are able to complain about his "prince" (369). The ultimate failure of the expedition gives Oviedo/Ranjel even more license to complain of De Soto. Oviedo/Ranjel profess

modesty and refuse to relate the specific adventure of Ranjel: “What befell this messenger horseman on that day he did not wish to say, because what he said would be about himself. Suffice it to say that he well proved his resolution to be a brave man” (369). Here we can hear Oviedo’s voice come through very clearly, speaking *for* Ranjel instead of merely providing a copy of his relation. In another similar instance we hear Oviedo’s voice in the relation, praising Ranjel’s discretion: “This army went from there to a stream which they named Discords, and the reason therefore he desired to conceal who prepared this narrative, because as a man of worth, he did not purpose to relate the faults or weaknesses of his friends” (374). Ranjel’s omissions of certain information are not careless, but rather serve to exemplify his modesty, discretion, and good character.

While the Knight of Elvas’ account includes numerous lengthy, flowery speeches by the Indians to De Soto, always flattering to De Soto and serving to exalt his authority, the Oviedo/Ranjel account has a different view of Indian speech to Governor De Soto. Indian messengers from Ichisi address De Soto curtly: “And one of the addressed the Governor and said three words, one after the other, in this manner: ‘Who are you, what do you want, where are you going?’” (389). The wordy Indian speeches in the Elvas account show De Soto as an awesome figure, inspiring respect and fear in the native chiefs. The Oviedo/Ranjel relation, on the other hand, shows De Soto as a less impressive figure, treated almost with disdain by the Indians. After the Indians ask him the curt questions, it is De Soto who, according to Oviedo/Ranjel, must respond with a long speech identifying himself to the Indians as “a captain of the great King of Spain” (390). While in the Oviedo/Ranjel relation De Soto is frequently received in fear, the awed speeches are absent, which is a stark contrast to the Elvas account.

Oviedo once again breaks through the narration and writes in first person, providing us with clear proof of his imposing presence in this so-called “copy” of Ranjel’s relation. Oviedo uses this “interruption” in the narrative to criticize not only De Soto, but also to compare him with other failed conquistadors in the Gulf region. Within the text Oviedo interjects his thoughts:

I have wondered many times at the venturesomeness, stubbornness, and persistency or firmness, to use a better word for the way these baffled conquerors kept on from one toil to another, and then to another still greater; from one danger to many others, here losing one companion, there three and again still more, going from bad to worse without learning by experience. Oh, wonderful God! that they should have been so blinded and dazed by a greed so uncertain and by such vain discourses as Hernando De Soto was able to utter to those deluded soldiers, whom he brought to a land where he had never been, nor put foot into, and where three other leaders, more experienced than he, had ruined themselves: Johan Ponce, Garay and Pamphilo de Narvaez, any one of whom had more experience than he in the affairs of the Indies, and inspired more confidence than he; for he neither in the islands nor in the mainland of the north had knowledge except of the government of Pedrarias, in Castilla del Oro and Nicaragua, and in Peru, which was quite another sort of embroilment with Indians. He thought that experience in the South was sufficient to show him what to do in the North, and he was deceived as the history will tell (394-395).

Here Oviedo, unlike Elvas or Biedma, takes great authority from his position of historian, and from his distance from the expedition in space and time, and from his freedom from the taint of the expedition failure because he is not a participant. With this interjection, we can deduce that of De Soto's great faults demonstrated in the Rangel relation, his mistaken reliance on previous experience in the South (Peru and others) makes him an incompetent conquistador. Failure in conquest leads to accusations of greed, delusion, and cruelty. Those who succeed in conquest may escape such criticism.

Successful conquistadors provide almost instant wealth for the Spanish crown, and their greed and cruelty must be insignificant compared with the benefit they provide to the crown and the project of empire. Added to this, the successful conquistadors, like Cortés, survive to speak for themselves through letters, by speaking at court, and by maintaining political power in the Americas. Successful conquest and survival yield very different portraits of conquistadors than failure and perishing mid-expedition. De Soto's reputation is at the mercy of other expedition members of lesser rank, the subordinate voices. We find that the subordinate voices judge him more subtly and less harshly than voices with greater authority, like Oviedo. The subordinate voices, through documents written more closely in space and time to the actual expedition, write with their own self-interest in mind, subtly criticizing their leader without implicating themselves in wrongdoing. Oviedo, free from such limitations, takes over the Rangel text to harshly criticize De Soto's competence and motives.

When Oviedo mentions Ponce, Garay, and Narváez, he places these failed conquistadors above De Soto, writing that they "had more experience than he in the affairs of the Indies, and inspired more confidence than he" (395). In doing this, Oviedo

heaps more failures upon De Soto. The successful conquistador with Pizarro in Peru must pay for his failure in the Gulf Coast region by being ranked as even more incompetent than Narváez, who had no success whatsoever in the business of conquest. (Narváez fails to capture Cortés in Mexico and the Florida expedition costs him and almost every man with him their lives.) In placing even Narváez above De Soto, the horrors of the Cabeza de Vaca account are in a way transferred to De Soto. Oviedo “contaminates” De Soto with the taints of other Gulf Coast failures, and judges him even worse by comparison, even though by actual achievement in conquest De Soto would objectively be judged as far more successful.

While Oviedo cannot claim eyewitness authority, he achieves historian authority by speaking through the Ranjel account, and by breaking into the account to mention his personal familiarity with De Soto: “Let us return now to the narrative and the march of this captain or Governor, whom I knew very well, and with whom I talked and associated” (395-396). By following the harsh comparison of De Soto with other failed conquistadors with a declaration of his own personal relationship with De Soto, Oviedo further shores up his own credibility.

Oviedo continues to criticize De Soto through Ranjel. When the men become lost, and even the Indians have “lost their bearings,” De Soto makes a bad situation worse: “The Governor proposed, as he always had done, that it was best to go on, without knowing, either himself or they, what they were aiming at or whither they were wandering” (397). An expedition, once full of the purpose of conquest, has degenerated to mere wandering. Starvation, continual rain, rising water, and hopelessness result. For Oviedo/Ranjel, De Soto is incapable of saving the men. The men call on God for mercy

and it is the Lord who “did bring the succor” (398). Only God saves men from De Soto’s foolish decision.

Oviedo/Ranjel again criticizes De Soto’s brutal treatment of Indians as un-Christian and cruel. When an Indian is burned alive for not revealing the location of his leader, Oviedo/Ranjel compares the Indian to some classical hero: “For to such a one as him the Romans set up a memorable statue in the Forum; and to Christians no such cruelty is allowable toward any one and especially toward an Indian who was ready to die to be loyal to his country and to his lord” (400). In such a brief statement Oviedo/Ranjel question De Soto’s Christianity and even his status as a civilized being. De Soto violates the rules of civilization not just of Spain, but also of the cradle of all Western civilization—Rome. De Soto, who seems to have lost his honor in the Oviedo/Ranjel account, is contrasted with an honorable savage. By emphasizing the Indian’s loyalty to his lord, Oviedo/Ranjel question De Soto’s loyalty, honor, and Christianity.

Oviedo/Ranjel speculate on Governor De Soto’s selfish motives to keep the richest land and pearls for himself. De Soto is viewed only negatively, even when his actions might be honest and noble. In Cofitachequi De Soto refuses to steal jewel and shows restraint in the taking of abundant pearls. However restrained his behavior, it is put into doubt by Oviedo/Ranjel: “It was believed that he planned to take that place for himself, since it was the best that they saw and with the land in the best condition...” (404). For Oviedo/Ranjel, De Soto’s true motives are selfish, so that even seemingly admirable behavior can be thrown into question.

De Soto’s custom of collaring and chaining Indians is condemned. Putting Indians into collars and chains is an apparently frequent event in the expedition, and this

is harshly judged by Oviedo Ranjel: “And the Spaniards went out to round them up, and they took many, and they put them in iron collars and chains. And verily, according to the testimony of eye-witnesses, it was a grievous thing to see. But God failed not to remember every evil deed, nor were they left unpunished, as this history will tell” (415-416). Oviedo’s moral authority is reinforced by an unnamed aggrieved eyewitness.

While the historian Oviedo cannot claim to witness De Soto’s barbarism, he can rely on the eyewitnesses’ testimony, even when he fails to name them and fails to mention Ranjel’s own personal reaction to the chaining. Oviedo then uses the narrative device of foreshadowing (which would not occur naturally in a firsthand diary), warning that the failed expedition is a result of God’s punishment for De Soto’s cruelty. For Oviedo/Ranjel, the failure and suffering during the expedition is the result of a combination of De Soto’s incompetence and of divine punishment for his evil deeds.

After briefly relating the general progress of the expedition, Oviedo/Ranjel return to harsh criticism of De Soto, seemingly angered by the taking of tamemes (carriers/slaves) and women at practically every Indian settlement. While the taking of tamemes and women is briefly addressed and questioned in the Elvas account, Oviedo/Ranjel devote entire pages to indicting De Soto and many of the men. Oviedo/Ranjel (in this instance Oviedo seems to overcome Ranjel, even naming himself in the account as “the historian”) wonders, within the text, about the taking of such large numbers of women and carriers. To satisfy his curiosity, “the historian asked a very intelligent gentleman who was with the Governor, and who went with him through his whole expedition in this northern country, why, at every place they came to, this Governor and his army asked for those tamemes or Indian carriers, and why they took so

many women and these not old nor the most ugly..." (420). The suggestion is that De Soto, along with some men, is decadent and an adulterer. Oviedo/Ranjel pose the question to an unnamed (yet again) intelligent gentleman. Oviedo once again takes historical and moral authority from the statement of a man who is triply valuable—he is an eyewitness, he is intelligent, and he is a gentleman, which implies that he has honor and is a truthful witness.

On the subject of tamemes and women, the intelligent gentleman explains, quoted by Oviedo/Ranjel: "That they took these carriers and tamemes to keep them as slaves or servants to carry the loads of supplies which they secured by plunder or gift, and that some died, and others ran away or were tired out, so that it was necessary to take more" (420). The taking of tamemes, then, is a direct consequence of greed. The taking of women is even more grievous, according to Oviedo/Ranjel quoting of the intelligent gentleman: "The women they desired both as servants and for their foul uses and lewdness, and that they had them baptized more on account of carnal intercourse with them than to teach them the faith" (420). De Soto and his men pollute the holy sacrament of baptism, and the cruel act of taking women goes beyond the sin of lust to become a form of heresy.

Oviedo/Ranjel also question the intelligent gentleman about De Soto's failure to settle or fully conquer the land, asking him "why they never tarried nor settled in any region they came to, adding that such a course was not settlement or conquest, but rather disturbing and ravaging the land and depriving the natives of their liberty without converting or making a single Indian either a Christian or a friend" (420). For Oviedo/Ranjel, De Soto cuts a path of wanton destruction, rather than serving the Spanish

crown by conquest and colonization. The intelligent gentleman shares Oviedo/Ranjel's low opinion of De Soto. Of De Soto's failure to conquer and settle, Oviedo/Ranjel quote the intelligent gentleman:

And that whither they were going neither the Governor nor the others knew, but that his purpose was to find some land rich enough to satiate his greed and to get knowledge of the great secrets this Governor said he had heard in regard to those regions according to much information he had received; and as for stirring up the country and not settling it, nothing else could be done until they found a site that was satisfactory (421).

The information De Soto had received is from the Narváez/Cabeza de Vaca expedition. Again, Oviedo/Ranjel link these failed expeditions and make implicit the inevitable failure caused by greed.

Oviedo/Ranjel then go into a dramatic indictment of De Soto and some of his men, condemning their greed, their bloodlust, and their ill treatment of the natives. This criticism fits better in a document that is removed in time and space from the actual expedition, written by one who has nothing to lose because he is not a member of that expedition. It is unlikely that an exclamation like the one that follows here would be found in Ranjel's original document, written in the heat of the expedition. Rather, we can hear Oviedo's voice come through clearly. Oviedo exclaims, "Oh, wicked men! Oh, devilish greed! Oh, bad consciences! Oh, unfortunate soldiers! that ye should not have understood the perils ye were to encounter, and how wasted would be your lives, and without rest your souls!" (421). The expedition is an adventure in greed, folly, and sin,

which causes the soldiers to experience a kind of death in life like that described by St. Augustine (421).

Oviedo/Ranjel continue by lamenting the bad treatment of the natives at the hands of De Soto, who, according to Oviedo/Ranjel, has a long history of needless killing in the Americas. Oviedo/Ranjel build sympathy for the natives in the Christian audience by recounting De Soto's sordid past:

Give ear, then, Catholic reader, and do not lament the conquered Indians less than their Christian conquerors or slayers of themselves, as well as others, and follow the adventures of this Governor, ill governed, taught in the school of Pedrarias de Ávila, in the scattering and wasting of the Indians of Castilla del Oro; a graduate in the killing of the natives of Nicaragua and canonized in Peru as a member of the order of the Pizarros... (422).

De Soto, for Oviedo/Ranjel, is an adventurer competent only in the killing of Indians. Oviedo/Ranjel paints De Soto as a member of the Pizarro clan, so effective at conquering and killing but a treacherous thorn in the Spanish crown's side. De Soto is infected with bloodlust, and unable to rest in Spain, he drags all of his men with him on the failed Florida expedition:

And then, after being delivered from all those paths of Hell and having come to Spain loaded with gold, neither a bachelor nor married, knew not how nor was able to rest without returning to the Indies to shed human blood, not content with what he had spilled; and to leave life as shall be

narrated, and providing the opportunity for so many sinners deluded with his vain words to perish after him (422).

The structure of this paragraph, which even Oviedo/Ranjel identify as a narration (“as shall be narrated” (422)), shows the hindsight and observational distance that is unlikely to exist in Ranjel’s original relation. Oviedo/Ranjel give De Soto’s expedition the form of a story, complete with foreshadowing and a moral lesson. De Soto, for Oviedo/Ranjel, damages and is damaged by the business of conquest. To complete Oviedo/Ranjel’s narrative, De Soto must suffer divine justice. The taking of treasure also is punishable. Because the Gulf Coast lacks gold, the pearls of Cofitachequi are the only valuable find for the De Soto expedition, and Oviedo/Ranjel foreshadow the coming disaster by writing, “Let us proceed, and forget not this truth which you have read, how as a proof of the number of pearls which were offered him, this Governor and his people took over two hundred pounds, and you will know what enjoyment they got out of them in the sequel” (423). Here Oviedo/Ranjel directly address the reader again, making what is purported to be Ranjel’s relation into a narrative, a morality tale directed to a wide audience that is larger and more varied than the officials who would read Ranjel’s relation.

The mistreatment of the courteous woman chief of Cofitachequi and the taking of her pearls must be punished within the narrative. The mistreatment of chiefs/monarchs may present a threat to the Spanish crown, and Oviedo/Ranjel must prove that divine punishment comes to those who abuse or murder rulers, even in the Americas. De Soto is involved in more than one violation of a monarch’s authority. He participates in the conquest of Peru with the Pizarros, and they directly order the execution of Atahualpa. (Earlier within the Oviedo/Ranjel account De Soto is indicted for being involved in the

atrocities in Peru.) De Soto continues the abuse of American monarchs throughout the Gulf Coast expedition, and finally his mistreatment of the woman chief of Cofitachequi, the lady of Talimeco, earns him severe punishment. Oviedo, in his position of historian, must uphold the principles of the Spanish crown and of monarchies in general. Unlike the more subordinate writers Elvas and Biedma, Oviedo can more harshly judge De Soto, and in doing that, uphold the idea that monarchies are sacred and reinforce the Spanish crown. While Elvas and Biedma subtly criticize some of De Soto's actions, only the Oviedo/Ranjel relation uses the benefits of distance from the original expedition and the authority of a historian to judge De Soto more sweepingly, framing the expedition's failure and De Soto's demise as divine punishment.

The next chief mentioned is even more closely associated with Spain and is much admired by Oviedo/Ranjel. In the village of Tascaluça, or Athahachi, the chief wears a headdress "like a Moor's, which gave him an aspect of authority" (423). He is as tall as the Spanish king's guard, "a fine and comely figure of a man" (423). Oviedo/Ranjel further associate the chief with Spain and Christianity: "Before this chief there stood an Indian of graceful mien holding a parasol on a handle something like a round and very large fly fan, with a cross similar to that of the Knights of the Order of St. John of Rhodes..." (424). These Indians compare to Christian knights, and the composure of the chief is royal: "And although the Governor entered the plaza and alighted from his horse and went up to him, he did not rise, but remained passive in perfect composure and as if he had been a king" (424).⁶ Oviedo/Ranjel contrast the abusive De Soto with the composed, calm, dignified chief of Tascaluça. When De Soto requests carriers and

⁶ It would be interesting to compare this chief's reaction to Atahualpa's stoic reception of the Spaniards in Peru.

women from the Tascaluça chief, Oviedo/Ranjel characterize it as an “unjust request,” especially when demanded of such a dignified, composed lord (425). De Soto’s image loses in this portrayal, and the Tascaluça chief maintains a royal bearing, an almost Christian bearing.

Oviedo/Ranjel build the feeling of impending disaster. De Soto’s unjust behavior (the taking of the pearls, the mistreatment of the woman chief, the unjust requests to the chief of Tascaluça) will surely bring punishment. Oviedo/Ranjel link De Soto’s passing through Piachi with the doomed Narváez expedition, further foreshadowing disaster: “In this village, Piachi, it was learned that they had killed Don Teodoro and a black, who came from the ships of Pamphilo de Narvaez” (426). The linking of the Gulf Coast failures of Narváez and De Soto is a strategy that Oviedo/Ranjel use to demonstrate the incompetence of both leaders, which of the two Oviedo/Ranjel consider Narváez the more capable (even while De Soto is a more accomplished conquistador by any objective measure). The failed expeditions on the Gulf Coast are linked by Oviedo/Ranjel several times in the relation. This linkage serves as foreshadowing for the Ranjel relation that Oviedo has turned into a more constructed narrative, and it serves to lump the Gulf Coast failures together to give narrative coherence and continuity. The Gulf Coast failure can make sense if the failure is a consequence of some moral failing, and Oviedo/Ranjel build the moral failing -> disaster structure in the Ranjel narrative.

The disaster at Mabila, an ambush in which many men and horses are killed and a terrible fire destroys the two hundred pounds of pearls, is punishment for Governor De Soto’s failings. Oviedo/Ranjel recount the terrible battle with great detail, naming names of the men involved in the most dramatic events. Rodrigo Ranjel’s deeds are told in the

third person, further providing proof of Oviedo's narrative takeover of the Ranjel relation. Oviedo gives Ranjel an important role in the great battle:

And he (De Soto) told Rodrigo Ranjel to give aid to the Captain of the Guard, who was left behind, for he had come out quite used up and a soldier of the Guard with him; and he with a horse faced the enemy until he got out of danger, and Rodrigo Ranjel returned to the Governor and had him draw out more than twenty arrows which he bore fastened in his armour... (428).

Ranjel is key in the action, and his almost supernatural survival contrasts with the killing of many men right beside him. While Oviedo/Ranjel are critical of De Soto, they are careful to detail Ranjel's valiant service to the Governor, emphasizing Ranjel's loyalty and sense of duty even within a disaster of De Soto's own making. The losses suffered are even greater than the "two hundred odd pounds of pearls" (430). The Spaniards fight "like men of great courage," and Oviedo/Ranjel give the list of "fine gentlemen" and "honoured soldiers" lost in the battle at Mabila (431). Oviedo/Ranjel then give the count of the losses of the entire expedition up through the battle at Mabila: "And up to the time when they left there, the total deaths from the time the Governor and his forces entered the land of Florida, were one hundred and two Christians, and not all, to my thinking, in true repentance" (431). De Soto, for Oviedo/Ranjel, is not only responsible for Spaniards' deaths, but also for the perdition of their souls, with many having died without confession.

Oviedo again takes his authority from Ranjel's participation in the hardships of the expedition in order to show how De Soto's wanderings bring down even the most illustrious gentlemen:

And that you may know, reader, what sort of a life these Spaniards led, Rodrigo Ranjel, an eyewitness, says that among many other great hardships that men endured in this undertaking he saw a knight named Don Antonio Osorio, brother of the Lord Marquis of Astorga, wearing a short garment of the blankets of that country, torn on the sides, his flesh showing... (433).

Even the most distinguished among De Soto's men are in a humiliating state, misled by his promises to partake in such a dangerous expedition, relying on De Soto's false promises. Oviedo/Ranjel again editorialize in the relation, injecting a voice that is surely Oviedo's: "I could hardly keep from laughing when I heard that this knight had left the Church and the income above mentioned to go in search of such a life as this, at the sound of the words of De Soto" (434). De Soto, for Oviedo/Ranjel, deludes and misleads the finest, most worthy gentlemen, and they end in starving, naked suffering in the Gulf Coast region.

Oviedo/Ranjel then repeat a previous criticism of De Soto's ignorance of the Gulf Coast region, comparing him unfavorably to other failed leaders of Gulf Coast expeditions: "Nor did the Captain (De Soto) who took him (Osorio) know anything more than that in this land had perished Johan Ponce de Leon and the lawyer Lucas Vazquez de Allyón and Pamphilo de Narvaez and others abler than Hernando de Soto" (434). While De Soto is clearly more competent and accomplished as a conquistador than a figure like Narváez, Oviedo/Ranjel insist on not only labeling De Soto as a failure, but also classifying him as the greatest Gulf Coast failure of all. Oviedo's status as historian should make him intimately familiar with all of the expeditions and leaders on the Gulf

Coast, making his pronouncement of De Soto's incompetence have the ring of authority, far from the milder subordinate criticisms that come from the Gentleman of Elvas or Biedma.

Oviedo/Ranjel immediately follow this pronouncement of De Soto's abysmal incompetence with an example of his destructive leadership. When the Governor finds the Indians "evilily disposed," he warns his men and declares his intentions in a statement that Oviedo/Ranjel give in a direct quote: "To-night is an Indian night. I shall sleep armed and my horse saddled" (436). Inexplicably, De Soto and the Master of the Camp Luis de Moscoso sleep undressed, unarmed, with horses unprepared. Oviedo/Ranjel may wish to emphasize both De Soto's and Moscoso's foolishness, or their laziness, which costs the Spaniards both men and horses in the subsequent Indian attack. De Soto is further humiliated by falling off his horse in the first moments of battle: "Only the commander was able to mount his horse, and they did not fasten the horse's girth, nor did he buckle his coat of arms... and he fell over the first Indian that he thrust at who had thrust at him, saddle and all" (437). Unlike Garcilaso de la Vega's version in which De Soto fights on an ungirthed horse for an hour, Oviedo/Ranjel's version is a humiliating, emasculating one. De Soto appears foolish, unprepared, losing the indicators of his Spanishness, his armor and his horse, in a scene that is almost comical, had it not brought the Spaniards so close to disaster. De Soto and his men are saved only by the Indians not knowing "how to follow up their victory" (437).

Oviedo/Ranjel emphasize the worsening suffering and unpreparedness of the Spaniards. As the Ranjel relation progresses, conditions and leadership continue to deteriorate for the Spaniards, and Oviedo/Ranjel's clear intention is for the reader to

blame De Soto, while most other Spaniards receive respect in the Ranjel relation. In the account of a following attack, “Some Spaniards displayed great valour that day, and no one failed to do his duty” (438). The valiant, dutiful Spaniards suffer only from poor leadership.

De Soto also is a spiritual failure in the Oviedo/Ranjel relation. Not only does he fail to conquer and settle the land properly, but he also neglects his obligation to Christianize and save the souls of the Indians. Of the conquistadors, Oviedo quotes Ranjel: “Their faith, says Rodrigo Ranjel, would have surpassed that of the conquerors if they had been taught, and would have brought forth more fruit than those conquerors did” (442). Even the Casqui Indians, of instructed in the Christian faith, would have been more useful than De Soto. For Oviedo/Ranjel, De Soto is committing a great sin in not teaching the Casqui Indians the faith, and the Spanish empire loses valuable potential subjects. De Soto is failing at the entire enterprise of conquest—there is no settling of colonies, no treasure to send to the Spanish crown, and no new converts to the Christian faith. Oviedo/Ranjel continue, “To my thinking, it would have been better after baptizing a chief of so much intelligence as Casqui, and making him and his people Christians, to have remained there... Nor do I approve of their having gone further than to Cofitachequi, for the same reason, and on account of what was said of that land” (448). De Soto is criticized for only superficially explaining God and the cross, for to explain the faith further would expose De Soto as a hypocrite and a sinner:

But I could wish that along with the excellencies of the cross and of the faith that this Governor explained to these chiefs, he had told him that he was married, and that the Christians ought not to have more than one wife

or to have intercourse with another, or to commit adultery; that he had not taken the daughter whom Casqui gave him, nor the wife and sister and the other women of rank whom Pacaha gave him; and that they had not got the idea that the Christians, like the Indians, could have as many wives and concubines as they desired, and thus, like the Indians, live as adulterers (448).

In the Oviedo/Ranjel account, De Soto's transgressions seem to progress in seriousness from incompetent leadership, to carnality, to failure in spreading the Christian faith. To allow the Indians to continue in adultery by setting the poor example himself, De Soto fails the Spanish crown and the Holy Faith. Ignoring what Oviedo/Ranjel consider to be the best option, which is remaining at Casqui to Christianize its people, De Soto pushes on, irrationally, never settling in one place. The Oviedo/Ranjel account in Oviedo's *Historia general* breaks off at this point. Because the Cañete fragment is so brief, it will not be analyzed in this section; it is useful for analysis of other characteristics of failure texts, however. By comparing the level of subordination of the De Soto expedition writers and their level of direct involvement in the expedition, we see varying degrees of criticism for the leader of the failed expedition. In these texts of failure, we can see the writers jockeying for position, criticizing De Soto harshly only to the level they dare to, as they are relative subordinates who would wish to insulate themselves from the failures of the expedition.

Chapter 2

The Subordinate Voices in the Luna Expedition and *Naufragios*

In this chapter I aim to prove the presence of the subordinate voice in both the Luna expedition letters and Cabeza de Vaca's narrative *Naufragios*. These documents differ from the De Soto documents discussed in the previous chapter in that the Luna

documents are made up almost entirely of relatively brief letters and petitions, and *Naufraños* is a more novelistic narrative, written for a wider audience than that of the De Soto accounts.

In *From Lack to Excess: "Minor" Readings of Latin American Colonial Discourse*, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel proposes a reading of *Naufraños* and other narratives of failure as "minor literature," in the theory of Deleuze and Guattari. She states that "a colonial/minority discourse can be produced by Spanish conquistadors" because "colonialism produces a particular series of subject positions that range from the European representative of the metropolitan power, to indigenous and African populations" (34). The writers of the Gulf Coast failure texts are doubly "minor"—they are military subordinates and failures at once. I intend to show specific examples of this double subordination or double minority in both the Luna papers and *Naufraños*. The Luna expedition papers provide voices from an especially rich variety of subordinates, from Mexican Indians to gentleman settlers.

Subordinate Dispatches from the Tristán de Luna Florida Expedition

The texts of the Tristán de Luna y Arellano expedition to Florida are mostly official documents in the form of reports, petitions, replies, opinions, and declarations. The texts analyzed here are from documents compiled and translated by Herbert Ingram Priestly after his exhaustive search of the *Archivo General de las Indias*. Before the compilation of Priestly's findings, the failed Luna expedition was known only through Fray Agustín Dávila Padilla's history. Dávila Padilla's history comes at least partly from Fray Domingo de la Anunciación and is written around thirty years after the actual expedition. Priestly's legal documents provide contemporary, first-hand narratives, in

contrast to the memoirs and reminiscences that are written years after the failed expeditions. Additionally, many of the Luna papers provide us with subordinate voices. A number of documents contain “opinions, threats, protests,... and reasonings of his recalcitrant followers” (Priestly li). The Luna expedition had more complex and difficult goals than mere treasure-seeking expeditions. Its goal to colonize the Florida region, with women and children in tow, to protect against French encroachment is laid out in the Luna papers.

With the Luna papers, it is particularly evident that texts of failure provide a rare opportunity to hear subordinate voices that in any other circumstances would be silent, by convention or by force. It is only the spectacular failure and grave conditions of the Luna Florida expedition that allow (and even demand) the vocal and written expression of such subordinates as Mexican Indians in the expedition party and lower-ranking soldiers. Subordinate men and soldiers are to obey, and speaking up should be left to those with higher authority. But in the Luna failure texts, while failure does not necessarily break down all order and social convention, we can observe that desperate failure does provide a powerful incentive for those who have no voice to find a way to speak. The consistent presence of the subordinate voice is a trait that separates failure texts from other successful expedition documents, and it makes failure texts of especially great interest. In the Luna documents we will see that subordinates find a voice through petitions and differing strategies. They question their immediate leader, governor Tristán de Luna y Arellano, but the ultimate authority of the Spanish crown is never in question, even in the most desperate state of starvation. Indeed, the priorities of the Spanish crown and the church are used as motives to question Luna’s command.

In this section I will discuss the subordinates and their textual strategies to relate to differing authorities. How do varying degrees of subordination affect one's written communications with those of varying degrees of authority? The Luna expedition is not just a gold hunt. "It was no haphazard set of uncoordinated wanderings animated by lust of gold, but a conscious aim at building a great northern colonial empire. The tragic Luna episode was determined effort to anticipate the French in occupying a part of this coveted domain" (Priestly xiv). Because settlement is a priority, the Luna expedition has a great variety of participants. In addition to the usual high and low ranking soldiers, there are priests, women, children, and Indians from Mexico. Luna wishes to bring, even in the first step of colonization, a complete, ready-made community, ready to settle Florida. So the voices available to us through the documents of the immediately disastrous Luna expedition have varying degrees of subordination, from the very subordinate Mexican Indians and lower-ranking married soldiers, to the less subordinate higher ranking soldiers, gentlemen, and priests. The managing of varying degrees of subordination in the criticism of the expedition leader and governor Luna is analyzed in the following paragraphs. Most documents are contemporary to the expedition, written and received in the heat of suffering and failure.

The Mexican Indians draft a document in which they ask for a ship in which to return to New Spain. Priestly explains that the "written petitions had evidently been preceded by much vocal complaint. On June 19 Luna had been petitioned by almost everyone who wanted to get out of the country. He had been unwilling to grant anyone license to go, it being contrary to the viceroy's wish and to the success of the enterprise" (Priestly xlv). So the Mexican Indians' written complaint is not their first, but rather a

culmination of previous unheeded complaints. In the petition to Luna, the men identify themselves as “all the principal Indians, natives of the City of Mexico and of Tatebula” (Volume I 143). They have a social rank higher than that of other Indian laborers, who also make their own petition as “Indian craftsmen” (“*indios oficiales*”). Interestingly we can see the social difference not only in the descriptors “principal” and “craftsmen” (*oficiales*), but also in the Indian names upon signing the petition. Most principal Indians have surnames, while most laborers have only first names.

In the Indians’ petition the criticism of Luna is only implicit in the starvation of their men: “On account of the great necessity which exists in this army from hunger, we are suffering very greatly. Until now we have been sustaining ourselves with a few herbs which used to be found here, but now there are no more...” (Volume I 143). The complaint of the principal Indians is simply imminent starvation. The request is not for better treatment or more supplies, but rather a ship to escape Florida: “So, in order that we may not perish here in greater number than those who have died and perished, will you not, in the name of his royal Highness, be pleased to give us a ship so that we may go to New Spain that we may preserve our lives” (143-145). Luna is asked only for a means of escape, which highlights the dire starvation of the expedition. Luna’s leadership becomes a less important issue in the face of sure starvation, and the Indians appeal to agreements they made with the viceroy in New Spain previous to the expedition. The agreements with the viceroy should trump any contrary decision that Luna may make. The request for a ship is made “in conformity with the cédulas whereby the most illustrious viceroy of New Spain made to us certain grants inasmuch as we did not want to take any money in payment, as is evident to you from the said cédulas, which we

present to you” (145). The *cédulas* give the Indians authority because they come from the viceroy, who is acting in the name of the Spanish crown: “We ask and beseech you...to order these *cédulas* compiled with the letter as the viceroy in the name of his Highness made the grants to us” (145). In such a brief statement the Indians affirm that their meager authority is backed by the Spanish crown through the *cédulas*. Surely Luna cannot contradict this legal evidence of the principal Indians’ right to demand relief.

The Indian craftsmen also draft a written petition for a ship “*pa’ venirse*,” to come away. Like the principal Indians, the only complaint is starvation: “The great need of food in this camp is well known to you, but to us more than anyone else, for we have nowhere to obtain it; wherefore we are enduring insufferable want, and we fear that we shall perish” (147). These Indians identify themselves as the least able to protect themselves from starvation because they have even less access to food than anyone else in the camp. We can see evidence of previous complaints when they declare in writing that Luna is well aware of the starvation problem: “The great need of food in this camp is well known to you” (147). The Indians claim the simple right of saving their lives, and this right is made legal by “the command which the most illustrious viceroy gave for all of us who came in this fleet” (147). That command is a concrete document “in the possession of Captain Don Miguel” (147).

The Indians’ request is remarkably simple and straightforward in comparison with other petitions by officers. Details of Luna’s previous talks and dealings with the Indians are not mentioned in the petitions, but we can be sure that some oral complaints and discussions preceded the written petitions. Alternate routes and encampments are not the issue in the Indians’ petitions. Their request is brief—they merely want a means of

escaping the entire disastrous expedition. The Indians offer no expedition details, no place names, no suggestions of how the ships are to be provided. Instead, the Indian laborers “ask grants, alms, and above all, justice” (147). In other petitions and complaints by those of higher social and military rank, we will see far more expedition details and nuance, which contrasts with the Indians’ brief and desperate petition.

The married soldiers, who had come to Florida along with their wives and children as part of the colonization project, also petition Luna that they be returned to New Spain. Their perspective is unique, in that few expedition texts include the complication of having entire families involved in the enterprise. While the married soldiers’ petition is relatively brief, it is more detailed than that of the Indians, and it goes beyond simply pleading for their lives. Before complaining of starvation, the married soldiers go so far as to question the overall effectiveness of the expedition and its use to the Spanish crown and the Church. As for Christianizing the natives and bringing them into the dominion of the Spanish empire and the Church, “we have not seen, during the past year in which we have been in this country, any disposition on the part of the natives or condition in the country whereby such a desire may be brought into effect” (Volume I 133). The married soldiers’ strategy in the petition is to put into doubt the hope for success, which will make their request to leave Florida far more reasonable. The soldiers elaborate on what makes success so impossible. Neither natives nor nature will cooperate, and the Spaniards are powerless to change the circumstances. The natives refuse Christianization and colonization: “All of this land refuse to have it, for they have revolted and have the supplies hidden” (133).

The married soldiers complain that winning in battle is equally impossible: “The land is so densely wooded and so full of inlets and swamps that no human power will suffice to subjugate these natives or bring them under the dominion which his Majesty desires” (133). The thesis of the petition is that attempts to settle Florida are futile and of no use to the Spanish crown: “We see clearly that his Majesty can have no profit, nor effect his very holy intention; neither can we be benefited nor settle nor live in this land” (133-135). The implication is that Luna’s insistence of carrying on is foolish and contrary to the Spanish crown’s interests. Compared with the Indians’ more straightforward petitions, the married soldiers take more authority when they opine in writing about the effectiveness of the entire expedition.

Only after making clear that the expedition is hopeless do the married soldiers make their complaint of starvation. Unlike the Indians, the married soldiers take the authority to judge the purposes of the expedition and its likelihood of success. This gives more weight to claims of hunger, as this suffering is useless and serves no purpose in a doomed attempt at settlement. And even beyond complaining of personal suffering, the married soldiers are able to petition for relief for the suffering women and children: “We see very clearly that we ourselves, our children and wives and our estates, are suffering from the great hunger which we are at present enduring” (135). Not only is the attempt at settling hopeless, but also alleviating hunger is out of Luna’s hands: “We see that neither we nor your Lordship can remedy this situation” (135). The married soldiers’ petition is a measured one when compared to the Indians’ petition. While Indians simply express the fear of dying and ask for a ship, the married soldiers defend their request to leave by questioning the very expedition. The married soldiers do not specifically

request a ship—they merely petition to be sent “to New Spain under whatever precaution may be proper” so that their wives and children do not starve (135).

The married soldiers then declare their loyalty to the viceroy Velasco and to the Spanish crown. Their desire to abandon Luna and the Florida expedition does not extend to treachery. They claim to remain willing to participate in the colonization project, provided that the land is good: “We say that whenever his Majesty or the viceroy in his name commands us to go and settle where the land may be suitably fertile and profitable, we will be ready with our persons and households to do it” (135). This is not only a claim of loyalty and obedience to the viceroy and king, but also an implication that Florida is not fertile or profitable. The petition is directed to an authority much higher than Luna. The married soldiers do not specify Luna’s failings, but rather they blame the land itself: “Neither can we be benefited nor settle nor live in this land” (135). Therefore the viceroy and the royal audiencia should send them and their households to some more livable land.

Luna answers the married soldiers’ petition with a threat to be silent or be judged as traitors. Luna lists the efforts underway to provide food, including going up the river in search of food and expecting a fleet from New Spain. He also declares that there is “no suitable equipment” to meet their requests to go back to New Spain. To Luna’s harsh reply and to his seemingly delusional expectations of aid, the married soldiers write yet another petition in which they more directly and frankly address their commander. In the petition titled “The married soldiers again insist on the terms of their former petition, and say that they have no one to whom to make complaint, and they ask that the brigantine shall not be sent to La Havana,” the married soldiers make a more detailed complaint.

They address Luna more forcefully and more critically, scolding him for refusing to hear their petition: “But if we do not address our petition for proper relief to you, as the person who represents the King our lord, Don Felipe, to whom would it be proper to address it?” (Volume I 139). The married soldiers expose Luna’s failure as the king’s representative, and they list his failings. Luna fails by ignoring requests for relief for the women and children, and his plans to seek food upriver are delusional or false: “We see that we have no prospect of food from any quarter, either from up the river or from down it, or much less from the interior... as is notorious among all the captains and men who have gone out for the purpose of finding food” (139). In this statement, the married soldiers borrow some authority from the experienced captains, using it against Luna. The married soldiers continue the accusations by stating that the fleet from New Spain has not come and that waiting for it is futile. Within the text of the petition, Luna is portrayed as either dishonest or delusional, refusing to take into account the most basic welfare of the settlers.

While the Indians’ petitions and the first married soldiers’ petition has general claims of starvation, the married soldiers’ second petition goes into far more desperate detail. Luna is directly blamed for allowing the chronic starvation and for failing to provide sufficient rations: “If we have sustained ourselves until now on the ordinary ration which is given us, this was because it has been intermixed with a small amount of maize or acorns” (139). The married soldiers again make the argument that the land is “so uninhabitable that no men who are human can possibly live in it” (Volume I 141). The Florida Indians are in revolt, and “cannot be brought by any means to the service of the king nor to the knowledge of the holy faith, as is notorious to everyone in common”

(141). By stating that “everyone in common” knows the impossibility of the situation, Luna’s judgment is thrown into question. If his insistence on staying in Florida causes such great suffering with no benefits for the church and crown, he must be an incompetent leader. The married soldiers, after Luna’s cruel rebuff of their first petition, are far more critical of every aspect of Luna’s leadership.

The married soldiers continue in the second petition with a reasoned criticism of Luna’s seemingly irrational dependence on the future arrival of brigantines: “The affairs of the sea have no end, because the voyage from this town and back again will take more than three months, in which time God knows what will become of us all because of the extremity in which we are” (141). Luna’s dependence on some unsure future arrival of ships is especially maddening when seen in context with the men’s urgent need for food. While the Indians’ petition does not question directly Luna’s competence, the married soldiers’ petition makes a clear case for Luna’s incompetence. Luna’s plan to send the brigantine to La Havana for supplies is doubly dangerous. First, sending the brigantine to Havana would take away all hope of escape from Florida. Second, the voyage for supplies would take at least three months, an impossible amount of time for starving families.

The married soldiers end their petition with a relatively frank threat. If Luna will not “take compassion on so many infants, women, and Christian men,” the petitioners will “protest all the deaths, injuries, calamities, and losses of men which may after all come upon the army” (141). In this legal document the desperation is clear, and the married soldiers must resort to graphic descriptions of the misery and its consequences, even within the legal petition.

Moving up in rank to those who are less subordinate, the captains petition Luna. They hope he will reconsider his decision to travel inland to Coosa. The captains make clear that they believe Luna's decision to be irrational:

In this discussion your Lordship decided and gave as your opinion that you desired to go in, giving no reasons therefore but simply saying that the sargento mayor wrote to you to do so... This we say should be deferred until the opinions of the maestre de campo and of the officials of his Majesty can be considered together with our own, and what they say [be discussed], and until your Lordship gives sufficient causes and reasons why we ought to go in, not merely saying that it is because the sargento mayor writes to do this (Volume II 5).

Luna's actions are unreasoned, hasty, and dangerous, as the captains make clear. His demands are not in compliance with "the service of God and his Majesty," but rather he wishes to "forefend what evil tongues may say in criticism" (5). As in the married soldiers' petition, the captains question Luna's service to the crown and God: "Your Lordship desires to go not for the sake of fulfilling the service of God and of his Majesty, but because of what people may say" (5). The expedition is of no use to Spain, which implies that Luna's leadership is equally useless. Just as the married soldiers, the captains profess complete loyalty to Luna under the condition that he acts in service to God and the king. In spite of "no food, horses, or other numerous pieces of equipment needed to make us ready to go inland," the captains claim that "we would draw strength out of weakness and put it all behind our backs, or even carry your Lordship on our soldiers if it were necessary" (5-7). However, because the movement inland serves

neither God nor king and the men “go only to perish,” the expedition is not “proper” (7). The captains protest Luna’s seemingly arbitrary and dangerous decisions.

Luna responds to the captains’ petition by issuing the same order, for the men to get ready for the expedition inland to Coosa. Luna includes in his order the quantities of food to be given to the soldiers and servants, and orders an inquiry into who has “gambled away their arms and clothing” (Volume II 7). Luna provides no rebuttal to the captains’ declaration that the expedition means certain death, and blames the lack of equipment on the soldiers’ gambling. The reply of the soldiers to this accusation is more detailed and desperate than their first petition, as we have seen in the example of the married soldiers’ petitions.

The reply of the soldiers comes from all of the officers and soldiers of all the companies in the camp, including the *maestre de campo*, the captains, and the *sargento mayor*. Their complaint detailed and desperate, made even more impactful by the numbers of soldiers who sign the document. The soldiers begin their petition by recounting the full extent of the hardships in Florida:

That we have endured many great and continuous hardships since we entered this country, both by sea as well as by land suffering great hunger, want, and shipwrecks, whereby we have lost everything we had in this land in the way of clothing and arms, and have been left naked and unarmed as is very notorious; and as is manifest to your lordship, we are all very ill of various diseases as clearly appears, for of the one hundred and sixty men whom your Lordship [has] in this camp, all are in such condition that there are not among them all ten sound men fit to go even

ten leagues, and so desolate a road as that which your Lordship desires to follow from here to Coosa (Volume II 11).

The use of the phrases “notorious (*notorio*),” “as is manifest (*le consta*),” and “as clearly appears (*como parece claro*)” especially indict Luna as irrational and in denial about the expedition’s grave situation. Luna refuses to acknowledge what is notorious, manifest, and clear, giving the soldiers a firm reason for complaint and providing them a strategy with which to defend themselves against accusations of disloyalty and treason.

Just as in the captains’ and married soldiers’ petitions, the soldiers claim that the hopeless expedition “is not conducive to the service of God and of his Majesty” (Volume II 11). The soldiers make special mention of the king’s royal command to settle the Punta de Santa Elena, essentially attempting to overrule Luna with the king’s own royal letter:

His Majesty has sent an order by his royal letter in which he in effect commands your Lordship to leave this country in the state in which it was when the letter arrived, and that you should go to make settlement at the Punta de Santa Elena, for this benefits his royal service. Hence if you do anything else you are not doing what his Majesty commands (11).

In desperate times we find that the men may strongly question and accuse their governor, but the Spanish crown is never questioned and is considered the ultimate authority at all times, as valid as divine authority. The soldiers make clear in the petition that disobedience to Luna is obedience to the Spanish crown and is in service to God: “We do not fail to obey your Lordship for lack of willingness but because we are as we are, and in order that that may be done which his Majesty commands, as may be fitting to the

service of our Lord God and his, which is that this expedition should not be made” (11-13). The soldiers’ petition makes a clear distinction between Luna’s plan and the Spanish crown’s wishes. Upon disobeying Luna’s commands, the soldiers are obeying his Majesty and serving God’s interests. Within the petition the soldiers have built in a protection for themselves should they disobey Luna, making his wishes the opposite of those of the Spanish crown. This simple but effective construct should give protection to the insubordinate soldiers, especially since they ask that their petition be “placed with the reply and arguments which the captains and officials of his Majesty have given or may give your Lordship” (13). The soldiers align their petition with that of other petitions of those with higher rank, building in even more protection for themselves, allowing them to defend themselves against accusations of treachery. By grouping themselves with petitioners of higher rank, the soldiers make Luna the outlier, out of sync with everyone’s judgment, showing Luna in disagreement with soldiers, captains, officials, and even the Spanish crown. Within the Luna expedition papers, the subordinate’s criticism of an authority must come grouped with justification from an even higher authority, especially that of God and the Spanish crown.

When the petitions of the men fall on Luna’s deaf ears, the captains appeal to the viceroy. So even while one chain of command is breaking down (Luna’s), the hierarchy remains intact. If governor Luna is unresponsive and irrational, the viceroy is petitioned and ultimately the chain of command and hierarchy remain stable, without questioning the validity of the hierarchy even while in a desperate Florida situation. The captains claim to the viceroy of New Spain that “the said expedition does not befit the service of our Lord or that of his Majesty” (Volume II 19). Luna, then, is acting contrary to Spanish

interests. The captains give further proof of the futility of the expedition in the service of the church by stating that even the friar has abandoned the hopeless cause: “Furthermore, the father vicar provincial, Fray Pedro de Feria, has deserted his monastery because the country is not habitable” (19). Luna’s subordinates, the captains, appeal to the viceroy, proclaiming the impossibility of the situation and declaring that all official channels have been exhausted, and also that the authority of the church agrees with the captains’ assessment. The subordinates cover themselves with the authority of others.

Within the very same captains’ petition to the viceroy, the disobedience is blamed first on the company soldiers: “It is plainly and notoriously evident that we have ever obeyed your Lordship and complied with your instructions in everything that has been confided to us or commanded us... Furthermore we will now obey what we are commanded to do, and in compliance therewith we have notified the soldiers you have ordered us to notify, but they will not obey us, saying that they do not wish to go [only] to die” (21). But their disobedience is justified, because of the “very unjust command” (21). The captains, subordinates to Luna, have more than one strategy to deal with their subordination. When overruled by Luna’s authority, they claim his command is unjust. In order to prove that it is unjust, they resort to the church’s actions in abandoning the expedition, and they claim that the command to go inland is contrary to Spanish royal and religious interests in Florida.

The treasury officials in their petition (*demanda*) to viceroy Velasco take certain authority from their position as treasurers and accountants responsible for the expedition resources. First the treasury officials claim authority through similar complaints made by military officials to Luna: “The latter refuses to admit the many conclusive, certain, and

noteworthy arguments which the *maestre de campo* and captains of this army have presented to him” (Volume II 23). Then the treasury officials show that their own observations in their official capacities demand a stop to Luna’s proposed expedition inland. Upon “taking account of present necessity, to provide for the most important things first,” the treasury officials find such lack of supplies that they “have the obligation...to demand of the *maestre de campo* and the captains not to make or allow his Lordship to make the proposed journey” (25). The treasury officials’ disobedience of Luna’s command is an obligation. Their subordination to Luna is mitigated through claiming that their responsibility on the expedition obligates them to the Lord and the Spanish king, while Luna has “a lack of capacity to govern this camp suitably” (25). Just as in the many other petitions of those of varying subordination, Luna’s command is shown as contrary to Spanish interests. According to the treasury officials, in Luna’s judgment “there appears nothing activated by the wish to serve God and the king our lord, but only by private interest” (25-27). And like other subordinate petitioners, the treasury officials repeatedly declare “loyalty and obedience” to their king and God.

Moving up rank to those who are less subordinate, the *maestre de campo* Jorge Cerón is older and experienced, having served with successful conquistador Hernán Cortés (Priestly 91). In his reply to the soldiers’ petition, Cerón sets himself apart from the soldiers as a higher-ranking official capable of deciding what actions are in service of the Spanish crown. Only those with higher rank have a voice. The soldiers and subordinates who dare to speak and petition are acting inappropriately, according to Cerón:

And that inasmuch as the aforesaid officers and soldiers have no business to make petitions or demands, [but obey] what their captains order and command, and answer their calls and requests without giving occasion for any disturbance or nonsense; and that since trying to offer petitions and make demands is contrary to what they have sworn and are obliged to do, for there are other persons, namely, the officials, the captains, and the *maestre de campo*, who discuss what affairs are fitting to his Majesty's service, they as good and faithful soldiers must await the decision and resolution taken in [all] matters (Volume II 45).

While the most subordinate members of the expedition may make accurate complaints, it is not their right to complain.

The Mexican Indians and soldiers petition Luna by recounting their dire physical state and lack of equipment, at times backed up by questioning Luna's service to God and the Spanish crown. The *maestre de campo* Jorge Cerón, on the other hand, begins with a more supplicating tone. Rather than taking the more direct tone of the Indians', soldiers', and captains' petitions, Cerón artfully begins by pledging his allegiance to Luna, declaring that he (Cerón) "held and holds the governor in the position in which his Majesty, his royal audience, and his most illustrious viceroy hold him; that he has had for him all respect and obedience as such governor in everything that has occurred in this army and camp" (Volume II 49). Rather than textually paying heed to other subordinate voices and petitions, Cerón urges Luna to stay put in order to await word from the viceroy: "As the reply and decision is shortly expected and might arrive to find his Lordship not in this port, [as a result of which] that might not be ordered done which

would befit the service of his Majesty and the welfare of this people and army” (49).

Cerón implies that the voice that Luna should heed is not the subordinate voice of the men, but the authoritative voice of the viceroy.

Only after encouraging Luna to await word from the viceroy does Cerón bring up the officials’ and captains’ opinions. Cerón gently suggests that Luna reconsider the officials’ opinions:

[The present is] a seasonable occasion wherein it would be fitting to do what has been and is being discussed between his Lordship and the captains, supported by the arguments and considerations which they and the officials [of his Majesty] have given his Lordship. Although his Lordship may have examined these, the *maestre de campo* supplicates him to meet in council again with the aforesaid and discuss the arguments and reasons they give him why the journey should not be made. If they are well taken, in order to quiet the commotion which prevails in this camp his Lordship ought to conform with their opinion (49).

The voices of those more subordinate than the officials are “commotion (*escándalo*).”

The commotion does have its desired effect, however, in that Luna is encouraged to listen and conform to it. Cerón urges Luna to face facts and accept that “the [former] accounts of this land and these provinces were false and not true” (51). The commotion or *escándalo* is actually the voice of reason, but Cerón, textually at least, gives Luna the last word: “As to what your Lordship commands and says, that I must admit no argument nor petition, I have admitted none save those which in justice ought to be heard” (51). The *maestre de campo* Cerón must negotiate a difficult balance. Because he is less

subordinate and has more authority than the soldiers and Indians, Cerón has a natural interest in preserving the established hierarchy and chain of command.

The captains' demand to the *maestre de campo* Cerón shows a more frank subordinate opinion of Luna, directly questioning Luna's competence. Their rank of captain is mentioned before the criticism of Luna:

We captains for his Majesty who are in this port say: that to a petition of ours in which we alleged certain clear and very notorious arguments and proofs of the incompetence (*ynsuficiencia*) and bad health (*poca salud*) of the governor, whereby he is incapacitated to rule or govern us, you, on whom it is incumbent to provide for the welfare of this camp, to govern and administer it because everything was going to ruin through the obstinate purpose of the said governor, you replied... that [we should await the viceroy's reply (53).

The captains protest that the mere act of writing to the viceroy in New Spain is a confession "that the governor is incompetent and without sound understanding (*ynsuficiente y sin congruo entendimto*) to be able to rule and govern us" (53). The captains insist that Cerón take control, not only to salvage the lives of the expedition members, but also because of his obligation under their "professions as Christians and as servants of his Majesty" (53). The captains imply in their demand to Cerón that Luna's leadership is contrary to royal interests: Cerón should govern according to the captain's petition "because we took oath in the City of Mexico before the officials of his Majesty who reside there that we would support all measures concerning the royal service" (53). The captains call out Luna's plans to journey inland as "illogical, impossible, and

harmful (*ynpertinente, ynposible, dañosa*)...in his disservice of God and his Majesty, injurious to his vassals in general, and disadvantageous to the royal treasury” (53). As in the complaints and petitions mentioned before, service to his Majesty is sufficient reason to break the hierarchy and disobey Luna’s orders.

The less subordinate treasury officials prepare a demand to the *maestre de campo* Jorge Cerón. The treasury officials list why Luna’s planned journey to Coosa is only in “self interest” and “does not appear wise” (Volume II 57). They declare that Luna’s plan “can neither on the one hand nor on the other produce anything whatever for the service of God or of the king our lord, but to the contrary notorious injury to those who are there and to those who may go from here” (57). The list of reasons against Luna’s inland journey include “the long days marching between here and there,” “the lack of everything necessary,” and “the scanty supply of food to be taken and to be left” (57). The treasury officials go on to compare Luna’s present incapacity to make sound decisions with his figurative death, giving *maestre de campo* Cerón justification to assume governorship of the camp and expedition. Their demand has a more formal tone and is longer than most petitions of the Luna papers, and it cleverly makes a case for Cerón’s takeover of authority. Since petitions to Luna go unheeded, Cerón is the target of demands and is encouraged to take control. These treasury officials who are less subordinate give Cerón legitimate cause to break the chain of command and take over. We can see that those with authority, the less subordinates, are interested in preserving some legality and order even while wishing to usurp Luna’s authority. They are careful to give legitimate reasons, other than “mere” starvation and suffering.

Continuing with those voices with more authority, the less subordinate figures, the priests have great spiritual authority that they throw up against Luna's authority as governor of the expedition. In a document entitled "What happened in the church during a sermon by a friar," notarized by Gonzalo Suárez, an actual event is recounted with some detail, along with quotes from the important participants. The quotes within the document and the confrontation between Luna, the friars, and the *maestre de campo* make for one of the most dramatic documents of the entire collection, because it reads less like a legal document and more like a narrative.

The reverend Father Fray Domingo de la Asunción chooses to confront Luna within his sermon at church. The friar confronts Luna's authority from the place and occasion that gives the priest maximum authority—within a holy place, within the holy mass. "Among other things contained in his sermon, he said that the governor ought to call a meeting with the *maestre de campo*, the [treasury] officials of the king, and the captains, to order the things necessary for this port" (Volume I 87). When Luna refuses to cooperate with the friar's demand, the *maestre de campo* reacts in a way that is uncharacteristic of his measured petitions. The *maestre de campo* loudly exclaims, "Ho, soldiers, my brothers and companions, follow me, for this thing cannot be endured" (87). The dramatic confrontation between the men and their governor, written and notarized in such a fashion, is an especially exciting example of the ability of the subordinate voice to survive and be heard within failure texts.

The friar exercises even more of his religious authority by informally excommunicating Luna. Luna's refusal to give up his governing/military authority is met with the friar's refusal to give him communion. Fray Domingo de la Asunción is quoted,

“Your Lordship will please leave the church, for while you are here we cannot say the *Salve*” (89). Luna is banned from mass. The notary Suárez recounts that the friar tells them the following:

Tell his Lordship [Luna] that they would not permit him to hear mass either, and the reason was because his Lordship would not hold the meeting nor talk with the *maestre de campo*, the king’s officials, and the captains; and that until he did so, since it was a matter vital to this camp and republic, they would not admit him nor allow him to be present at divine offices (89-91).

The interplay of willful silence, forced silence, and speech is especially interesting in this particular document. Within the many and varied texts of the Luna expedition papers we can observe the strategies and arguments of men of different degrees of subordination, but with the friar we can observe direct action, with spiritual retaliation against Luna, which surely encourages the men to continue to protest Luna’s decisions verbally and textually. The friar’s actions give more moral authority to any subordinate petitions that follow.

The Luna documents analyzed here are by no means an exhaustive survey of the huge variety of voices preserved in Herbert Ingram Priestly’s extensive collection. The subordinate voices range from the extreme subordination of the Mexican Indians, all the way to the lesser subordination of priests and gentleman on the expedition. The Luna expedition papers are extraordinary even among failure texts in the tremendous variety of voices. While these voices speak on the very limited topics of protesting the relatively passive Luna’s planned inland journey to Coosa and the desire to return to New Spain,

they nevertheless provide valuable insights on the textual maneuverings of subordinates in disasters in the Gulf Coast region.

Overcoming Subordination in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*

In Álgvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's relation, we are able to analyze his subordinate account of the failure of leadership. Because Cabeza de Vaca has some authority as treasurer of the expedition, he must carefully differentiate the general leadership of the expedition from Pánfilo de Narváez's specific failures. The writing of the account is a duty of the treasurer. "Among his duties as royal treasurer, he was instructed to provide the emperor with written accounts of the expedition's progress" (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 3). Cabeza de Vaca's original responsibility is a written report that pays special attention to obedience of royal commands, treatment of natives, and most of all the teaching of the Holy Faith to the Indians. So, according to Adorno and Pautz, *The Account* serves two purposes: to fulfill his first responsibility to write the report, and to obtain a royal assignment (4). Cabeza de Vaca's concern for self-protection and self-advancement is clear, so his judgment of his governor Narváez must serve to protect Cabeza de Vaca's own future career interests. Cabeza de Vaca is relatively less subordinate than many of the other voices preserved in the Gulf Coast failure texts. As treasurer of the Florida expedition he has certain authority to express opinions and evaluate the expedition itself. His writing of a report is not unusual either, as it is one of his primary responsibilities as treasurer. So while Cabeza de Vaca's report as a subordinate to Narváez is not as extraordinary as the expressions we see in the Luna papers, it is still in keeping with the failure text characteristic of being written by the subordinate.

The Account has a complex history as a narrative and as a published work, so it cannot be seen as a spontaneous expression contemporary to the expedition itself. Adorno, Pautz, and Pupo-Walker write extensively of the versions and various publications of *The Account*, and of its evolution to the version familiar to most readers now. *The Account* is not a raw diary or petition produced in the heat of the expedition, but rather a “mature result within a prior and still ongoing process of royal solicitation and historical interpretation” (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 5). Nevertheless, the struggle of Cabeza de Vaca to attain royal assignment and maintain his status within the system of the Spanish empire is of interest to us as Cabeza de Vaca’s text has three characteristics important for our analysis of his work as part of the Gulf Coast failure texts as a subgenre—his wanderings take him through the entire Gulf Coast region; it is a text that starts from the spectacular failure of the expedition; and it is written by one who does not lead the expedition, a relative subordinate. While Cabeza de Vaca has the right and duty to write for the emperor, his motives in the wake of the disastrous expedition must be very different. His strategies to talk about and judge his superior and his fellow expedition members are necessarily altered by the expedition failure. *The Account* is a narrative that has undergone revisions and is not a legal document, which demonstrates that Cabeza de Vaca writes for a possibly wider audience, for a different purpose than providing an official report or sworn testimony.

At the point of writing *The Account*, Cabeza de Vaca was “engaged in writing narrations of those events, not legally certifying their occurrence” (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 11). The lost Joint Report would be a document more contemporary with the actual Florida expedition, and Adorno and Pautz find that Oviedo’s version of the account is a

carefully reproduced and reliable version of the Joint Report. However, I agree more with Enrique Pupo-Walker's opinion that Oviedo's comments, additions, and deletions make that document less useful, especially for our purposes of studying Cabeza de Vaca's personal voice. (As seen previously in Oviedo's "copy" of Rangel's account of the De Soto expedition, Oviedo tends to opine and interject throughout the supposed "copy.") While Oviedo's copy of the Joint Report may have more historical validity, Cabeza de Vaca's personal voice is more likely present in *The Account*. "Although he (Oviedo) often drew on the language of the report itself, his text does not represent an unmediated transcription of the Joint Report" (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 20). Adorno and Pautz's analysis and reconstruction of the Joint Report and its relationship to other accounts of the Florida expedition are included in their collection, and while this analysis is important for historical reasons, it is less helpful in recovering the actual voice of Cabeza de Vaca within Oviedo's text. For that reason, the text analyzed here will be *The Account (La relación)*. Of course any text pertaining to the Florida expedition would make interesting comparisons, but for now *The Account* will serve as our prime example of the Narváez expedition texts.

Cabeza de Vaca's account published in 1542 is different from those previously presented at court, according to Adorno and Pautz. The 1542 version's relationship with the De Soto expedition is especially interesting. "It includes no reference whatsoever to any lingering quest for Florida, Cabeza de Vaca's hopes for which had been dashed when he learned, upon arriving at courts, about De Soto's appointment to lead a major expedition there" (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 54). Cabeza de Vaca's failure text, then, is not only of a failed expedition, but it also reflects his failure to obtain an appointment to

return to Florida. He must produce a text to defend himself in the face of the failure of the Narváez expedition, while at the same time taking into account his failure to be appointed to return to Florida, losing out to De Soto. So, according to Adorno and Pautz, “there is no trace of the solicitation that they (Cabeza de Vaca and Dorantes) had made for the rights to conquer and settle Florida” in the 1542 version of *The Account* (Vol. 3, 54). Cabeza de Vaca’s apparently glowing report of the region encourages De Soto and his crew to give Florida another try, which is mystifying to the 1542 version reader. Cabeza de Vaca’s account of the physical difficulty of conquering Florida, along with the food scarcity and the apparent lack of gold or mineral wealth, seems more of a deterrent than a recommendation for further exploration. We must remember, then, that what encouraged De Soto and his crew to make another expedition to Florida may have come from accounts that differ from the 1542 account.

The 1542 version does not have the primary aim of obtaining Cabeza de Vaca a royal appointment to Florida. The subordinate who speaks through this account is no longer willing to be subordinate. If he fails to be appointed as governor of Florida, he has no interest in accompanying the De Soto expedition (Adorno, Pautz Vol. 3, 55). Cabeza de Vaca writes as a subordinate determined to rise to a governorship, so rather than emphasize his victimhood at the hands of an incompetent Narváez and Nuño de Guzmán, he dwells more on his own personal adventure. Narváez’s bad decisions are merely a catalyst for Cabeza de Vaca to come into his own. Unlike in the De Soto and Luna texts, where subordinate voices revolve around the governors’ decisions, Cabeza de Vaca relatively quickly jettisons Narváez from his narrative, reserving the great majority of the text for his own independent decisions and actions. The subordinate figure who exists

outside the command structure, governorless, becomes less subordinate, acting not on orders, but on his own judgment. Cabeza de Vaca is somewhat unusual in the Gulf Coast failure texts in this sense. Rather than acting within the authority structure of a leader like powerful De Soto or irrational Luna, Cabeza de Vaca spends the majority of his narrative with no commander. His strategy is a brief criticism of governor Narváez, followed by a narrative of his own continuous, independent action-taking.

Because there is a wealth of analysis of Cabeza de Vaca's address of the emperor and of his self-protection and self-promotion within the text of *The Account*, we will discuss only briefly his subordinate criticism of his superior Narváez. The criticism of Narváez is always linked to Cabeza de Vaca's direct address to the emperor, while all other narrative of his ordeal is free of any mention of the emperor. According to Adorno and Pautz, this is strategic in that it allows the king to be a spectator, not a collaborator, in the American native life (Vol. 3, 57). Complaints and criticisms of the governor are addressed to the imperial reader directly, while the majority of the narrative is not.

According to Adorno and Pautz, Cabeza de Vaca perhaps misleadingly gives himself the title of *alguacil mayor* (chief constable or provost marshall), besides his legitimate position of treasurer (Vol. 3 59). This appropriation of an additional title allows Cabeza de Vaca to lessen his subordination within the narrative, setting the scene for his years of conducting himself independently, outside any formal structure of military or political authority.⁷ In chapter one Cabeza de Vaca writes, "The officers that he (Narváez) took—for they ought to be mentioned—were those named here: Cabeza de Vaca as treasurer and Provost Marshall..." (30). If the claim to be *alguacil mayor* or

⁷ Here I use Martin Favata and José Fernández's translation of *The Account* for Arte Público.

Provost Marshall is indeed misleading, it is certainly important for our analysis of Cabeza de Vaca's subordinate voice. He has not only a financial responsibility and authority, but also a disciplinary duty. Right away, even before beginning the narrative itself, Cabeza de Vaca subverts his own subordination by adding to his list of titles and responsibilities in varying aspects of the Narváez expedition. If Cabeza de Vaca is in charge of the financial and discipline aspects of the expedition, he is an easy replacement for the incompetent Narváez, ready to set off on years of self-command and independent action.

Cabeza de Vaca proceeds to list Narváez's failings, subtly beginning in the proem without mentioning Narváez by name.

Since my counsel and my diligence were of little avail in accomplishing
the task for which we went in the service of your majesty, and since God
permitted, because of our sins, that of all expeditions that ever went to
those lands, no other encountered such great dangers or had such
miserable and disastrous outcome (28).

Cabeza de Vaca's humility here masks an implicit criticism of Narváez. Only the expedition leader's "sins" (perhaps we can read between the lines here "incompetence") could be grave enough to bring on such disaster.

In the first line of Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, he clarifies to readers exactly what Narváez's failure is: "On the seventeenth day of the month of June of 1527, Governor Pánfilo de Narváez departed from the port of San Lúcar de Barrameda by authority and order of Your Majesty to conquer and govern the provinces which lie on the mainland from the River of Palms to Cape Florida" (30). The crown's charge to Narváez to conquer and govern obviously comes to nothing. Narváez's failure begins Cabeza de

Vaca's story, and everything that comes after, nothing of which has to do with conquering Florida, is a consequence of Narváez's failure as governor.

Cabeza de Vaca then shows himself propelled by Narváez's poor decisions, a subordinate at the mercy of an incompetent superior. The decision to go to the city of Trinidad, exposing the ships and men to a hurricane, is the first incompetent decision that puts Cabeza de Vaca and the men in the path of terrible danger. Governor Narváez continues the chaos-causing decisions by hiring Miruelo, an incompetent pilot who runs the ships aground (33). It is clear in the very beginning of the narrative that the combination of Narváez and ships is an unlucky one. In fact, Narváez and maritime disaster are carefully linked throughout the narrative. Interestingly, the conflict in chapter four of *The Account* foreshadows the conflicts of the Luna expedition. Narváez, like Luna, wishes to go inland, while Cabeza de Vaca wishes to set sail for more hospitable land. Narváez and others are so fearful of "tempting God" by putting out to sea that they decide against another sea journey (36). In being overruled by Narváez, Cabeza de Vaca's position as subordinate is emphasized. In fact, Cabeza de Vaca paints himself as the lone voice of reason:

When I saw his determination, I required him in your Majesty's name not to leave the ships except safely in port... He (Narváez) replied that he was satisfied with the opinion of the majority of the other officers and the

Commissary and that I had no authority to make these requests of him (37).

Cabeza portrays himself here as a lone subordinate with sane judgment, ignored precisely because of his subordination, his lack of authority. Here Cabeza de Vaca uses his own subordination as a narrative device, foreshadowing doom for Narváez's plan to go inland.

Narváez's seeming carelessness with the ships is a recurring theme, from the beginning of the expedition.

Narváez's final act of maritime irresponsibility is the total abandonment of his men in order to save himself. Reserving the best men for himself in his boat, Narváez officially breaks down military and social order: "He (Narváez) told me that it was no longer necessary for any of us to give orders, that each of us should do what seemed best to save his life, since that is what he intended to do" (53). When presented with this breakdown, Cabeza de Vaca takes responsibility for his men, acting as a direct foil to Narváez: "At that time I certainly would have died than see so many people before me in that condition" (54). Cabeza de Vaca as narrator stands between the reader and exposure to total chaos, a breakdown of Spanish order.

Just as the Gentleman of Elvas questions the morality of some Spanish soldiers, Cabeza de Vaca exposes some of his own expedition members as cannibals. Unlike the soldiers indicted by Elvas, however, a few soldiers resort to seemingly unacceptable acts only because they "became so desperate" (59). Cabeza de Vaca claims a certain moral authority here, while in his criticism of Narváez he claims a more technical authority.

Cabeza de Vaca continues his claim of moral authority when he criticizes the Christian slavers in the west. Social, governmental, or military rank is irrelevant in Cabeza de Vaca's indictment of those Spaniards, and he freely speaks in harsh terms. However, the harshest criticism is put in the mouth of the Indians. This strategy is one that we have seen before when the subordinate dares to criticize. Cabeza de Vaca sums up the moral comparison between the Spaniards and his own group and puts it in the words of the Indians: "Speaking among themselves, they said instead that the Christians

were lying...that we healed the sick and they killed the healthy; that we were naked and barefooted and they were dressed and on horseback with lances; that we coveted nothing but instead gave away everything that was given to us and kept none of it" (110). Almost in the form of biblical scripture, the contrast between the Spanish slavers and Cabeza de Vaca's group illustrate that Cabeza de Vaca and his companions have truly Christ-like qualities. Of course such a comparison should not be made by the writer himself, so it is convenient to have the Indians speak on this issue.

In the beginning of *The Account* Cabeza de Vaca emphasizes the superiority of his own judgment, his moral authority, and his sense of duty over those of Narváez. At the end of his narrative he emphasizes his moral fitness and understanding of the territory and its people over that of the other Christians. In this narrative, which has gone through more versions and editing than the more contemporary, urgent examples of subordinate accounts from the Luna expeditions, Cabeza de Vaca subverts his subordination. He portrays himself as a man capable of making decisions, maintaining his own Spanish morality and sense of social order even when deprived of all structure and even of all basic human necessities.

The failure texts make subordinate voices available to us, although in somewhat limited capacity. These subordinate or "minority" texts are by no means as expansive or as strikingly different as texts by Guaman Poma or Miguel León Portilla's recuperation of Aztec voices, but nevertheless they do provide a rare opportunity to study productions by those who are alternately marginal and hegemonic. Because these subordinate expedition members have some space, especially legal space, within the Spanish imperial system, these voices are preserved in text. This subordinate discourse could well be

considered minority discourse, even while the writers are members of the larger hegemonic system. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel classifies the minority as “simultaneously a disenfranchised collectivity and a politically visible entity,” which is “both marginal and capable of exercising pressure” (29). The discourse of failure texts is subordinate or minority because “minority discourse presupposes a system of incorporation within the hegemonic discourse and official politics that parallels literary recreation of marginal voices as a legitimate way of forging official and public spaces of representation” (Martínez-San Miguel 29). The failure texts, when grouped together, offer a different perspective on the expeditionary subordinate. Rather than view the failure text as an anomaly, a foil to grand victory texts like those of Cortés, we may group these failure texts in a large enough quantity and variety to justify their study as a sub-genre. The grouping of these texts by vulnerable subordinates should heighten interest in the texts, especially taking into consideration Deleuze and Guattari’s high estimation of minority literature.

Taking into account Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of minority literature, the subordinate expedition member works within the overarching imperial system. As we discussed here, Cabeza de Vaca has official status as treasurer, and even the most humble Luna expeditionaries have legal rights to petition higher authorities. They are subordinates writing in a major language, maneuvering their way through the socio-political system of the empire. The degree of minority or subordination can be easily distinguished by nuanced behavior within the text. Most importantly, the failure texts break the image of expedition texts as monolithic reports back to the king. They introduce variety and unexpected disagreement from subordinates, providing even more

excitement and interest in the amazing expedition texts. Failure texts remind us that the multitude of voices from the expeditions, both authoritative and subordinate, are voices that may be loyal to the Spanish crown, but they also have their own personal interests to protect.

Chapter 3 **The Shipwreck**

In this chapter I will analyze the brief treatment of the shipwreck in primary expedition texts as compared to the extensive treatment given in later texts. Second, I will attempt to explain the treatment of starvation and thirst that follow shipwrecks in the failure texts and provide possible reasons for such treatment. Finally, I will analyze how the writers treat the use of everyday European items for other purposes in attempts at survival after the shipwreck, and how these mostly failed attempts illustrate the Spanish expeditionary view of the Americas.

The Shipwreck

While it may seem obvious that many Gulf Coast failure texts will narrate shipwrecks, the *extent* of the treatment of the shipwreck is a characteristic that will be

useful in the study of the Gulf Coast failure texts as a subgenre. The texts that are more contemporary with the actual event treat the shipwreck relatively briefly, as just one more disaster in a long series of disasters. Texts that come later, often written by poets or historians who are not eyewitnesses, give the shipwreck a far more dramatic treatment.

For the writers of the texts most contemporary with the expeditions, the ship is not the focus; rather, what happens on land is the priority. For instance, the Cabeza de Vaca and Luna accounts spend only proportionate amounts of time on disasters and shipwrecks. Joseph Ignacio de Toca Velasco's epic poem of a Spanish shipwreck spends literally hundreds of lines on the dramatic details of the shipwreck. We must question the marked difference between the treatment of the shipwreck in more raw first hand accounts and in the more literary second hand accounts.

Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* provides us with more than one account of shipwrecks. The primary shipwreck is followed by other secondary shipwrecks in smaller vessels, emphasizing the complete maritime failure of the expedition. But even while Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* is also titled *Naufragios* (interestingly using the plural shipwrecks), it is not an account based primarily on shipwrecks. The wonder that the *Relación/ Naufragios* inspires in readers has little to do with the drama of the shipwrecks, but rather it is owed to the struggles of the land journey and Cabeza de Vaca's encounters with the Other. Even while the *Relación* is the most literary of the first-hand accounts of disaster, it places most importance on the experiences that follow the shipwreck, choosing to ignore the dramatic and poetic possibilities of a long narration of the details of the shipwrecks. This is reasonable and expected in the first hand accounts, of course, because these accounts of failure are at best framed as service to the king. A dramatic account of a

shipwreck would be of little help to the king and the expansion of empire, while Cabeza de Vaca's "noting the location of lands and provinces and the distances between them as well as the sustenance and animals produced in each, and the diverse customs of the many and very barbarous peoples" could serve some future purpose in conquest (Cabeza de Vaca 28).⁸ If the exhaustive, literary narration of shipwrecks is a questioning of empire (per Josiah Blackmore), the first hand accounts of failure function more as an affirmation of empire and a guide for future conquests. The first hand failure texts, rather than implicate the empire in the disaster, blame leaders' incompetence (as explained in chapter two on subordinate voices) or just "sins" of those on the expedition.

The Narváez expedition shipwreck is foreshadowed by the hurricane in Cuba, and even this foreshadowing of doom takes place mainly on land. The shipwreck is only meaningful in its close proximity to land. The destruction of the ships is almost a side note, serving only to illustrate Narváez's incompetence. Cabeza de Vaca recounts, "I remained on board with the pilots who told us that we ought to leave that place as rapidly as possible, for it was a very poor harbor and many ships were lost in it" (31). After the dire warnings from nature and locals, it is only logical that the coming storm should destroy several ships, along with men and horses. However, the drama on the ships is overshadowed by the damage on the island itself. Damage to the ships is based only on evidence left after the storm. This hurricane shipwreck story is barely a story at all in Cabeza de Vaca's narration of the storm.

Miruelo, the incompetent ship pilot chosen by Narváez, is a further portent of coming disaster. Cabeza de Vaca does not use this incompetence to criticize the project

⁸ Here I use the Martin A. Favata and José B. Fernández translation *The Account: Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación* for Arte Público Press.

of empire, but rather as more evidence of Narváez's inability to lead the expedition and serve the Spanish crown. Ships are grounded for weeks: "The pilot whom we had just engaged took the ships through the shoals called Canarreo, so that the following day we ran aground" (33). Nearly disastrous storms barely merit a sentence each: "Having departed from there and arrived at Guaniguanico, we almost perished in another storm that overtook us. We encountered another storm at Cape Corrientes, where we spent three days" (33). The nearly constant maritime problems have plagued the expedition from the beginning. "He [the Commissary] said that putting out to sea would be tempting to God, because since leaving Castile we had experienced so many hardships, so many storms, so many losses of persons and ships before arriving there" (36). Narváez's bad decisions have their consequence in the shipwrecks, which are almost routine from the beginning of the expedition. Cabeza de Vaca makes himself the picture of prudence when he disagrees with the plans that put the ships in jeopardy, while general incompetence and bad preparation continue to be the causes of the shipwrecks.

The shipwrecks turn into boat wrecks after a time in Florida, with all the men traveling in three separate boats, sick and desperate to land after struggling just off the coast. It is in this famous episode that Narváez abandons his post, advising his men to "do what seemed best to save his life" (53). Even in this state of high drama and danger at sea, Cabeza de Vaca narrates the wrecks in a matter-of-fact manner. "After four days a storm came up and caused the other boat to be lost" (53). Eventually the wreck or running aground of the boat is a blessing rather than a disaster. Remaining at sea would mean starvation and death, and life is revived when the boat runs aground: "The boat ran

aground with such force that it revived the men on it who were almost dead” (54). This *naufragio* or shipwreck is ironically a disaster that saves its men, at least for a time.

In the episode mentioned above, the dynamic of the shipwreck as a negative event changes completely. The boat at sea is hopeless; nourishment is impossible, the men are moribund, and no one is able to control the boat. The only possibility for survival is a shipwreck onto land. Cabeza de Vaca gives a new positive meaning or connotation to the shipwreck in this narration, something quite original in the failure narrative. The ship at sea is a deathtrap, as proved throughout the Narváez expedition, and going overland is the only survivable option. The narrative of most importance to Cabeza de Vaca, and most important to the project of empire, is what happens inland on the Gulf Coast. Cabeza de Vaca’s account of maritime failure serves to insist on the necessity and importance of the land journey. Shipwrecks, tragic or fortunate, are of much less importance than the record of peoples and resources that Cabeza de Vaca seeks to provide the Spanish crown.

The Tristán de Luna expedition shipwreck is recounted in an even less literary or dramatic way. Because of the brief nature of the letters and petitions, they are much less literary than Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación*. No comprehensive narrative of the Tristán de Luna expedition is known to exist, so the shipwreck is even less likely to appear as a poetic or dramatic narration. In fact, the expedition leader Luna barely mentions such a significant event. Historian and translator Herbert Ingram Priestly states that “Dávila Padilla said that Brother Bartolomé Mateos, on one ship ready to sail for Spain, was lost with all on board when the vessel opened. Luna merely said that many people lost their lives and property” (Priestly xxxvi). The leader of the expedition is perhaps the least

likely of all to give details about shipwrecks, simply because the disaster reflects directly on him.

Luna is a notoriously reticent writer in these Florida expedition documents, so most mentions of shipwrecks come from other writers involved in the expedition. Don Luis de Velasco, viceroy of New Spain, shows considerable care in his letters to Luna about the condition of the expedition ships. It can be observed in the viceroy's concern that the state of the ships has direct consequences on project of colonization, important in the Luna expedition not just as a gold-hunting expedition, but also as a project to colonize and protect Florida from competing European interests. The health of the ships indicates the health of the expedition, and therefore the health of the empire and its expansion project. Viceroy Don Luis de Velasco's letter to Luna shows his intimate involvement in the details of the Luna expedition and continuing its aid.

In his letter to Luna, Don Luis de Velasco regrets Luna's decisions to go to open sea: "If you had not gone out toward the open sea as you did, you would have reached it some days sooner; if the pilots had been able to do so they would have saved time and labor and the loss of some of the horses, and possible the loss of the ships" (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I, 59). However, Velasco continues on by saying that the Lord is ultimately in control of loss: "But since our Lord ordained it thus there is nothing to be said except to give Him many thanks... (59). He mentions later in the letter that he has "regretted nothing so much as the loss of the ships and supplies," and that while "our Lord permitted it for our sins," disasters occur so "that we should trust in Him alone" (67). The shipwrecks and losses may be punishment for sins, but they are also a method by which the Lord teaches his servants. Here we can see that the empire project is never

questioned. Shipwrecks may be due to personal sins or the Lord's teaching, but they are never a cause to critique the priorities of the Spanish crown. The punished sins are individual, not imperial.

Shipwrecks are commonplace, as Velasco writes, "since it was not only the marquis del Valle who sank his vessels when he entered this land" (67). Here the viceroy establishes an intertextual relationship with other expedition documents, in particular Hernán Cortés' letters, showing that the shipwreck in these first hand expedition documents is simply a common, almost expected occurrence. Velasco does not go as far as questioning the competency and aim of the expedition to Florida. The failures and shipwrecks of the expedition may be due to divine ordination, but Viceroy Velasco does not consider this a condemnation of the project itself. The failures and shipwrecks are given only brief mention in his letter, while the majority of the long letter is concerned with planning for future aid to establish the Florida colony. Velasco discusses ships, supplies, and routes, all so that Luna can go "inland with the rest of the army to search for a town where the people can be sustained" (63).⁹ All preparation is made with future success in mind, including the plans for *repartimiento*.

To view further evidence that the shipwreck is treated in a decidedly low-key and pragmatic way, we merely have to continue to view Viceroy Velasco's letter. In the same letter to Luna, Velasco recommends uses for the wrecked ships and the survivors. Regarding the survivors, Velasco recommends, "It was well that the mariners who escaped from the ships which were sunk should remain there, for they are artisans, and it

⁹ We can note here the Spanish expectation of finding a ready-made town, with no anticipation of having to build infrastructure of their own. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

was just that they should be assigned salaries, for they will have to perform service” (71). The sunken ships’ anchors also should be salvaged and reused. Velasco commands Juan Xaramillo “that if it is possible to recover the anchors of the ships which were lost, he is to recover them and put them where they will serve to anchor the ships to them as with those which are at the port of San Juan de Ulúa” (73). Even while Velasco writes, “I have been almost ready to lose my senses and my life for grief over what happened in the loss of the ships,” his tone remains pragmatic and insistent on Luna’s colonization project (77). The shipwreck is part of the bargain in the project of empire.

In one of many letters and petitions that the men make to Luna to not go into the interior, the shipwreck is only one in a list of failures and hardships. One “Reply of the Soldiers” to Luna reads, “we have endured many great and continuous hardships since we entered this country, both by sea as well by land suffering great hunger, want, and shipwrecks, whereby we have lost everything we had in this land in the way of clothing and arms, and have been left naked and unarmed as is very notorious” (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. II, 11). The shipwreck is the barely mentioned precursor to starvation, nakedness, and helplessness, just as in Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative, serving as a clear identifier of this failure text subgenre. The suffering that follows the shipwreck receives far more extensive treatment, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Starvation, thirst, nakedness, disease, and the lack of arms are the causes of the greatest human drama in the first-hand failure texts.

In striking contrast to the barely-mentioned shipwreck in the first-hand expedition texts, the later works written by those who did not participate in the expedition failures, more poetic or narrative in nature than most first-hand documents, treat the shipwreck

with great attention and dramatic flair. José Ignacio Toca Velasco's *Triaca producida de un veneno. Naufragio de española flota* is an epic canto that provides an example of a highly dramatized, poetic account of the shipwreck. This account of a fleet leaving Havana for Spain in July of 1733 only to be shipwrecked by a hurricane in the Florida Keys fits into the subgenre of Gulf Coast failure texts due to the ships' location at the time of the disaster, and serves as a contrast to the brief shipwreck mentions in the first-hand failure texts.

It is especially interesting that the Gulf Coast shipwrecked treasure fleet of Toca Velasco's epic canto was "one of the last of its kind and signaled the end of an epoch in the declining years of the Spanish Empire" (Gurulé 42). In his analysis of Portuguese shipwreck discourses, *Manifest Perdition*, Josiah Blackmore provides fascinating insight on the narrative of the Portuguese shipwreck as a questioning of empire. His analysis is especially useful in Toca Velasco's second-hand narration of a shipwreck, a narration that seems to serve moral purposes. Josiah Blackmore posits that the shipwreck narrative functions as a questioning and criticism of the empire project, at least with the Portuguese narratives, as he explains in the following:

Manifest Perdition proposes that shipwreck narrative is a practice of prose writing, defined not solely by the thematic presence of shipwreck in a text but by a relationship between calamity and writing, where a certain kind of experience generates a certain kind of text. The shipwreck text, one of breakage, rupture, and disjunction, precludes the possibility of a redemptive reading, and in this messy openness presents the greatest blow to the predetermined success of national expansion and its textual

analogue... Shipwreck literature exposes and promotes breaches in the expansionist mentality and in the textual culture associated with that mentality (Blackmore xxi).

I propose that while the first-hand failure accounts of shipwreck and disaster do not question the Spanish crown or the empire-building project, the later, second-hand accounts are more questioning of the empire's aims. The first-hand failure accounts may question their immediate superiors, as in Cabeza de Vaca's critique of Narváez, or in all members' questioning of Luna. But the second-hand, more literary narrations of shipwreck failures are far more philosophical and dramatic in their treatment of the shipwreck, as seen in Toca Velasco's epic poem. While first-hand account criticisms are primarily based on the incompetency of the leader, Toca Velasco's account is written in a time in which corruption and smuggling are perhaps even more visible than ever. Infighting over the cargo and jurisdiction over the cargo of these shipwrecks was an ugly business (Gurulé 39), and doubtless there is more questioning in this time of who has authority over treasure. Tension between the King and merchants in the New World over the treasure in these particular shipwrecks must be indicative of the growing discord and competing interests in the Americas. Toca Velasco's poetic account of these Gulf Coast shipwrecks may provide us with a subtle criticism of the Spanish crown and the project of empire itself.

Toca Velasco's particular shipwrecks are specifically of a treasure fleet destined to Spain, which is perhaps an important difference from those of failed expeditions on the Gulf Coast. Cabeza de Vaca, Luna, and others are expeditionaries have the goals of conquest and colonization. Toca Velasco's interest is in a fleet of ships whose purpose is

only to transport treasure to the King of Spain, and he also is writing in a time when it is possible he perceives discord and decline in the Spanish empire. The hopeful empire-building project of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is in the eighteenth century a cynical sacking of American treasure to be transported to Spain, and Toca Velasco's poem demonstrates a possible critique of Spanish actions in the 1700's. Jerry Gurulé provides a meticulous copy of the original Spanish text, as well as a careful English translation with extensive footnotes based on his literary analysis of *Triaca producida de un veneno. Naufragio de española flota*. Gurulé makes this work, potentially very difficult for modern readers, a much more accessible and interesting addition to the Gulf Coast failure text subgenre.

Toca Velasco begins his epic in first person, as if he were a participant in the shipwreck, giving his narration of the shipwreck a sense of personal immediacy. The description of the fleet is majestic perfection and gives no indication that it will shipwreck in the near future: "Elegant body of light material, rich in/ substance and grave in form, extended/ in commitment, instantaneous in response/ to orders, strong in battle and gentle/ in greeting... (Gurulé's translation of *Triaca*, 180). The fleet is a nimble, powerful force. This lightness and agility is combined with ships fitted with cannons that wing the fleet: "Sixty heavy canons powerfully/multiplied by two..." (182). Toca Velasco adds that the fleet is a "Formidable prodigy, in every part it was/ a great wonder of absolute grandeur/...each ship, in its strength a bulwark/ prepared the gunports that its sides/ overburden with handspikes, cannons and/ gun-carriages in order to project fires from its wood" (185). This seeming perfection is matched with treasure in its interior: "Gold its heart, scarlet its/ blood, and Mexican silver its entrails" (184). Toca

Velasco's fleet is a show of the potency and perfection of the Spanish crown, and even serves as a symbol of the Spanish empire, which will soon be brought to ruin. The fleet of ships is the metaphor for the Spanish ship of state, made especially explicit when Toca Velasco makes mention of the fleet's "long banners in which Castles fly/ and Lions flap," the flags of Castile and Leon. Toca Velasco continues the clear identification of the fleet with the crown itself by mentioning King Philip V: "And so Great Philip's, great Fleet/ with a free southeasterly wind/ delivers itself to the sails" (190). This close identification of the fleet with the Spanish empire and crown allows us to read the epic poem as a possible critique of the Spanish empire project (especially the practice of transporting treasure back Spain).

Toca Velasco's use of the first person to make his narrator a participant on the voyage of the treasure fleet allows him to blame the shipwreck on punishment for his own sins. With the narrator's participation in the failure of the fleet, there is no need to explicitly blame the Spanish crown or others for the disaster. Personal sin stands in for the bad actions of the Spanish state in this epic: "Please, please, this pulse of/ mine weakens to see that your ire/ caused by my torpid sin, makes/ persistence in it a suicidal daring" (196). The shipwreck that follows makes up the vast majority of the poem. Other than the brief introduction of the fleet, the entire body of the poem is a dramatic, detailed, poetic account of the disaster, drawing heavily on classical allusions. This of course stands in stark contrast with the more practical, brief mentions of shipwrecks in the first-hand disaster accounts. The hardships that are the aftermath of the shipwreck, the suffering, starvation, and thirst, take second place to the drama of the shipwreck itself. The breakup of the ships is detailed: "The broad sea darkens, the/ sea rises, the sky falls:

the parts of/ that whole that was beautifully/ nicknamed gigantic find themselves/
separated” (210). This breaking up includes an overt reference to the Spanish nation:
“the bowed/ cutwater breaks up, and opening in its/ timbers a great breach, rips away the/
throne of the crowned lion” (214). According to Gurulé’s interpretation of this portion of
the poem, the throne and the crowned lion refer to Spain’s flag. The unity and stability of
the throne are put into question here, if we take Josiah Blackmore’s analysis of shipwreck
literature into account.

The ship (perhaps even standing as a warning or symbol of the Spanish ship of
state) is wrecked: “With severity wounded, the vagrant/ ship lies so prostrate that its
weak/ fatal, miserable life, from Air, Fire,/ Earth, and Water, forges a monument to/ its
sad death” (239). The suffering of the fleets’ crews will follow (discussed later in this
chapter). Toca Velasco concludes his epic poem with an extensive commentary on the
nation of Spain, making the connection of the fleet with Spain even more concrete.
Strangely, Spain’s victories are referenced after such a harrowing tale of disaster. The
“Sacred lionized iris, flower of Spain,/... that on the martial field gleams and frightens”
receives “more Laurels than Eurotas renders to Sparta” (306). The failure and disaster of
the treasure fleet, considered a result of the sins of the narrator, contrasts with Toca
Velasco’s praise of the military prowess of the very Catholic Spanish king:

Powerful monarch, who are the efficient
warring arm of your Mother Rome, and in
two defenses your naked sword subdued proud
unfaithful irons. Of Catholic Heart, a
Lamb. Of very Christian Blood, a Dove.

Who is made the Deity of the world, by
 Armada, Cordon, Fleece, Crown,
 Scepter, Sword (307).

This hyperbole (or “extreme flattery,” as Gurulé calls it) emphasizes the Spanish crown’s military superiority and its defense of Catholic faith. Even in disaster, “Your Royal Strength/ is exerted for merit/ amid such sorrow” (308). But even as the Spanish crown is exalted, Toca Velasco shows the failure of the ships as a direct result of *national* sin. Even privileged Spain can be brought low by God: “Only Divine Power is capable of subduing/ your great power, giving you glories,/ showing you the celestial road with stormy/ transitory sorrows” (309). The punishment is to propel Spain on to greater Christian glory, being the “first region that universally embraced the/ Faith with ardent love” (310). Spain may be redeemed from its sin, but not before the punishment for its sins—the shipwreck of the treasure fleet. The Spanish crown, compared by Toca Velasco to a phoenix, may rise from adversity: “In order to live and reign, must man, a long suffering bird, suffer and die, like Phoenix and Eagle” (313). However, the poem does contain an indictment for Spanish sin, disguised as the narrator’s sin, and the shipwreck is the consequence.

As the poem ends with great praise for Spain and its Bourbon monarch, it cannot be supposed that Toca Velasco’s work is simply a one-sided, clean critique of the Spanish empire. Josiah Blackmore’s analysis of shipwreck texts gives a far more subtle and nuanced concept of the shipwreck as critique of empire. Blackmore states, “Shipwreck functions as a symbolic tool by which failure can be related to empire... There exists the possibility of allowing shipwreck (and the shipwreck prophecies) to be

part of the cost extracted by empire...” (Blackmore 25). While expedition failures of first-hand texts are most often blamed on individuals, the poets, historians, and other writers of second-hand failure texts are more questioning of the empire project in general, even while the shipwreck may be considered a “cost of doing business.” The act of giving the shipwreck an existence within text is way of folding that failure into the empire project. In Toca Velasco’s epic, the sinking of the treasure fleet specifically questions the economic priorities and economic strength of the empire, and even questions its military superiority on the seas. It breaks the notion of the Spanish empire’s infallibility, but at the same time Toca Velasco makes the failure itself an inevitable and necessary part of the building and renovation of empire.

In connection to the extensive treatment of the shipwreck in second-hand Gulf Coast disaster texts is a relative scarcity of mentions of the Americas. While the first-hand accounts often give a wealth of geographical and ethnographic information and show quite an interest in the Gulf Coast terrain, Toca Velasco’s poem is exemplary in its avoidance of any reference to American geography. The first-hand Gulf Coast disaster accounts are primarily concerned with pressing everyday issues and accounts of life on land after the shipwreck. For the second-hand accounts, the shipwreck overtakes survivor’s land narrative and diminishes the importance of the region of the shipwreck. Rather than even mention the Florida keys, they are renamed for a European landmark: “In the rigor of such a ferocious/ precipice it would have been split into/ miserable quarters if a favorable/ western Hellespont had not countered/ the tragedy of Helles...” (237). American geography is at times simply avoided, making the poem more

Eurocentric in emphasis. An invented western version of the Dardanelles (Hellespont), not the Bahamas nor the Florida Keys, is the point of geographic reference.

Starvation and Thirst

The shipwreck has the consequence of starvation and thirst, brought on by both the loss of supplies in the initial shipwreck, and the inability to find sufficient quantities on the Gulf Coast. The struggle to find enough food and water to survive is major theme in the failure texts. Maize becomes the gold for desperate expeditionaries. Soldiers bent on conquest are ill prepared to hunt and gather food, and without a large indigenous population center to supply them, they inevitably begin to starve. Starvation is often a motivation for writing petitions and complaints, as in the Luna expedition documents. For Cabeza de Vaca, it is such a major theme that starvation could almost be a character itself. The constant suffering from hunger and the threat of death from starvation and thirst is a common feature in all Gulf Coast failure texts, a theme that unites all of the disaster documents.

The shipwreck results in the loss of shelter on the sea, but in the first-hand Gulf Coast failure texts the shipwreck is only the briefly mentioned start to great physical suffering. In Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*, the narrator's privations may serve as proof of service to the Spanish crown. Hunger is a constant presence in the account, which is of course realistic and understandable in such a harrowing ordeal. But Cabeza de Vaca's choice to include such extensive details of hunger and starvation may serve purposes beyond a mere mechanical account of his adventure. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cabeza de Vaca's account is the most narrative and revised account among the first-hand accounts, possessing many novelistic qualities. His work is meant for a wider

reading public, not just the Spanish crown, which is an important and unusual aspect of a first-hand failure text. Cabeza de Vaca's inclusion of extensive mentions of hunger and privation must be considered very intentional, and not spontaneous as with other letters, petitions, or diaries. Unlike the Luna expedition petitions, which include declarations of hunger made in the very desperate moments of starvation, Cabeza de Vaca's narrative of starvation must have purposes beyond that of escaping the disaster itself.

The first mention of lack of food begins with the horses in Florida, which comes very quickly in the narrative as the preparations, hurricane, and trip to Florida take up little space in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative. According to Martin A. Favata and José B. Fernández' translation of Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*, the horses "that remained were so skinny and fatigued that for the moment they were of little use to us" (34). The starving, tired horses foreshadow the fate of the surviving crew on the Narváez expedition, just as the storms and disasters at sea foreshadow the disasters to come on land. This lack of usable horses will be discussed in later chapters, along with the stripping of all other Spanish signifiers.

The scarcity of food makes Florida inhospitable, and hunger, in unison with the lack of horses to bear loads, almost immediately begins to affect the expedition: "And many of our men, besides being very tired and hungry, had sores on their backs from carrying their armor and suffered in other ways" (40). Occasional finds of maize sustain the men, but only barely. The lack of maize is a metaphor for Cabeza de Vaca's perception of the poverty of the country itself. No maize and no gold, combined with disease, merit the designation of "that awful country" (46). The beginning stages of hunger signify the unsuitability of the country itself. Hunger stands in for several

disappointments on the Gulf Coast. First, the lack of easily available food shows that the land is not as easy, lush, hospitable, or arable as Cabeza de Vaca would like. Second, the scarcity of cultivation signifies the absence of a large, established city-state like those in Mexico and Peru. (This failed search for the Mexico/Peru city-state template on the Gulf Coast will be discussed in the following chapter.) The scarcity of available food indicates that there is no ready-made settlement on the Gulf Coast, that the Spanish paradigm of taking over already established states is not an option. When faced with the absence of a ready-made state to colonize, the Spaniards do not adapt. Rather, what follows is only starvation and hardship.

Even while Cabeza de Vaca suffers from starvation, the possibility of maize is always present. The promise of future colonization is reflected in the possibility of growing maize. Cabeza de Vaca cannot claim the discovery of some magnificent, ready-to-conquer city-state, but he can use the possibility of the cultivation of corn as a substitute. Maize is an indicator of civilization and a reason to continue Spanish expeditions on the Gulf Coast: “Having gone four leagues, we took four Indians and showed them corn to see if they were familiar with it, since we had not yet seen sign of it. They told us they would take us to a place that had some” (35). Where there is corn, there is a city-state, and where there is a city-state, there must be gold: “They indicated to us that very far from there was a province called Apalachee, in which there was much gold...” (35). Maize functions as a signifier for civilization and gold. Hunger for food and hunger for gold often merge into each other: “But having arrived where we wanted, where they had told us there was so much gold and food, much of our affliction and weariness seemed to disappear” (40). Physical hunger for food can be relieved by news

of gold. The equation of gold and corn is clear within Cabeza de Vaca's text, and the plentiful food he finds in the southwest at the end of his journey is a foreshadowing of the possibilities of wealth to be found there. The lack of corn signifies the absence of the city-state and gold, and the suffering from hunger is made worse by the absence of easily available gold.

In failure texts like Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* and the Luna expedition letters and petitions, the empire builders are consistently distracted and stymied by the most basic of needs. Lack of food can indicate a lack of competence of the expedition leaders. Governor Narváez's decision to go inland forces the men to rely on divine providence to secure enough food. The already tired and weak expedition must capture Indians to find corn: "We captured five or six of them, who took us to their lodges about half a league from there. There we found a large amount of corn ready to be picked" (38). Incapable Narváez is indicted constantly throughout Cabeza de Vaca's text. The most basic needs, food and horses, are absent:

Our distress had been caused by the long and difficult march and by great hunger. Although we sometimes found corn, most of the time we traveled seven or eight leagues without finding any. And many of our men, besides being very tired and hungry, had sores on their backs from carrying their armor and suffered in other ways (40).

Narváez's leadership is practically non-existent, and but his abandonment of the expedition does allow starvation to take on another role within the narrative beyond that of showing the governor's incompetence. When Narváez is present, the inability to locate corn (and gold) is demonstrated to be due to Narváez's own ineptitude. When

Cabeza de Vaca is left alone on the Gulf Coast, starvation takes on another role within the text. His suffering functions as a service to the king, the only thing he can offer from the failed expedition. Cabeza de Vaca declares as much to the Spanish crown in the proem of his *Relación*, stating that the information contained in the account, hard-won through wandering, starving, and suffering, “is the only thing that a man who returned naked could bring back” (29).

Thirst joins starvation among the miseries brought on by the most basic lack of necessities in the Gulf Coast failure texts, particularly in Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación*. The irony of having water all around without being able to drink is especially cruel, and helps to turn the paradigm of the shipwreck as disaster on its head. Being trapped in a boat in bays and inlets without access to land and without the ability to go out into the open sea is a torturous limbo for Cabeza de Vaca and his companions. Having no access to fresh water on land, “our thirst obliged us to drink salt water. And some drank so much that soon afterwards five of our men died” (50). Being trapped on land is preferable to being trapped at sea, and wrecking on shore is a welcome development rather than a disaster. Cabeza de Vaca’s account turns the world on its head, and this reversal of the shipwreck disaster pattern is the beginning of the paradigm shift.

Throughout the Spanish struggles in the first portion of the disaster, Cabeza de Vaca breaks down Spanish maritime power. The trajectory extends from the expedition ships loaded with potential conquistadors to the degraded condition of makeshift rafts cobbled together with Indian canoes loaded with the starving and dying soldiers. Cabeza de Vaca acknowledges the weakness and inadequacy of the Spanish boats, recounting, “we were on the open seacoast, where we used the canoes I had taken from the Indians to

improve our boats, making washboards from them and securing them in such a way that our vessels rose two spans above the water” (49). Incompetency on the sea makes beaching the boats the only path to finding drinking water and survival. The ingenuity of using Indian canoes is limited and precarious, for while in the ocean, the men desperately need water. The Spaniards’ desperation for water turns Spanish maritime superiority on its head. The seemingly endless disasters at sea foreshadow Cabeza de Vaca’s emphasis on the importance of the land itself.

Cabeza de Vaca’s title of *Naufragios*, or shipwrecks in the plural, points us to the varying possibilities of a shipwreck. The shipwrecks are not all equal disasters; each has varying meanings and consequences. With the shipwrecks of the makeshift rafts, being on the sea is never a workable option in the first place. With no supplies or water on board, thirst makes land the only option. To be carried to the sea is the disaster: “The north wind blowing from the land increased so much that it carried us out to sea and we could do nothing... We sailed under those conditions for two days, struggling all the time to reach land” (53). Hunger and thirst in the boat bring the men close to death, and the crash onto land is salvation: “Near land a great wave took us and cast the boat out of the water as far as a horseshoe can be tossed. The boat ran aground with such force that it revived the men on it who were almost dead” (54). The shipwreck is reviving, life-saving in this context. In the *Relación*, the shipwreck must be understood as a much more complex event than in other failure narratives. Its function as metaphor varies according to the situation. While some shipwrecks preserve lives, later, another shipwreck, unseen by Cabeza de Vaca the narrator, metes out justice to the incompetent

deserter Narváez. Hunger and thirst on the boats are a few elements that allow the shipwreck paradigm to change within Cabeza de Vaca's narrative.

In the Luna expedition documents, starvation is an overarching theme and the main motive for writing most of the letters and legal documents. The lack of supplies is a damning indictment of Luna's leadership, just as it was of Narváez's in Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*. Viceroy Velasco's October 25 of 1559 letter to Luna emphasizes the almost absurd helplessness of the expedition. New Spain is unable to provide quick provisions, and Luna's expedition is reduced to childlike dependence on Indian supplies. Velasco advises Luna, "For your army must not perish from hunger because the Indians do not want to give it food. Thus in case of necessity, such as exists, you may take it from them, leaving them what is necessary for their sustenance" (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I, 67). No other failure texts have such explicit and constant complaints of starvation. The Spaniards' desperation and weakness are reiterated in every letter and petition.

The Luna expedition's failure is set almost entirely in terms of starvation, and starvation provides a useful structure to study all the Luna documents as a group. The group's hunger motivates petitions for permission to leave Florida. The petitions come from the entire social spectrum, from the captains and *maestre del campo* all the way to the Mexican Indians. In a June 23, 1530, petition to Luna, made through the notary Aguirre, the Mexican Indians make the following plea:

All the principal Indians, natives of the City of Mexico and of El Tatebula, appear before you and say: that on account of the great necessity which exists in this army from hunger, we are suffering very greatly... So, in order that we may not perish here in greater number than those who have

died and perished, will you not, in the name of his royal Highness, be pleased to give us a ship so that we may go to New Spain that we may preserve our lives... (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I, 143-145).

The universal complaints of starvation give us an extraordinary opportunity to hear voices from all social strata, a rarity even in the failure texts. The incompetence and failure of the Luna expedition is repeated endlessly throughout all petitions and letters. The Luna papers are an even more extreme example of the indictment of an incompetent conquistador than is Cabeza de Vaca's account.

In Toca Velasco's *Triaca*, starvation makes an appearance as well. Starvation and thirst in this poem are dramatized and poeticized, whereas in the first-hand failure texts these sufferings are more straightforward. Toca Velasco does not mention any survivor by name. The ship and the misfortunes themselves are of more poetic importance than any individual expedition member. This contrast provides an interesting point of difference in the study of the Gulf Coast failure texts. In Jerry Gurulé's translation we find that the "sparse provisions" are distributed to survivors, but they are rotten: "All damaged, fetidly filled with insect/ eggs and worms, they were, in the disaster/ they mitigated, sick to the palate, healthy/ to hunger" (271). The survivors are driven to eat "non-food" items: "The stringy meat of the hard snail is a/ soft meal to the hungry tooth" (272). Spaniards are shamed in this desperation that pushes them to even eat shells: "Shameful ambition disguised, the disdained shells/ become dear" (273). Thirst is dramatized as well. Water is as "along with dregs of gills, drops as bitter as/ gall" (276). The thirst is such that one "eats salt, drinks bile, and/ swallows sand" (277). The experience, while very poeticized, is similar to those in Cabeza de Vaca's account.

However, in Toca Velasco's *Triaca*, mentions of thirst and starvation are contained in a relatively few lines of the poem, with the dramatic shipwreck taking up most of the length. Names of the suffering are never mentioned. These distinctions between the first-hand documents and the *Triaca* poem provide a useful approach with which to examine the failure texts.

In the Gentleman of Elvas account of the De Soto expedition, starvation is one among many misfortunes, and the hunger of the Spanish expedition points toward a worse moral failure. The Spanish take the maize of the Aminoya, causing them to starve and come begging for their own food. "Those (Indians) who came to the town were weak, and so lean that they had not flesh on their bones, and many died near by, of clear hunger and debility" (The Gentleman of Elvas' account in Milanich 173). Even the Spaniards' hogs are fed before the Aminoya, who are made to work for a bit of their own maize (174). The Gentleman of Elvas' account of starvation serves less as a demonstration of Spanish suffering and weakness, and more as a relation of Spanish cruelty. In De Soto's secretary Ranjel's account, starvation is only briefly mentioned, with more emphasis on the expedition's movements. Ranjel mentions only that "there was much suffering from hunger so that they ate the ears of corn with the cobs or wood (which is cassi) on which the grains grow" (Ranjel's relation in Milanich 370). While starvation is indeed a severe problem during the De Soto expedition, it does not play the massive role as it does in Cabeza de Vaca's account and the Luna papers.

Spanish deserters are rare but certainly present in failure texts. That is, there are surprisingly few given the dire circumstances that the common expeditionaries encounter, but there usually is at least one account of a deserter in every failure text. While deserters

are generally judged harshly in texts that are secondary or further removed from the failed expeditions, the primary failure texts written during or soon after by participants themselves are more matter-of-fact about the desertion issue. Desertion is often a consequence of extreme hardship and starvation and thirst. The desertion itself may function as an indictment of the management of the expedition, or as an indictment of individual or collective Spanish character. The Gentleman of Elvas harshly judges Spanish members of the expedition (as mentioned in Chapter 1 on subordinate voices), and the first deserter mentioned is a “bastard son of a gentleman of Sevilla” who runs away with his Indian girl “concubine” to avoid having to give her up to pay gambling debts (Milanich 153). This desertion is more of a matter of character, not a direct result of horrible conditions on the expedition.

The contrast between the ill-prepared Spaniards and the often well-supplied Indians is stark. The Christian deserters from the De Soto expedition perhaps have good reason to stay with the Indians, as they “never lack meat. With arrows they get abundance of deer, turkeys, conies, and wild animals, being very skilful in killing game, which the Christians were not” (from the Gentleman of Elvas in Milanich 55). In Cabeza de Vaca’s account, extreme conditions and thirst drive the deserters to the Indians. While asking the Indians for water, “a Greek Christian named Dorotheo Theodoro... said that he wanted to go with them” (51). Both he and a black man leave with the Indians, even while “the Governor and others tried hard to stop him” (51). Harsh judgment of the deserters is reserved for future chroniclers of the failure expeditions. The first hand writers of the Gulf Coast failure texts express not condemnation, but rather confusion or

sadness at the loss of the Christians. Within the failure texts, desertions serve to show the bewilderment and misery of living during the physical collapse of the expedition.

Use of Everyday European Items for Another Purpose

In the extreme suffering and need caused by the shipwreck, Spanish expedition members resort to desperate measures, using European items in unusual ways. But failure texts are not like the inspiring accounts of ingenious pioneers cleverly taking advantage of everything around them. Instead, the attempts to re-purpose European objects often fail. Eating leather boots and tack gives no sustenance, and the horsehides tanned to hold water rot away and are useless. The uselessness or loss of many European items on the Gulf Coast can teach us about the writers' attitudes about the clash of the old and new worlds, and of Europeans' vulnerability when faced the loss of all Spanish accoutrements.

The Gentleman of Elvas account of the De Soto expedition provides a particularly striking example of the limits of the markers of European civilization par excellence, paper and ink. When Governor Luys de Moscoso decides to leave Florida, he writes to the Spanish deserter among the Indians, the "Christian who had remained there and would not come," imploring him to return and leave the "heathen" or to answer with ink and paper he sends along with the message (165). The Christian deserter not only refuses to return to his fellow Spaniards, but also refuses to write anything more than his "name and rubric" (166). With this rogue mixing of Christian and Indians in Florida, the failure of the Spanish paper and ink in the Indian Gulf Coast context is symbolic of a greater failure. The failure of the Christian deserter to communicate via the paper and ink points toward the expedition failure itself. European items cannot function in this new world on

the Gulf Coast. Within the context of a failed expedition, Spanish objects fail or become useless.

With the failure and loss of Spanish items, more rustic Indian items become more valuable. During the De Soto expedition, the Spaniards, “numbers who had been a long time badly covered,” used “many shawls, deer-skins, lion and bear skins” to make gowns, cassocks, jerkins, shirts, stockings, and shoes (Gentleman of Elvas in Milinich 111). The result is good, waterproof apparel and effective armor for horses. The skins are made by the Indians themselves, and prove to be useful. A similar situation occurs with Cabeza de Vaca when he lashes Indian canoes to flimsy Spanish boats to make them sea-worthy (49). However, in order for these schemes to work, the new world items must be crafted by Indians. Any attempts by Spaniards to fashion ingenious items from old world artifacts come to complete failure.

Even animals from Europe put to use on the Gulf Coast fail. The Spanish horse, brought from Europe, is one of the first of those objects to succumb to failure on the Gulf Coast. The horse as means of transportation is lost when all horses succumb to starvation. The horse is one of several signifiers of Spanishness. It is transport, and more importantly, in addition to Spanish steel swords, it is the reason for Spanish success in conquest in Mexico and Peru. An experienced Spanish swordsman on horseback is an almost impossible foe, so the loss of horses and the failed use of their parts is particularly significant in the failure text. Successful conquest with all men on foot is unattainable. The horse, the conveyor of Spaniards and the means to their victory in so many other contexts, decays into meaninglessness on the Gulf Coast. In the Gulf Coast failure texts, both means of transport, the ship and the horse, come to ruin. Shipwrecks deprive the

Spaniards of their maritime superiority, and the death of the horses deprives them of their military potency on land. (More on the horse as signifier of Spanish masculinity will be discussed in Chapter 5.)

When the horses on the Narváez expedition become weakened or die, Cabeza de Vaca and the men use them to postpone starvation: “By the twenty-second of September we had eaten all but one of the horses” (48). Such an act indicates the desperation of the men and points to the inevitable failure of the expedition and conquest. Of course eating the horses provides very temporary relief, and starvation threatens the men soon after. Afterwards, a seemingly clever plan is devised to put the horse remains to practical use: “From the horses’ tails and manes we made rope and rigging” (47). The cobbled-together boats are less than seaworthy, however, and are in pitiful shape. Indian canoes are lashed on to the boats to keep them afloat. From the legs of the horses the men attempt to make water vessels: “We skinned the legs of the horses in one piece and cured the hides to make skins for carrying water” (47). The extraordinary accounts of pioneering ingenuity we are accustomed to in pioneer stories do not hold here. The Spaniards, typically unused to work outside of their trade or social status, fail at resourceful and inventive action. When Cabeza de Vaca and the men fashion skins from horses’ legs to carry water, the “horses’ legs rotted and became useless” (49). In Cabeza de Vaca’s failure text, the horses illustrate the breakdown of the expedition on at least two levels.

The Luna expedition papers show a similar calamity with the horses and mules in the complaints in the “Opinion of the Captains”:

The horses and mules which are here, which must number about fifty, are so thin and weak from eating no corn for so long, that if any of us go hunting from this camp on them it always happens that within half a league from here they become exhausted, and those who go on them have to leave them behind and come back carrying the saddles on their shoulders (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I, 213).

The Spaniards on the Luna expedition not only lose their means of transport, but they also are humbled to the point of carrying the saddles themselves. The reader of the “Opinion of the Captains” will visualize those expedition members as taking the place of horses, a bizarre and degraded image of the Spaniards. The European saddle’s role is reversed, and a useful Spanish tool becomes a burden.

The shipwreck victims in Toca Velasco’s *Triaca* have no success with the native items where they are marooned, just as the members of the other failed expeditions. European items left from the shipwreck are not enough to maintain all lives; the poet claims that the supplies are “a proportionate distribution... I/ know not whether they may die or/ live” (270). The “sparse provisions” are put into “the branch-lodgings of the people” (270). The shipwreck survivors must resort to living as primitive beings, with primitive and insufficient shelter, made from “dried rushes” and “humble mangroves.” European items are insufficient, and native items are badly used. The meager shelters are pathetic, described by Toca Velasco as follows: “... huts and / resting places which/ crumpled together / occupy the steep inclines of the green / circular contour of branches, are / sad caves...” (278). Rather than innovative or ingenious shelters, the Spanish shipwreck survivors revert to an uncivilized state, living in figurative caves. Toca

Velasco emphasizes the total loss of “European-ness,” the deficit of shelter, clothing, and food that mark the civilized man. Unlike the resourceful, resilient, successful Daniel Boone-type characters so often found in American frontier literature, the Spaniard barely survives in these degraded conditions. More will be discussed in Chapter 5 about the loss of these Spanish accoutrements.

The aspects of the shipwreck, privation, and failed use of European and native items listed and explained in this chapter provide three more characteristics of the sub-genre of the Gulf Coast failure narratives. Each characteristic of the sub-genre is rich with possibilities for analysis. These features provide tools to compare Gulf Coast failure texts with other Spanish colonial texts, or even with texts from the American frontier. They are especially helpful when contrasting first-hand texts with those texts written later by those who did not experience the failed expeditions. In the following chapter, three more characteristics of the Gulf Coast failure texts will be examined.

Chapter 4 **The search for a city-state template (Apalachee)**

In this chapter I analyze and provide examples of three more important features of the Gulf Coast failure text subgenre. First, there is evidence that the Spanish expeditions to the Gulf Coast search for a ready-made city-state, and the lack of a civilization like that of the Aztecs in Mexico is one of the main causes of the expedition failures. Next, the geographical and natural difficulties are often insurmountable, and the wild land is useless without that city-state template. Related to this geographical difficulty is the

inability or unwillingness of many expedition members to do work that is outside of their social norm, and their lack of interest in agricultural tasks.

The search for the city-state template

The top priority for the first Florida expeditions is finding Apalachee, which is imagined as a wealthy city-state like Tenochtitlán or Cuzco. Expedition leaders have a Cortés-style conquest in mind, and their insistence on finding a wealthy city-state is the tragic flaw that brings suffering and disaster. The main failure in the failure texts is the failure to find and conquer the wealthy city-state. All shipwrecks and disasters would be forgotten in the shadow of a successful conquest. Therefore, failure texts must be studied from the perspective that they are overshadowed by the texts of successful conquests. The expeditions that cannot find or follow the template for successful conquest of a city-state must in some way excuse themselves within the text. Suffering takes the place of success, and merit is proved by selfless service to God and king, not by victory in conquest.

The De Soto expedition is perhaps the most obvious collapse due to the failure to find the city-state Apalachee. Upon arrival in Florida, Elvas claims that De Soto asks the Indians “if they had knowledge or information of any country where gold and silver might be found in plenty” (Milanich 36). De Soto is criticized for his refusal to establish a base, so great is his desire to find a great city. The constant search for Apalachee is a spiral towards disaster for the expedition, and the search for this non-existent civilization is an almost continuous presence within the De Soto expedition texts. In De Soto’s secretary Rangel’s relation, the hoped-for city-state seems temptingly close near Talimeco, and Rangel provides a list of promising indicators:

Some things were done there as in Spain, which the Indians must have been taught by the followers of the lawyer Lucas Vazquez de Ayllón... In the mosque, or house of worship, of Talimeco there were breastplates like corselets and head-pieces made of rawhide... and also very good shields. This Talimeco was a village holding extensive sway; and this house of worship was on a high mound and much revered. The *caney*, or house of the chief, was very large, high and broad, all decorated above and below with very fine handsome mats... In this river, Alaminos, a native of Cuba (although a Spaniard), was said to have found a trace of gold... (from the *Relation* of Ranjel in Milanich 404-405).

Along with the promise of a nearby city, there are signs of previous Spaniard presence, likely from the failed Ayllón expedition. Other signs of native civilization include a place of worship and buildings that reflect a hierarchical social structure like that of Spain. These elements, along with the village's influence and power, point to the template of a conveniently ready-made city, ripe for Spanish conquest. In Ranjel's text we can detect the anxiety of the Spaniards to find such a site. But instead, this anxiety and desire points De Soto to a deadly journey to fruitlessly search for this template city.

In the Gentleman of Elvas' account we find a second-hand relation of the confusing report Cabeza de Vaca gives at the Spanish court, providing an intriguing bit of intertextuality among the De Soto and Cabeza de Vaca failure texts. In contrast with the harrowing and awful experiences recounted in text in Cabeza de Vacas *Relation*, his behavior at court serves to make everyone suspect that there indeed is a rich country to exploit:

Generally, however, he described the poverty of the country, and spoke of the hardships he had undergone. Some of his kinsfolk, desirous of going to the Indias, strongly urged him to tell them whether he had seen any rich country in Florida or not; but he told them that he could not do so; because he... had sworn not to divulge certain things which they had seen, lest some one might beg the government in advance of them... nevertheless, he gave them to understand that it was the richest country in the world (from the Gentleman of Elvas account, Milanich 7-8).

Cabeza de Vaca's ambiguous account continues to point to the existence of the rich civilization. Cabeza de Vaca is apparently undeterred by his experience on the Gulf Coast and continues to hold the illusion of the wealthy city-state. When he loses out to De Soto on the grant to return to Florida, De Soto inherits Cabeza de Vaca's illusion. All along De Soto's journey the illusion is maintained by word of great villages and abundant maize. The conquests in Mexico and Peru create a permanent mirage of the city-state template, misleading the conquistadors in the failure texts, driving them to suffering and disaster. On the Gulf Coast, the fantasy of the Mesoamerican and South America victories drives compels the leaders of the expeditions on to failure.

In the Gentleman of Elvas' account, De Soto's fatal moment can be found when he hears of Apalachee, the rich city so hoped for. Here the account shows a disagreement between De Soto and the men, so great is his ambition to find the city.

On the seventeenth day of August they arrived at Caliquen, where they heard of the Province of Apalache, of Narvaez having been there and embarked because no road was to be found over which to go forward, and

of there being no other town, and that water was on all sides. Every mind was depressed at this information, and all counseled the Governor to go back to the port, that they might not be lost, as Narvaez had been, and to leave the land of Florida; that, should they go further, they might not be able to get back... to which Soto replied, that he would never return until he had seen with his own eyes what was asserted, things that to him appeared incredible (from the Gentleman of Elvas' account in Milanich 40).

In this passage we find more intertextuality with Cabeza de Vaca's relation. The Gentleman of Elvas' account shows a foreshadowing of the coming failure when mentioning Narváez's disaster. De Soto seals the fate of the expedition by ill-advisedly deciding to continue the search for Apalachee, disregarding the desire of the men and the ever-present threat of a disaster like that of Narváez. The Gentleman of Elvas' purpose in including this passage can be seen as a criticism of De Soto's leadership. De Soto ignores the lack of evidence of the existence of Apalachee. He is blinded by the great conquests of Cortés and Pizarro, and by Cabeza de Vaca's vague promise of some wealthy territory. In the relation of Ranjel, we find a withering criticism of De Soto's tactics: "His purpose was to find some land rich enough to satiate his greed and to get knowledge of the great secrets this Governor said he had heard in regard to those regions... and as for stirring up the country and not settling it, nothing else could be done until they found a site that was satisfactory" (Milanich 421). This after-the-fact critique of De Soto is a condemnation of the single-minded search for the city-state template. This passage advocates for a settlement, rather than the conquest of some unknown Gulf

Coast empire. The writer perceives the fatal flaw in the De Soto expedition and criticizes the Governor accordingly.

The Gentleman of Elvas (and the rest of the men, according to his account) wish to make a settlement in the Cacica's town, as the inhabitants are "more civilized than any people seen in all the territories of Florida, wearing clothes and shoes" (Milanich 64). More importantly, the Gentleman of Elvas connects this region with the great empires conquered already in the Americas: "To all it appeared well to make a settlement there, the point be a favourable one, to which could come all the ships from New Spain, Peru, Sancta Marta, and Tierra-Firme, going to Spain; because it is... a good country, and one fit in which to raise supplies" (64). The Gentleman of Elvas and the men's thoughts are turning to a different kind of economic model, or at least one not based entirely on conquest of another empire. While clearly the priority is Spain and the Americas merely serve its purposes, a change occurs in this account, and as will be discussed later, in Cabeza de Vaca's relation. The point of view shifts from gold-centric to mercantilist. The Gentleman of Elvas' account shows a shift from a treasure-based purpose to more practical concerns of maintaining the colonies and shipments to Spain. He shows his frustration with De Soto's outmoded perspective: "But Soto, as it was his object to find another treasure like that of Atabalípa, lord of Peru, would not be content with good lands nor pearls, even though many of them were worth their weight in gold..." (64-65). The dissatisfaction with De Soto's insistence on finding the city-state treasure template becomes a nuisance and a danger within the failure text, a source of criticism of the Governor. The author of the failure text is conscious that the drive to find the template is a prime factor in the failure of the expedition, and we can find subtle suggestions within

the text that propose more modest alternatives to Apalachee. The Gentleman of Elvas censures De Soto because of his failure to accept an alternative to the city-state template:

The Governor then resolved at once to go in quest of that country, and being an inflexible man... who, although he liked to know what the others all thought and had to say, after he once said a thing he did not like to be opposed, and as he ever acted as he thought best, all bent to his will; for though it seemed an error to leave that country, when another might have been found about it, on which all the people could have been sustained until the crops had been made and the grain gathered, there were none who would say a thing to him after it became known that he had made up his mind (65).

The Gentleman of Elvas detects the fatal flaw in the purpose of the expedition, and proposes another option, an alternative form of conquest and colonization that requires agricultural know-how and patience to stay in a land without reserves of treasure.

A similar pattern can be found in Cabeza de Vaca's relation. Just like the De Soto expedition finds Spanish remains they assume to be from the failed Ayllón expedition, the Narváez's men find evidence of previous European presence in Florida. The Indians take Cabeza de Vaca and companions to their village, where they find "many merchandise boxes from Castile, each containing the body of a dead man" (Cabeza de Vaca 35). The boxes, functioning as coffins, from the region of the Spanish crown foreshadow what is to happen to the majority of the Narváez expedition. The European artifacts serve to entice the expedition with signs of some wealthy city-state.

In addition to the Spanish boxes, the Narváez expedition finds objects from Mexico: “We also found pieces of linen and cloth and feather headdresses which seemed to be from New Spain” (35). These findings likely persuade the men that there is contact between the great Aztec empire in Mexico and some yet undiscovered empire in the Gulf region. The seemingly promising indicators deceive the expedition. Most tempting are samples of gold found in Florida, and the Spaniards must be certain that a great empire is just in the offing. Perhaps the Indians truly did communicate the existence of a wealthy Apalachee, or maybe it was the Spaniards’ merely wishful thinking. Cabeza de Vaca declares that they communicated Apalachee’s existence through signs:

Through signs we asked the Indians where they had gotten those things.

They indicated to us that very far from there was a province called Apalachee, in which there was much gold, and they gestured that it had a great quantity of everything we valued. They said there was much in Apalachee (35).

Here the failure of the expedition is sealed, with the false hope of an easy conquest of a ready-to-exploit city-state. The hope for Apalachee leads the men inland on their lethal journey. Cabeza de Vaca claims to have had the wisdom to question the push inland, that if his advice had been followed, the catastrophe could have been avoided. He asserts that his long list of practical advice is ignored in favor of the promise of Apalachee:

And he (Governor Narváez) asked us to give him our opinion. I answered that under no circumstances should he leave the ships until they were in a secure and populated harbor...Besides this, the horses were in no condition to be of use to us...Furthermore, we were traveling without an

interpreter...I added that we did not know what we wanted from the land, and that we were entering a land for which we had no description...

Moreover, we did not have sufficient provisions...(36).

Astoundingly, these weaknesses, any one of which would be reason enough to avoid leaving the ships, are ignored by Narváez, who “persisted in his way of thinking” to search for Apalachee (36-37). The imagined Apalachee is so powerful a draw, like the sirens’ song for Narváez, he is willing to risk all to find it. Eventually all the men, even Cabeza de Vaca, is drawn into the mad rush for the template empire Apalachee. Despite the march, hunger, and suffering, Cabeza de Vaca and the men are encouraged by the proximity of Apalachee: “But having arrived where we wanted, where they had told us there was so much gold and food, much of our affliction and weariness seemed to disappear” (40). The expedition is blinded by its confidence in the existence of a new model city-state.

The disillusion comes quickly after the arrival in Apalachee. Cabeza de Vaca’s description of the inhabitants and the land is telling in that it demonstrates precisely what is lacking, compared to their expectations of another Tenochtitlán. The shining buildings and organized canals of the Aztec capital are absent. Instead, they find “forty small, low dwellings in sheltered spots to protect them from the great storms that continually occur in that country. The buildings are made of straw and are surrounded by very dense forests, great groves of trees and many swamps...” (41). Rather than splendidly dressed subjects, they “found many of their deerskins and a few small woven blankets of poor quality” (41). The geography is difficult to traverse, and they find no Roman-style Incan roads on the Gulf Coast: “We found the country sparsely inhabited and hard to cross

because of its difficult terrain, its forests and lakes” (43). The bad news keeps coming when the expedition solicits information from the chief about the status of the country. Instead of receiving reports of rooms of gold and a wealthy new realm from a new Moctezuma or Atahualpa, they are disillusioned:

We asked the chief we had captured and other Indians that we had brought with us about the country, settlements, quality of people, food and all the other things we wished to know. Each one answered that the largest village in the entire land was Apalachee, and that further on there were fewer and poorer people; that the country was sparsely settled and the inhabitants scattered about; and that further ahead there were large lakes and dense forests as well as large areas that were empty and uninhabited (43).

The primary concern of the expedition is finding a Tenochtitlán-like Apalachee, and the bad tidings sink in. After hearing the report from the Indians, Cabeza de Vaca makes a visual observation to accompany the oral testimony: “We saw that the country was poor and heard the bad news about the population and all the other things the Indians told us about” (43). When the expedition faces the harsh reality, things really begin to fall apart. Narváez and the men face Indian attacks and skirmishes and disease. Cabeza de Vaca states that “even if there had been good passage, our men could not have gone on because most of them were sick, and there were too few able-bodied men” (46). The expedition quickly deteriorates after discovering Apalachee cannot provide the city-state template needed for conquest and survival. The structure of the Spaniards’ morale and military order weakens as well: “Something else happened that made our situation worse still:

the majority of the cavalrymen began to leave secretly, thinking that they could save themselves. They abandoned the Governor and the sick men who were totally weak and helpless” (46). The decision is made to leave “that awful country.” This abandonment of responsibility and military order foreshadows Narváez himself deserting his own men to their fate. The discovery that the city-state template is absent begins the collapse of the expedition, physically and morally. For victory (and indeed for mere survival), the Spanish model of conquest demands that the city-state be conveniently in place, with all economic, social, agricultural, and military structures in place. Without it, the Spaniards are powerless to effectively take territory and put it to use. In Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación*, we can observe that the lack of the city-state template leads quickly and directly to disaster and failure, a key characteristic of the Gulf Coast failure texts.

In the absence of an Apalachee city-state, and after years of suffering and wandering, Cabeza de Vaca changes his economic priorities in some ways. At the end of the relation, in what is now the western U. S., Cabeza de Vaca insists that the western land is worthy of Spanish attention:

This land is without a doubt the best in all the Indies, the most fertile and abundant in food... They have many fruits and beautiful rivers and many other very good bodies of water. There is great evidence and signs of gold and silver deposits. The people are very congenial; they serve Christians—the ones who are friendly—quite willingly. They are well built, much more so than the Indians of Mexico. This truly is a land that lacks nothing to be very good (110).

Agricultural potential is the first item mentioned, and while silver and gold are of course still part of the equation for Cabeza de Vaca, it comes after the fertility of the land and appears only in “deposits,” rather than in ready-made caches of treasure like those of Mexico and Peru. Cabeza de Vaca seems to advocate, at least in this passage, a slower, more patient, colonizing point of view, perhaps more along the line of Anglo style colonization. He cannot offer the Spanish crown a conquest-ready Apalachee, so he proffers instead potential for future colonization.

In the Luna papers we find evidence of such a search for a rich land, but the Luna expedition begins with a more colonizing or militaristic priority, to hold Florida and the Gulf Coast out of French hands. Using the search for the template city-state as a subgenre characteristic, we can compare and contrast this aspect of the Luna expedition with the goals in other failure texts. While there is not necessarily an explicit goal of the conquest of some yet undiscovered empire, the lack of ready-to-settle land brings the Luna expedition to conflict and failure quickly. In spite of the failures of the Narváez and De Soto expeditions, there is an expectation that Coosa province is the ideal place to settle and erect a town and fort. However, the Maestre de Campo Jorge Cerón writes in a reply to Luna that accounts of a rich Coosa are simply not accurate:

From this report [of Captain Don Cristóbal] it appears that the former accounts of this land and these provinces were false and not true, judging by what has been seen in the province Coosa, which was declared the most fertile, best disposed, and provisioned part for Spaniards to live and settle in, whereas it seems to be quite the opposite, being of such an undesirable

nature that everyone asserts there is no place where one may remain or erect a town (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. II, 51).

Luna does not heed the Maestre de Campo's complaint, and the failure is set. Within the failure texts, expectations of the Gulf Coast are set exceptionally high, with the previous conquests farther south as the measure of success. The Gulf Coast's geography, cut off from any practical land route from New Spain, is difficult to supply, and without the fertile, best land hoped for, starvation is certain. The failed expeditions of the failure texts fail largely because of the difficult location of Florida and the Gulf Coast. The difficulty of that location includes the lack of the city-state template that has an already-attained level of culture for the Spaniards to occupy. That lack, combined with geographical difficulties, lead to certain failure.

Geographical difficulties

Because of the grouping of these writings as regional, Gulf Coast texts, the landmarks and geographical descriptions are of special interest. The storms, insects, swamps, difficult waterways, and diseases remain present for Gulf Coast dwellers even to this day. Descriptions of nature become more hostile, destructive, and uninviting within a discourse of failure. Nature is less of a landscape to behold, and more an obstacle. The environment can be impressive or admirable, but it is overwhelming and often deadly. An added bonus for contemporary readers who are also Gulf Coast dwellers is the opportunity to connect and identify with these natural wonders and threats that are still vital parts of our lives in the American south.

The abundant references to geographical difficulties present another useful characteristic of the sub-genre of the Gulf Coast failure text. While hardships in nature

can be found in texts of successful conquest, the failure texts are especially rich with the descriptions of the harsh natural environment. Interestingly, the complaints in the failure texts are similar to our complaints on the Gulf Coast today—hurricanes, storms, mosquitoes and the diseases that come with them, scarcity of fertile land, terrible heat, and humid cold. The profusion of natural hardships in the Gulf Coast failure texts serves at least two purposes. First, the physical suffering due to environmental conditions of the writers of the failure texts serve as an account of their service to the Spanish crown and the business of conquest. Second, the harsh natural conditions serve as indicators that the land not agriculturally or economically viable.

For the first purpose, the physical anguish experienced by the failed expedition members is a form of service to the King that must take the place of victory and conquest. The suffering experienced in nature must overtake other themes in the text. In her discussion of failed conquests in *The Armature of Conquest*, Beatriz Pastor states, “In the context of this inhuman, destructive environment action is transformed, and nature... gradually becomes the central focus of the text, shifting the reader’s attention away from everything else” (120). Pastor asserts that the realistic and unforgiving view of the Americas is a demythification of objectives, a “shift from epic exploits toward common daily tasks” (121). The failed conquistador can no longer be called a conquistador when he fails to expand the Spanish empire. What is his title and purpose within the Spanish system when the expedition is a complete failure? The writers of the failure texts must redefine their purpose in the context of failure, and the copious mentions of natural hardships serve a purpose in their reinvention of identity and purpose in the context of failure. In the Gulf Coast failure texts, the scene of a gleaming Tenochtitlán is replaced

by scenes of impossible swamps and tiny, struggling Indian villages. As Pastor posits, this may serve to express a new reality of colonization, like that briefly suggested at the end of Cabeza de Vaca's account when he praises the possibilities of the American west. But we can see in Cabeza de Vaca's later testimony and actions, documented in the Gentleman of Elvas' relation, that he still believes that there is some rich land to be conquered, and he loses out on the commission to De Soto. While the text may "demythify" the Gulf Coast, it does not have that effect on other potential conquistadors like De Soto, or even on the author Cabeza de Vaca himself.

The sufferings brought on by geographical conditions expressed in the failure texts, perhaps more than demythifying the triumphal conquests made legendary in Mexico and Peru, function as markers of service to the crown. The account of the cruel environment on the Gulf Coast becomes as compelling a narrative as an account of successful conquest. In the spectacular torment of the narrators of the Gulf Coast failure texts lies "the presentation of the narrative itself as service... as valuable and deserving of favor as any more successful venture" (Pastor 128). The extensive listing of dreadful natural conditions also can function as a pretext for the failure. If the land is barely sustaining small Indian villages, how can it serve the Spanish empire?

The Luna expedition documents show a particularly consistent vision of Gulf Coast as an inhospitable and unproductive land, while other failure texts demonstrate mixed views of the Gulf Coast environment. The desperate petitions and letters of the Luna failure texts show mainly an overwhelming desire to get out of Florida, so positive evaluations of Florida are completely absent. In the petition by the married soldiers, complaining that their previous petition has been ignored, they declare as follows:

The territory inland is quite as swampy and overgrown with forests and brambles as it is here, and is so uninhabitable that no men who are human can possibly live in it. Besides this, the Indians who are there are in revolt, and cannot be brought by any means to the service of the king nor to the knowledge of our holy faith... (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I, 141).

The married soldiers emphasize the absolute hopelessness settling in Florida, as their only desire is to leave as quickly as possible. These men have no illusions of treasure or rich city-states. Successful settlement and survival of their families is their humble objective, and even that is unachievable in so harsh a natural environment. Swamps and brambles, elements that still complicate life on today's Gulf Coast, make survival for the members of the Luna expedition out of the question. Intriguingly, the married men's petition calls the land uninhabitable for humans, and then immediately mentions the Indians who live there. In such a brief statement, the Gulf Coast Indians are dehumanized, portrayed as uncivilized and animal-like and unusable to the Spanish crown. For the Luna expedition members, the Gulf Coast Indians are as difficult as the natural environment they inhabit, and both are equally impossible. The Gulf Coast environment and its native inhabitants are analogous, simply unsolvable problems that threaten the survival of the Spaniards in Florida. The textual equating of the natural environment with its population (or not) is a useful tool when approaching the Gulf Coast failure texts. For instance, Columbus pairs positive descriptions of the docile, handsome Indians with the images of the equally attractive land. The Luna petitions do the same, but in the negative.

The native Indians' actions can turn the geography from hopeful to impossible. In a letter by the Maestre de Campo to Luna, he mentions a "hope of relief" that comes from the "cornfields and grainfields and certain wild vegetables which were found on the banks of this river of Nanipacana and the Tome" (Vol. I 155). From the Spanish point of view, the Indians change the geography itself when they destroy the crops: "The cornfields had been pulled up, and all the fields burned and pulled up by the natives, [as had] even the wild herbs, which they had learned that we could make use of and which we eat. For this reason the camp has fallen into the want described..." (155). The captains' letter to Luna outlining the many "obstacles to prevent going inland" also relates the poverty of the territory inland with the hostility of the Indians:

And as known to your Lordship from the captains and the religious who are there, and from the expeditions and the efforts which we have made, we know for certain that for sixty or seventy leagues up the river there is no food which can be found... The whole land is in revolt and without any manner of food whatever (161).

Again, the native Floridians are linked to the geography of their territory, and the qualities of each are correlated within the failure texts. The hostile Indians are paired with land that is "so swampy, so full of canebrakes and brambles, and so full of obstructions" (163). Settlement in such a land is unworkable, which is proclaimed continually in the letters and petitions to Luna.

The unfeasible geographical location of Florida, so far from New Spain, also is recorded in the Luna documents. Viceroy Velasco, doubtless already clued in after De Soto's failure on the difficulties presented by Florida's natural features, states that

sending horses and cattle by land from New Spain to the north is “very difficult” as the “country is rough and bad and unoccupied” (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I 101). Unoccupied land is a curse to any Spanish action, because as mentioned above, the Spaniards need a ready-made society in order to make a go of any project. An unpopulated geography is a negative geography from the Spanish point of view. It is rare in the Gulf Coast failure texts to find positive references to geography when the land is either uninhabited or inhabited by uncooperative or hostile Indians. In the failure texts, the geography is inextricably linked to its inhabitants.

In the Gentleman of Elvas’ relation, the unpopulated country is a difficult one as well. While “the Christians marched two days through an uninhabited country... no road was to be found over which to go forward, and of there being no other town, and that water was on all sides” (Milanich 60). Elvas states that “every mind was depressed at this information, and all counseled the Governor to go back to the port” (60). When nature is not yet conquered and developed by natives, the Spaniards are overwhelmed by the impassability of the geography.

Bodies of water that are impossible to cross or ford are typical complaints in the Gulf Coast failure texts. In contrast to the orderly Tenochtitlán canals, the Gulf Coast landscape is wild and difficult to traverse, and danger of drowning is always present. Combined with the severe weather, the men suffer greatly from the elements. In Ayays, snow stops the men from marching, and then they encounter “a region so low, so full of lakes and bad passages, that at one time, for the whole day, the travel lay through water up the knees at places, in others to the stirrups” (Milanich 135). In the abandoned town of Tutelpinco De Soto and his men encounter a lake emptying into a river with a violent

current, so dangerous that “a worthy man...became drowned” (135). Crossing without Indian help is unattainable: “The Governor travelled all one day along the margin of the lake, seeking a ford, but could discover none, nor any way to get over” (135). To save the Spaniards from the impasse, “two friendly natives, who were willing to show him the crossing, and the road he was to take,” save the day (135-136). Once again, geography that is uninhabited or abandoned is at best desolate and impossible to navigate, and at worst deadly.

The Spaniards are unable to provide for themselves in the harsh environment of the Gulf Coast, and complaints of starvation occur in the absence of inhabited land. Nature is cruel and does not provide the men with enough sustenance to survive. But with De Soto’s arrival in Nilco, Elvas writes that it is “the most populous of any country that was seen in Florida,” and with the population comes “a good quantity of maize, beans, walnuts, and dried ameixas” (Milanich 136). The absence of people indicates the absence of natural resources, including food.

Just as the Gulf Coast flora cannot support the Spaniards, the fauna seems to conspire against them as well. The insects of the Gulf Coast are a plague to the Spaniards, and the Gentleman of Elvas devotes an entire paragraph to the suffering caused by the mosquitoes. While in boats off the coast, the men “suffered the intolerable torment of a myriad of mosquitos” (Milanich 189). The mosquitoes are an affliction to the expeditionaries, as their “flesh is directly inflamed from their sting, as though it had received venom.” The quantity of insects is overwhelming, and the boat’s sails “appeared black with them at daylight” (189). The natural environment causes immense suffering. It is partly to blame for the failure, and it compounds the torment of the

Spaniards. Suffering functions both as a pretext for failure and as a demonstration of faithful service to the crown.

Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* is bursting with natural descriptions, as his life depends on such observations. For him, nature is not a landscape to be admired aesthetically, but rather the environment is "vast, wild, hostile territory" (Pastor 130). Just as in the De Soto expedition texts, rivers are almost impossible to cross. In the *Relación* Cabeza de Vaca writes, "That night we came to a very wide, very deep and swift river, which we did not dare cross on rafts... A horseman...entered the river without waiting, and the swift current knocked him off his horse...and both he and the horse drowned" (39). The horse, the Spanish symbol of military might and masculinity, is quickly overcome and destroyed by the powerful environment on the Gulf Coast. Nature continues to pick off the Spanish with quick and slow deaths.

Travel on the Gulf Coast is continually met with obstacles. Crossing the terrain is an awful challenge, for there are "very dense forests, great groves of trees and many swamps, where there are obstructions caused by very large fallen trees, so that one can go through there only with great difficulty and danger" (41). Fallen trees are a constant impediment for the Narváez expedition, and these fallen giants are signifiers of great forces at work on the land of the Gulf Coast. The fallen trees, besides making travel so difficult for the Spaniards, point to powerful lightening and storms, forces of natural destruction to which the Spaniards are relatively unaccustomed. This, along with the hurricane at the beginning of the expedition, serves as an ominous sign of divinely sent disaster.

Even while describing the savagely difficult terrain, Cabeza de Vaca does declare that nature is sublime in its awesome terribleness. Cabeza de Vaca relates that in the early days on the Gulf Coast, captured Indian guided the expeditionaries:

They took us through country that was very difficult to cross and marvelous to see, filled with large forests and amazingly tall trees. So many of the trees were fallen that they hindered our progress, making us go around them with great difficulty. Of the trees that were still standing, many had been split from top to bottom by lightning that strikes often in that land, a place of many mighty storms and tempests (40).

This description of the fearsome reality of nature on the Gulf Coast is especially compelling when compared to natural descriptions in other expedition texts. It does not read like Columbus' exaggerated, flowery depictions of the new world, or even like Bernal Díaz's amazed account of seeing Tenochtitlán. It is neither a sordid, entirely negative account, nor an account of simple wonder. Rather, Cabeza de Vaca's Gulf Coast is sublime, both terrible and wonderful at once, inspiring both fear and awe. Real, present, physical hardship is textually mixed with intellectual wonder. The sublime, poetic language saved for the terrible shipwreck in Toca Velasco's *Triaca* epic is used in Cabeza de Vaca's firsthand account to describe the Gulf Coast landscape.

Surprisingly, the harrowing accounts of the difficult geography are softened at the end of the accounts. After the awful accounts of hardship and death, Elvas' account ends with an optimistic summary of the Gulf Coast land and its potential. In the beginning Elvas proclaims that the country in Florida is made "of very high and thick woods, and in many places...marshy" (Milanich 25). But in the last chapter of the Gentleman of Elvas'

relation, we find a quick synopsis of the land's promise. The land of Ocute is "more strong and fertile than the rest," and Chiaha, Coosa, and Talise are "flat, dry, and strong, yielding abundance of maize" (Milanich 200). Along the River Grande, the fields are "very fertile and inviting" (201). Despite the accounts of the soldiers' hunger, he lists the foodstuffs available growing wild in the area, fruits that "are all in great perfection" and "are less unhealthy than those of Spain" (202). Similarly, Cabeza de Vaca ends his account on a positive note, praising the Gulf Coast. At the end of his *Relación* he states that "we understand that on the southern coast there are pearls and much wealth and that the best and richest things are near the coast," in spite of the Spaniards' fruitless wandering on there (116). The land in the west is said to be "without a doubt the best in all the Indies, the most fertile and abundant in food...They have many fruits and beautiful rivers and many other very good bodies of water" (110). Cabeza de Vaca continues that sanguinity in his report to the Spanish crown when he suggests that there is a rich country yet to discover in the Gulf Coast region. Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* is one of the most intriguing failure texts in its mixing of geographical difficulty with geographical promise, and the text provides a rich context with which to study the writer's priorities and strategies in relation to the Spanish crown.

The reason for these seemingly contradictory geographical descriptions put forward in the failure texts may be explained by the each writer's strategy to protect his own interests. Uncooperative geography can be a partial explanation for an expedition's failure, though the writers lay most responsibility for failure in the laps of the failed leaders like Narváez and Luna. The difficult environment serves to showcase the writer's service to the crown through his suffering. When the failure text writer shifts from

negative to positive in his appraisal of the geography, he is looking to protect his future commissions in the Americas. Territory that is only barely inhabitable for the Indians throughout the narrative becomes more promising at the end of the failure text. The reader of the failure account has promising news of the Gulf Coast, and the writer of the failure text portrays himself as a valuable, experienced expeditionary who can help to exploit these Gulf Coast features in the future.

Avoidance of work

In the face of failure to conquer a city-state or find major population centers to support their physical needs, the expeditions suffer greatly. Strangely, agricultural endeavors are almost never discussed in any of the Gulf Coast documents. It is even more surprising that there are few mentions of agriculture in texts like the petitions of the Luna expedition, which was to have been a legitimate colonizing project, not just a military conquest. Lack of sufficient food supplies and outright starvation are the main themes of the petitions of the Luna expedition members. The men, from high-ranking to the Mexican Indians of the expedition, complain that Luna's only concern is traveling inland, and the only hope of food lies with the unlikely arrival of a supply ship. This concern receives the greatest treatment in the texts. In Cabeza de Vaca's account and in the De Soto expedition accounts, there is almost an obsession with finding maize. Maize is a sign of indigenous civilization, a reason to hope to find that illusive city-state. That desperate need and hope for maize, and a seeming lack of concern for growing their own supplies, provide an opportunity to analyze the expeditionaries' attitudes toward social status, agricultural work, and the real task of colonization. Also, it may provide a way to compare and contrast the Spanish concept of colonization with that of other empires.

Other examples within the Gulf Coast failure texts of the avoidance of work outside of one's social status or trade provide material for analyzing the attitudes and mores of the typical Spanish conquistador.

Upon arrival in Florida, gold and silver are the top priorities for the De Soto expedition, according to the Elvas relation. More practical concerns, like maize, are mentioned only when hunger has already set in. Spaniard attempts to harvest available foods are pitiful and disorganized, and only possible when encountering already inhabited land. The Gentleman of Elvas writes of the men's hunger:

Where there were inhabitants, some water-cresses could be found, which they who arrived first would gather, and cooking them in water with salt, ate them without other thing; and they who could get none, would seize the stalks of maize and eat them, the ear, being young, as yet containing no grain (Milanich 37).

The disordered and desperate means to get sustenance is an early foreshadowing of the expedition's failure. It already seems to be becoming a free-for-all when feeding themselves. Cooking, a sign of some level of civilization, is abandoned when the men eat raw corn stalks.

The general labor required to prepare food is already unattainable in the De Soto expedition, as evidenced by Elvas' account above. Civilization, the ability to live as a European, a Spaniard, is breaking down due not only to a lack of food, but also to a lack of appropriate labor. Without the city-state template and the servants and workers it would provide for the expeditionaries, Spaniards have no source of manual laborers for food preparation. Elvas describes the dietary collapse that occurs early in Florida:

Up to that time, no one had been able to get servants who should make his bread; and the method being to beat out the maize in log mortars with a one-handed pestle of wood, some also sifting the flour afterward through their shirts of mail, the process was found so laborious, that many, rather than crush the grain, preferred to eat it parched and sodden (Milanich 38).

As described in Chapter 3, the Spaniards resort to using their European equipment for other purposes when they use armor as an inefficient flour sifter. The Spaniards, without proper equipment and without servants supplied by some nearby city-state, resort to eating food that is barely cooked at all, maize that is still in its natural, whole state. They are unable (and unwilling) to toil in the act of making bread. Bread, so much a symbol of an old world civilized community and staple in the European diet, disappears from the daily diet of the expeditionaries. The journey inland, for the Gentleman of Elvas, is characterized not only by physical and geographical hardships, but also by the rapid loss of the markers of civilization, of Europeanness, of Spanishness. The deficiency of manual labor available to the Spanish expeditionaries is one of the many important elements in their failure.

The failure to share or switch work roles is an essential characteristic of the Spanish expeditionaries, and the mentions of the complications within the failure texts show how problematic it became. Naturally it is directly related to the failure to find the city-state template. The Spanish model of conquest simply does not have a contingency plan in case there is no Aztec or Inca Empire to be taken. The Gulf Coast presents an especially thorny problem because its location complicates sending supplies from New Spain. The Gentleman of Elvas makes another mention of the labor problem when the

cooper becomes ill: “The cooper sickened to the point of death, and there was not another workman; but God was pleased to give him health, and notwithstanding he was very thin, and unfit to labour, fifteen days before the vessels sailed, he had made for each of them two...quartos” (Milanich 169-170). Even taking into account the desperate condition of the Spaniards, it may seem strange to the modern reader that the cooper is forced to labor in spite of his weakness, with no mention of others helping or attempting to quickly learn his craft.

Trade and rank are markers for a Spaniard’s identity, not just happenstance. As long as other Spaniards are present, the social order and occupations are maintained even while conditions needed to survive are breaking down. The avoidance of the work of bread-making and coopering points to several possibilities. Spaniard social order may be so rigid that the texts reveal that not even extreme hardship and starvation can easily break it. Or, each individual feels constrained or unwilling to take on any other roles that might jeopardize social standing or rank within the expedition’s order. The frequent unwillingness to morph labor roles stands in contrast with the U. S. frontier hero accounts of a Daniel Boone or Johnny Appleseed. While we have astonishing accounts of Spanish struggle and survival in horrible conditions on the Gulf Coast, the failure texts abound in examples of Spanish reticence to adapt to the Gulf Coast circumstances. And, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the attempts at ingenious uses of Spanish items for other purposes invariably fail. The failure of the use of European items for Gulf Coast necessities runs parallel with the failure of the expeditionaries to adapt their social and labor roles to the harsh requirements of the Gulf Coast. The failure texts give seemingly contradictory messages. The texts expose the incompatibility of the Spaniards and the

geographical conditions, but at the end declare the potential riches of the same Gulf Coast. This apparent inconsistency makes the failure texts even richer subjects for literary study.

In the Luna expedition papers, we find an almost mystifying absence of agricultural planning, given the dire supply problem the settlers face. Herbert Ingram Priestly, in his historical introduction of the Luna papers, explains the details of how the contingent of Luna expedition was built and organized upon a “set of instructions formulated by the viceroy and audiencia upon a model provided by the king” (Priestly xxx). The instructions in that document prescribe the duties of any administrative and judicial officers, but “did not contain any specific rules for the functioning of the general officers of the new province nor any outline of the specific purpose of the expedition” (xxx). Priestly contends that the lack of clearly defined relationships among the governor, the *maestre de campo*, and the royal officials is a source of the conflict that brought the expedition to failure. Priestly also contends that the forces were “without proper discipline” and disgruntled from previous incidents (xxxi). We can find a relationship between this documental and personnel failure and the extraordinary aversion to or discounting of the essential tasks of building a settlement.

In “The Oath and Covenant of Homage Made by Don Tristán,” a transcript of the oath made by Luna to Viceroy Luis de Velasco in New Spain, we can see the priorities of the Spanish crown laid out. The first priority mentioned in the oath is “to preach our holy Catholic faith to the natives” (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I 35). “Settlements and fortifications” are mentioned, without specifics, and then the “welfare, conversion, and good treatment of the natives” are emphasized again (37). No detailed plans are laid out for the settlements, but Florida is referred to as “large, good, healthful, and fertile” (37).

Supplies of men, horses, and flocks are promised, but no explicit plan for the future community, other than religious devotion and total obedience to the crown, is defined in the oath. In addition, the provision of King Felipe permits no new discoveries or settlements, since his wish is that La Florida “be settled and placed under orderly government” (45). The means to this establishment of orderly government is through “the natives thereof,” who along with the Spaniards are expected to establish “homes and means of living” (45). The absence of assigned duties depends at least in part on the Spanish dependence of the city-state template examined in this chapter. The Florida natives are expected to bear the burden of manual labor, and the provisions and oaths are taken up by everything but specifics on the settlement. Conversion of the natives is paramount, and with that, the understanding that they will be the workers for the Spaniards. When the Luna expedition cannot find a large population of cooperative Indians, the Spaniards’ plan is exposed as incomplete and doomed to fail. The *maestre de campo* writes that the natives “may have hidden the food and destroyed the houses” so that it is “not possible to take from this settlement or camp any supply of food, nor is it hoped that any can be obtained on all the road” (157). The only agricultural plan, apparently, is to confiscate food. For all the official language of Luna, the viceroy, and Spanish crown, a practical, workable agricultural and labor plan is replaced with a vague reliance on an established Indian society in Florida. When the Indian society fails to materialize, we see the breakdown of the Luna expedition in the form of the Luna failure texts, which are the increasingly desperate letters and petitions from every member of the expedition.

In the *Relación* of Cabeza de Vaca, social and labor conventions lose meaning when Cabeza de Vaca acts as a “woman” trader and healer, but this happens long after he is alone and Cabeza de Vaca has written that Narváez has given his declaration of every man for himself. Cabeza de Vaca’s assumption of varying, surprising roles throughout his wanderings will be a subject analyzed in the following chapter. As long as there is a modicum of Spanish organization, the rigid labor roles apply, and we see observe avoidance of work and work organization. While Narváez is still in charge and there is a critical mass of Spaniards, position and honor may have higher priority than even survival. In the *Relación*, Cabeza de Vaca writes that after leaving Aute sick and starving, “the majority of the cavalymen began to leave secretly, thinking they could save themselves” (46). But the “noble and well-bred men” agree to stay with Governor Narváez and the sick, in spite the hopelessness of the situation. When these men agree to build boats in which to escape the Gulf Coast, they realize that they “did not know how to build them and... we especially lacked someone to provide expertise” (46-47). Like the Luna and De Soto expeditions, the Narváez expedition seems appallingly unprepared for any eventuality, with men who are unskilled for the expedition’s needs. Cabeza de Vaca does not name the “sole carpenter in our company” who would build the boats, and while the men seem to pull together to make rope and rigging, it is a pitiful attempt (47). The lack of expertise continues while aboard the meager boats, as there was no one “with us who knew the art of navigation” (48). The absence of willing or able skilled laborers on the Narváez expedition must be a principal element in the failure, and Cabeza de Vaca emphasizes the point in chapter eight of his *Relación*. The lack of a shipbuilder and navigator, among other deficiencies, is a special indictment of Spanish maritime

superiority. The deficits of the expedition cause the continuing deterioration of conditions, leading to the desertion of Governor Narváez and even cannibalism by some of the men. Upon the complete failure of the Spanish on the Gulf Coast, a lone Cabeza de Vaca is left to rebuild his own version of Gulf Coast Spanishness, to be discussed in the following chapter.

The geographical difficulties and the avoidance of work found in the failure texts are interrelated with the failed search for the city-state template. In the following chapter I will examine another vital labor during the expeditions, that of interpreter. The competent or incompetent interpreter often holds the success or failure of the expedition in his hands. The performance (or non-performance) of interpreter is a vital component in the Gulf Coast failure texts. And perhaps the most important element for the failure text authors, the maintenance of Spanishness and masculinity within the context of failure, will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Preserving Spanish and Spanishness in the Wake of Failure

In this chapter I aim to study the final two characteristics of the subgenre of the Gulf Coast failure texts. First, I intend to examine the textual role of the competent or incompetent interpreter and his language in the Gulf Coast failure texts. Next, I aim to explain how the failure text writers textually maintain their Spanishness and manhood after experiencing failure and disaster to the point of starvation and nakedness. The two characteristics are related in the textual strategy to continue *hispanidad*, or Spanishness, in the harsh conditions of the Gulf Coast, and in the context of failure.

Spanish and the interpreter

Several Gulf Coast failure texts include a chain of interpreters, some discovered left behind from previous expeditions. The interpreters or guides provide almost a “cast of characters” that links the Gulf Coast expedition texts. Destiny hangs on these interpreters, and in most texts they are treated as far more important than even the shipwrecks and disasters. The surprising discovery of a Spaniard left over from the Narváez expedition extends the life of the De Soto expedition. That interpreter’s death and treacherous interpreters who follow severely limit and harm the expedition. The treacherous or incompetent interpreter or guide often is the cause of the most drama in the failure narrative.

The failed expeditions’ dependence on interpreters offers rich material for the analysis of the European Renaissance vision of language and difference. The fact that in failure narratives an expedition’s fate often turns on good or bad interpreters is especially interesting, given the other extreme dangers that the expeditions face. Also worth extensive study is the *subordinate* expedition member’s narration of the difficulties with incompetent and treacherous interpreters, and its relationship with their criticism of the expedition leadership. It is useful to keep in mind that in Cortes’ letters recounting his Mexican victory, interpreters play no large role. The role of the interpreter, especially the treacherous one, is a useful way to contrast the failure and victory texts.

In the Gentleman of Elvas’ relation, a real-life coincidence provides intertextuality with Cabeza de Vaca’s relation with an amazing encounter. When the De Soto expedition comes upon a captive Spaniard who had been part of the Narváez expedition, Juan Ortiz of Sevilla, they find an invaluable asset. It is perhaps one of the greatest twists of fate of all the Spanish expeditions, giving De Soto an experienced,

trustworthy, Spanish interpreter. Ortiz has been held captive for years, and his story is as compelling as any Indian captivity narrative and runs parallel with the Pocahontas tale, with some detail provided by Elvas. Ortiz's interpreting allows the Gentleman of Elvas to include native voices in the form of monologues by the Caciques of the Gulf Coast.

It is presumably through Ortiz the interpreter that Elvas can relay Ortiz's caretaker Cacique Mocoço's greeting to De Soto. The greeting is wordy and grand, and we can only speculate about its accuracy. Elvas quotes Chief Mocoço's desire "to serve you (De Soto)," who "in your (De Soto's) bodily perfection you exceed all, and in your command over fine men are you superior to others, so in your nature are you equal to the full enjoyment of earthly things" (Milanich 33-34). In another instance later in the expedition Elvas relates that the Cacique of Tulla's address includes an apology to De Soto and an offering of his country and his own person. Elvas claims, "the speech of this Cacique—like those of the other chiefs, and all the messengers in their behalf who came before the Governor—no orator could more elegantly phrase" (Milanich 128). Elvas quotes message from the Cacique of Tastaluca (Tuscaloosa): "He sends me to offer you his person, his lands, his subjects" (80). The Cacica of Cutifachiqui addresses the Governor, saying, "With sincerest and purest good-will I tender you my person, my lands, my people, and make you these small gifts" (62). The Gentleman of Elvas' relation contains several monologues of Indian chiefs, grandiloquent in their praise of the Governor, and we must assume that his ability to include these native voices is courtesy of Ortiz's interpreting. The monologues' purpose in the Elvas account seems to be primarily to show the Indians' submission to a Spanish governor, and to show their willingness to submit not only land and subjects, but even their own person to Spanish

rule. While the monologues are verbose in praising De Soto's power, the most important element is when a Cacique expresses, "See in what you will command me" (82). The Indians' giving authority to the Spaniards is the priority.

Elvas' inclusion of so many native royal addresses must be seen at least partly as a function of Ortiz's presence, and perhaps even provided directly by Ortiz, without Elvas' changing the messages at all. The textual evidence of Ortiz's role as interpreter may be viewed as another failure text within the Gentleman of Elvas' failure text. Because Ortiz has experienced a failure similar to that of Cabeza de Vaca, we may construe the textual support of his position of interpreter within the Gentleman of Elvas account as yet another Gulf Coast failure text. This internal failure text of Juan Ortiz contained in the Elvas relation provides an intriguing Gulf Coast literary artifact—the voices of native Caciques and messengers, of course filtered through at least two other narrators, Ortiz and Elvas. The formal, somewhat unctuous speeches of the Indian caciques and messengers contrast with the hostile, treacherous Gulf Coast reality, narrated by Elvas. The constant skirmishes between Indians and Spanish narrated in the Elvas account demonstrate a gap between the reality of the difficult expedition and the monologues of the seemingly docile and eager-to-please Indian rulers. The Indian language is transformed into a formal European courtly greeting, giving the Elvas account at times an incongruent tone. Elvas is more realistic than worshipful toward De Soto in his account, but the tone of the Indian monologues we assume to be transcribed by Elvas is more obsequious, more formal, more ceremonial. We can examine these transcriptions of Indian monologues as Ortiz's attempt to redeem his own failure on the

Gulf Coast. The interpreter's version of Indian voices is a demonstration of his worth to the Spanish crown and the project of conquest, his own Gulf Coast failure text.

Ortiz provides Indian messages that almost invariably tell the Spanish crown what it wants to hear. Most caciques offer lands and service unconditionally, exactly what one desires after the conquests of Mexico and Peru. This latent desire for the Aztec or Inca city-state template, discussed in the previous chapter, can be detected in the interpreted Indian messages. De Soto, previously a participant in the conquest of the Incas, is verbally promised effortless authority over the lands of the Gulf Coast, which contrasts with the hardships recounted by the Gentleman of Elvas. Ortiz may have a strategy in this over-the-top assurance of trouble-free conquest on the Gulf Coast to remedy his double-failure in Florida. He fails not only with the disastrous Narváez expedition, but also upon his return to Florida to find news of Narváez, Ortiz is captured by Indians. Not only is he captive, but he is unable to provide De Soto with news of local riches: "When asked if he (Ortiz) knew of any country where there was either gold or silver, he said that he had not been ten leagues in any direction from where he lived" (Milanich 33). But Ortiz's double-failure can be softened somewhat by his skill to interpret the positive news of the Indians' surrender to De Soto, a win in Florida after such horrible catastrophes associated with Narváez. The Cacique of Mocoço, according to the Gentleman of Elvas, declares to De Soto: "The favor I hope for, great Lord, is that you will hold me to be your own, calling on me freely to do whatever may be your wish" (34). The cacique's capitulation to De Soto contrasts with his previous total domination of Ortiz. The Spanish need for native vassals seems to be fulfilled in the cacique's statement. Later Indian messages are interpreted with both help from natives and with we must assume

Ortiz acting as the final interpreter. The Cacique of Achese, besides expressing wonderment at the Spaniards and their swift horses, offers all to serve De Soto: “I hope no fault will be found in me, and that I shall receive favours, of which one is that with my person, my country, and my vassals, you will do as with your own things” (54). Unlike Moctezuma, who claimed his person simply could not be taken prisoner due to his status, the Florida caciques make the most unlikely offerings of themselves, their people, and their land. Of course it is possible that the interpretations offered in the Elvas account are completely accurate, but the similarity among them is too striking to ignore. The Indian monologues function almost as a window into the most basic desires of the Spanish conquistadors.

The offering (or seizing) of *tamemes* from the Cacique of Ocute reinforces the verbal offers of vassalage of the Indians. Shortly after, the Cacique of Patofa continues the theme in his speech to De Soto. Presumably interpreted by Ortiz, the cacique expresses his inferiority before De Soto:

By what circumstance has this your land, which I govern, deserved to be seen by one so superior and excellent that all on earth should obey and serve as prince? ... From the depth of my heart, and with the respect due to such a chief, I make mine offer; and pray that, in return for so sincere good-will, you dispose of me, my country, and my vassals (56).

The offer is a duplicate of those made by caciques before, so we may detect a clear pattern in Ortiz’s interpretations. When the Indian monologues are interpreted in Spanish, the Spanish conquest’s needs and desires are proffered. The Cacica of Cutifachiqui presents all she has, according to Ortiz thru Elvas: “With sincerest and purest good-will I

tender you my person, my lands, my people, and make you these small gifts” (62). The Gentleman of Elvas acknowledges the similarities and formality of all the cacique monologues: “The speech of this Cacique (of Tulla)—like those of the other chiefs, and all the messengers in their behalf who came before the Governor—no orator could more elegantly phrase” (128). The interpretations of Indian messages meet or exceed Spanish oratorical standards and meet the needs of empire. In the conversion of messages from native languages to Spanish, the imperial language expresses the fulfillment of imperial requirements. To interpret all messages in Spanish is to change native thoughts to fit the Spanish empire project. Maintaining the Spanish language, through the interpreter Ortiz, in turn maintains the Gulf Coast venture.

The Gentleman of Elvas thwarts the interpreter Ortiz’s intertextual failure strategy by questioning one incidence of dishonest interpretation. (Interestingly, Elvas does not question Ortiz’s Cacique interpretations that all sound so strangely similar.) Here, the use of Spanish misleads the Governor. The providential interpreter Ortiz switches roles according to Elvas, becoming the untrustworthy interpreter so often mentioned in texts of Spanish conquest. When some Spaniards of the cavalry steal skins and shawls from the Indians and are condemned to death by De Soto, Ortiz, influenced by the Spanish religious and officers, gives a false interpretation:

Juan Ortiz, at the entreaty of Baltasar de Gallegos and others, changed their words, telling the Governor, as from the Cacique, that he had understood those Christians had been arrested on his (the Cacique’s) account; that they were in no fault, having offended him in nothing, and that if he would do him a favour, to let them go free: then Ortiz said to the

Indians, that the Governor had the persons in custody, and would visit them with such punishment as should be an example to the rest (94-95).

The manipulation of the interpreter Ortiz is to completely reverse the message of the Indians in favor of the Spanish thieves. Elvas shows Ortiz as swayed by the opinions of the men, somewhat disloyal to the Governor. But his Ortiz's loyalty is with his fellow Spaniards, not with the wronged Indians, and the violent Indian attack that Elvas recounts immediately after Ortiz's false interpretation may well be caused by Ortiz's thwarting justice. The misuse of Spanish, a false interpretation, brings disaster upon the men.

Ortiz's ultimate service to the expedition is expressed by Elvas, because with Ortiz's death, the expedition slows terribly and heads toward disaster. The inner-failure text of Ortiz finally succeeds with Elvas' account of Ortiz's crucial role. Elvas relates the misfortune after the loss of Ortiz:

Juan Ortiz died in Autimque, a loss the Governor deeply regretted; for, without an interpreter, not knowing whither he was travelling, Soto feared to enter the country, lest he might get lost... The death was so great a hindrance to our going, whether on discovery or out of the country, that to learn of the Indians what would have been rendered in four words, it became necessary now to have the whole day: and oftener than otherwise the very opposite was understood of what was asked... (134-145).

The crucial task of interpreter is especially significant in the failure texts, as life and death hang on the competence of the interpreter. Escape from a hostile country or continuing conquest is hampered and made nearly impossible by the absence of an efficient interpreter. The success of the Aztecs, for Bernal Díaz, hangs on access to a

competent interpreter, and the inverse is true for the Gentleman of Elvas. The lack of an adept interpreter is a catalyst in the failure of the De Soto expedition. The failure to maintain access to accurate Spanish language leads to disaster.

The similarity between interpreter Juan Ortiz's story in the Gentleman of Elvas' account and that of the future Pocahontas and Pocahontas-like narratives makes a fascinating subject for study, especially taking into account that each story is set in places of swampy, miserable failure (Jamestown and the Gulf Coast), failures that are situated within the successes of a larger European empire projects. The go-between or the interpreter role, competent or incompetent, honest or dishonest, is a prevalent one in the documents of the Spanish conquest, and the fairly extensive detail provided in the Elvas account gives us a great deal to consider. The role of the Indian woman as savior of the weakened, captive European man who goes on to aid in the building of the empire has been studied extensively from both historical and literary perspectives, but this tale of a rescued European interpreter within the context of the failure text can lend even more literary interest to this well-examined topic.

Biedma's account contains the history of Juan Ortiz as well, but Biedma places emphasis on different details. Ortiz is "the Christian, having nearly forgotten our language" (Milanich 251). For Biedma, Ortiz almost loses his Spanish identity when he loses his language, recuperating his identity only when he remembers "to call upon the name of Our Lady" (232). Biedma does not include the extensive reproductions of Indian monologues as the Gentleman of Elvas, and Ortiz plays a very minor role in his text, in contrast to the Elvas account. In the Rangel account, Ortiz is mentioned only in passing as "the interpreter, that Christian who was found in the land" (Milanich 379).

Rather than grand, formal monologues like those in the Elvas account, the natives are quoted as asking De Soto, “Who are you, what do you want, where are you going?” (389). Ranjel’s brief quote seems perhaps more realistic regarding Indian attitudes toward the unwelcome Spanish. While the Ortiz of the Elvas account provides flowery speeches and offers of vassalage from Indian caciques, Ranjel testifies that Ortiz’s interpretations contain more damning quotes from the Indians (keeping in mind that Ranjel’s relation is copied by Oviedo, who is quite critical of De Soto). According to Ranjel/Oviedo, Ortiz interprets the Indians asking De Soto, “Why did you desire to use us with such cruelty... Why did you desire to offend your God and us...” (445). While the Gentleman of Elvas allows Ortiz to have an empire-affirming voice within Elvas’ relation, Biedma and Ranjel gloss over Ortiz’s role. The Elvas account can play a special role in the study of the Gulf Coast failure texts with its special emphasis on Spanish, language, and the interpreter’s important function in affirming or critiquing the actions of the project of empire.

In the Luna expedition papers, we find a long letter from Viceroy Velasco to Luna, dated May 6, 1560, responding to information he has received from Luna about the situation in Florida. Luna has previously expressed a need for interpreters, and the Viceroy responds with the following offer:

You (Luna) say that the Indian whom my niece, Doña Beatrice, has would be useful as an interpreter, as would the other married woman of Tlaxcala whom my sister-in-law has. This is the simplest thing in the world; she is badly crippled, but if she recovers I will send her. The Tlaxcala woman

has hidden, but if she can be found I will send her too (*The Luna Papers*, Vol. I 121).

Luna's petitions to the Viceroy for many supplies and people demonstrates the urgent conditions in Florida, and the Viceroy's offer of interpreters serves to reveal the rather pitiful preparation for communication on the expedition. The most powerful Spaniard in the Americas offers two women as tongues, one a cripple and one apparently in hiding from her mistress.¹⁰ Their physical condition and general willingness to take on such a task is doubtful, as is their suitability to interpret in Florida. Both women doubtless speak indigenous central Mexican languages, of no use on Florida's Gulf Coast. The offered interpreters are insufficient physically and linguistically, which reveals even more weakness in the Luna settlement plans. Luna's connection with Spain through the viceroy is shown to be precarious with such weak offers of help. The inability to prioritize linguistic aid for the Florida expedition foreshadows the expedition's failure. Just as Doña Marina is the key to Spanish success in Mexico, the lack of a cooperative Indian woman is one of the many factors in failure for the Luna effort. The disconnect between Spanish power / Spanish language and the indigenous of the Gulf Coast lead to the collapse of Luna's efforts in Florida.

For Cabeza de Vaca, the interpreter role varies throughout the narrative of his relation, ending with Cabeza de Vaca himself becoming the tongue. In his role interpreting the ethnographic information throughout his wanderings, he becomes the most reliable interpreter, not only capable of relating true and accurate interpretations of events and speech, but also, in his capacity of a Spaniard of some rank, he is able to relate

¹⁰ Here it would be interesting to contrast the Luna indigenous interpreters with Doña Marina/Malinche.

all in exact and truthful Spanish. His textual relation is in many ways a book-length interpretation, faithfully rendered in Spanish for the crown and public. He is the ultimate reliable narrator, translating the incredible Gulf Coast experience into a narrative with cohesive structure, and ultimately, with purpose for his audience. His language is reliably Spanish because of his national, linguistic, and social status. His extraordinary story is given credibility and authority with his maintenance of Spanish and Spanishness throughout the failure text.

Early during the expedition in Florida, in chapter five, Cabeza de Vaca makes more detailed accounts of communication between Spaniards and Indians: “By signs we told him we were going to Apalachee, to which he replied by signs that seemed to indicate that he was an enemy of the people of Apalachee...” (39). It seems that the writer is giving space for errors in communication during initial contact with the Indians. Communication is hampered by the lack of an interpreter, and Cabeza de Vaca makes specific mention of the “signs” the Spaniards resort to. By chapter seven, Cabeza de Vaca merely recounts what the Indians “say.” Cabeza de Vaca states that when asked, each Indian “answered that the largest village in the entire land was Apalachee” (43). No longer mentioning methods of communication, he writes that the Spaniards “heard the bad news about the population and all the other things the Indians told us about” (43). Simplifying the details of communication between Spaniards and Indians makes the narrative move more smoothly, and at the same time gives Cabeza de Vaca more narrative authority as the sole source of information for the reader.

By the end of the narrative, in chapter thirty-one, language becomes a topic of interest in itself. Cabeza de Vaca describes the linguistic situation:

We encountered a great number and variety of languages; God our Lord favored us in all these cases, because we were able to communicate always. We would ask in sign language and be answered in the same way, as if we spoke their language and they spoke ours. We knew six languages, but they were not useful everywhere, since we found more than a thousand differences (104).

As Cabeza de Vaca is drawing the narrative to its close, this explanation satisfies the reader's curiosity about language and communication details. No interpreter is needed, since Cabeza de Vaca and his companions are proficient at any type of communication. The reader can trust that Cabeza de Vaca's experience has made him an expert in Indian linguistics, and that his transfer of information back to Spanish is faithful and competent. Indeed, when interpreters surface at the end of the narrative, they are indicators of bad faith and lies. The Christian slavers have their interpreters lie to the Indians about Cabeza de Vaca and his companions. The Christians "had their interpreter tell them that... we were people of little luck and valor" (109). The appearance of interpreters reintroduces the imperial pattern of conquest and enslavement that Cabeza de Vaca is now questioning. His independence, or freedom from interpreters, while communicating with the Indians during all of his years of wandering is suddenly truncated with the appearance of the Christian slavers. Free communication is hampered, and with the interpreters come lies. We are to trust the multi-lingual Cabeza de Vaca and put aside judgments from inexperienced Spaniards who must rely on interpreters. Cabeza de Vaca's Spanish (and his Spanishness) is more trustworthy because it is backed up by knowledge of other languages and systems of communication. Because the account is coming to the reader

without filtering through an Indian interpreter (who may or may not be reliable), Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* maintains an incorruptible image as a Spaniard's honorable relation.

The treatment of the interpreter, whether he/she is present or absent, reliable or dishonest, is a useful theme for the study of the Gulf Coast failure texts. The interpreter within the text, especially the indigenous and female, is especially vulnerable to the failure text writer's judgment. It is especially interesting when studied together with texts of successful conquests, such as those of Bernal Díaz de Castillo or Hernán Cortés. The conquistador writers' handling of the figure of the interpreter can teach us a great deal about their narrative strategies in protecting their own interests and points of view within the rigid Spanish imperial structure. The tensions between the Spanish language and the languages of the other in written text provide opportunities for the literary analysis of the Gulf Coast failure texts as a subgenre, and of all European conquest texts.

Maintaining Spanishness and masculinity

A close study of the Gulf Coast failure texts can provide tools to analyze each writer's struggle to maintain his place in the Spanish system of masculinity and honor. These texts can help to answer the question "How is Spanishness performed when one loses his sword, his authority, his companions, his clothes, his faith community, and even occasion to use his native language?" Cabeza de Vaca's nakedness and performance of "woman's work" as a trader is an extreme example (already analyzed by Jonathan Goldberg). The weakness of the men of the Luna expedition is more subtle and difficult to examine. Toca de Velasco's attention to shipwreck victims' nakedness in his epic poem of disaster shows the importance of clothing in Spanish imperial culture. The

failure texts that show Spanish masculinity and honor in jeopardy may offer more nuanced details of the social context of the conquest period, opening up a more accurate picture of the Spanish mentality of the early Renaissance. When the requirements of Iberian masculinity are compromised—military endeavors fail, swords are lost, imperial service comes to nothing, clothing is stripped—what are the results and what are writers’ strategies to deal with these results?

Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relación* is the Gulf Coast failure text that provides the most extensive and personal account of the stripping of every vestige of Spanishness. Given Cabeza de Vaca’s self-interest in writing his account, we must assume that his revealing of these details is strategic and written in a way that maintains his status in the Spanish imperial system, and in a way that maintains his European-ness in general. Cabeza de Vaca is quick to defend his honor early in his account, ignoring his own self-preservation to go with Narváez and the men, refusing to stay and “thus have my honor doubted, for I preferred to risk my life than to have my honor questioned” (37). Honor, of utmost importance in Spanish society, must be protected and maintained for Cabeza de Vaca’s account to have any value whatsoever, and for his future in the Spanish imperial political system. Whatever shocking revelations follow in the account, we must suppose that Cabeza de Vaca’s priority is to maintain his Spanishness and his position as an honorable man. Whatever outrageous details are revealed, they must be in some way acceptable Spanish behavior.

Cabeza de Vaca and his companions lose the trappings of Spanishness quickly due to a series of disasters on the Gulf Coast. The loss of horses is especially difficult, both practically and symbolically. The horse symbolizes military power, European

identity, and general superiority over the indigenous people without such military advantage. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the use of the dead horses for food or vessels fails miserably for the Spaniards. The loss of ships, made even more poignant by titling his account *Naufraños*, shows the swift and total loss of Spanish maritime power. Without horses and without ships, the Spanish expeditionaries are left without transport, without military advantage, stranded and walking like Indians. And the loss of weapons obviously points to both literal impotence and symbolic loss of the phallic sword or arquebus. The Spanish conquistador without his horse and weapon is unable to penetrate the land and take possession. The masculine role of the Spaniard as conqueror and possessor of the Americas is reversed, and the feminine, passive role of the conquered land and conquered native is no longer applicable. The New World, and specifically the Gulf Coast, is no longer a submissive entity to be penetrated and possessed. On the contrary, the land, nature, and its inhabitants are powerful forces, with the Spaniards often at their mercy. (As mentioned in previous chapters, the depiction New World nature is distinct in the Gulf Coast failure texts.) Spaniards fall victim to the forces of the Gulf Coast's natural difficulties—storms, disease, difficult terrain, terrible cold and heat, scarce food, and hostile inhabitants with no civilization to graft to serve to rob the Spanish expeditions of their masculine conquering force. The Gulf Coast failure texts are graphic accounts of the rapid decline and wasting away of Spanish dominance, and they offer alternative views of what Spanishness is when all Spanish trappings are stripped away.

Perhaps the most striking and difficult account of the loss of Spanish accoutrements is the loss of clothing, and no account is more extreme than that of Cabeza

de Vaca. Nakedness is the final humiliating loss of Spanishness, and nakedness is so often mentioned that it is practically a character in the relation, as constant as hunger. Clothing as a marker of status and identity in Spanish social and military order is generally a moot point by the time the garments are lost, as death and desertion have broken down the expedition's hierarchy ahead of time. In *Sodometries*, Jonathan Goldberg posits that as Narváez deserts, "The Spaniards are literally divided, but what slips away... is the basis for Spanish identity, at least one normative component of it" (206-207). The nakedness that comes after is a far more personal stripping of Spanish identity, beyond the military and social order. It is fitting, then, that soon after the complete military breakdown culminated in Narváez's desertion, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions are stripped of their clothing. The narrative maintains an order in the Spaniards' collapse—first social and hierarchical breakdown, then individual.

After the loss of horses, the beginning of starvation and thirst, and the abandonment by Narváez of his post and responsibilities, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions lose what little is left of the material markers of Spanish/European identity. In chapter twelve, he and the men decide to set sail in boats once again, and they "had to strip naked" to launch them (56). The Spaniards are unsuccessful in their endeavor to set launch the boats, the attempt killing three, and those "who survived were as naked as we were born and had lost everything we had" (56). This episode stands as a symbol for the total loss the Spanish have suffered, a loss of all material indicators of Spanishness. Cabeza de Vaca emphasizes the terrible damage, lamenting that, "Although the few things we had were of little value, they meant a lot to us" (56). These "things of little value" were the physical pointers to the men's Spanish identity, their European self.

As starvation and cold set in, the naked men are “closer to death than to life” (56). The morphing vision of the “Other,” the Indians, appropriately occurs just a few sentences after the loss of all material Spanishness. The “crude and untutored” Indians, who are “like brutes,” show great empathy for the Spaniards and sit to cry for them (57). To question the “otherness” of the Indians and the moral superiority of the Spaniards even further, Cabeza de Vaca names five Christians who “became so desperate that they ate one another one by one until there was only one left” (59). In these brief passages, Cabeza de Vaca proposes another way of envisioning the Indians and even the Spanish self. The Indians have the moral high ground in this episode, and Cabeza de Vaca explains that, “the Indians were quite upset by this happening and were so shocked that they would have killed the men had they seen them begin to do this” (59). In the narrative there is a seeming blurring of Spanish and Indian roles and moral identities, yet Cabeza de Vaca never fails to maintain his identity as a Spaniard. Jonathan Goldberg states that the episode of Spanish cannibalism “is no instance of Spaniards becoming Indians... but it is also not an instance of Spaniards not being Spaniards either, although Spaniard and cannibal are usually antithetical” (208). Cabeza de Vaca, rather than blurring together Indian and Spanish identities, is widening the very definitions of Indian and Spaniard, saving a safe place for Spanishness to be maintained even in such impossible circumstances.

With all vestiges of Spanishness and European identity gone, Cabeza de Vaca is at least left with his language (discussed above in this chapter), but the Spanish language is almost useless during his wanderings. Is there some trace of Spanishness that survives the stripping and privation that occurs on the Gulf Coast? According to Federico Garza

Carvajal in *Vir: Perceptions of Manliness in Andalusia and Mexico 1561-1699*, the Spanish beard a symbol par excellence of Spanish masculinity and honor. The beard as an indicator of manliness and difference from women or the sodomite “other” is emphasized in Iberian thought from pre-medieval times. In her book *The Disappearing Mestizo: Configuring Difference in the Colonial New Kingdom*, Joanne Rappaport states that, “The association of beards with masculinity has a long history in the Iberian Peninsula. We have only to remember the medieval poem of the Cid, whose hero refuses to trim his beard, which stands in for his masculine honor” (Rappaport 41). Cabeza de Vaca, in spite his nakedness and physical weakness, maintains the Spanish beard. Of all the losses, the beard is the only entity that maintains its presence, exempt from the terrible disasters and failures of the Spanish expedition. While the Spaniards have failed to penetrate and conquer the Gulf Coast, at least Cabeza de Vaca himself is never penetrated, figuratively or literally, within the Gulf Coast text.

If Cabeza de Vaca is able to maintain his manliness and honor through the presence of the beard, how can we explain his own admission in the account of his role of trader as “woman’s work”? After all, if Cabeza de Vaca is in charge of his own account and may include or omit any narrative he chooses, what is the purpose of including an episode that (at least to the modern reader) puts into question his maintenance of masculinity when among the Indians? Why does Cabeza de Vaca’s role as trader/go-between not mark him as a sodomite, an accusation so often used against Indians and the “other” in the times of the conquest and colonies? For Jonathan Goldberg, Cabeza de Vaca’s role as go-between reflects his other role as shaman and is at its base an economic function. Goldberg states that Cabeza de Vaca “is inserted in a circuit of native

exchanges that serve to make shifting and fragile alliances among peoples often at war and on the brink of starvation” (209). It is precisely Cabeza de Vaca’s difference that is emphasized by his unusual role of trader, and “it is thanks to his separateness that he also can serve them (the Indians)” (Goldberg 209). Cabeza de Vaca’s strange positions in his wanderings accentuate his distinct nature, always different from the native nomad.

Cabeza de Vaca’s naked (but not beardless) journey gives him another role that has a long history in Christian tradition—that of hermit. Beyond maintaining Spanishness, he maintains his Christianity, the most patent signifier of Spanishness. The starvation, humiliation, and physical suffering are the requirements of a hermit’s ordeal. In spite of years wandering with the Indians, Cabeza de Vaca never mentions a relationship with an Indian woman. He keeps chaste and offers only ethnographic observations of women, usually about their benevolent or harsh treatment, their modes of dress, and their roles in the community and household. His relationship with the Indians is usually one that is humiliating, and he often holds the place of slave. However, when he takes on the role of shaman/ healer, his role as religious hermit is affirmed. Nakedness does not cause Cabeza de Vaca to “go native” or confuse his identity. On the contrary, his Christian role as hermit/ monk is confirmed as a result of his privations, and his nakedness and beard is a constant statement of his maleness, regardless of his taking on of a female trader role. Jonathan Goldberg states that Cabeza de Vaca’s nakedness may signify his role as “go-between and neutral,” but I would argue that the dangerous proximity of this role to that of the sodomite makes it an impossible position for Cabeza de Vaca to take (213). When all vestiges of Spanishness are lost, the Spanish beard and Spanish Christianity are maintained, allowing the failed expeditionary to preserve his

beard and his European self through playing the part of hermit or monk, not unlike a John the Baptist who is nearly naked, dressed in skins, near-starving in the wilderness.

Cabeza de Vaca's service to God and Spain must be immune from doubt, and his religious, pious role would help to insulate him from criticism or accusations of going native. The complexities of his depictions of the Spaniards (some good, some cannibals or immoral slavers) and the many varied Indians and American cultures do not necessarily function as a questioning of the world order, but rather it works to expand understanding of the many variations of both Spaniards and Indians. If Cabeza de Vaca's occupation is the go-between in this expansion of the identifying features of Spaniards and the "other," he protects himself from accusations of sodomy and "going native" by maintaining a religious role, imitating the long-suffering hermits of the Christian tradition.

Christian identity as Spanish identity is essential in the De Soto documents. In the Gentleman of Elvas' account, the Spaniards and Indians suffer from nakedness as well. In Mauilla, after an attack and terrible fire, the anguish of nakedness begins:

If, by good luck, any one had been able to save a garment until then, it was there destroyed. Many remained naked, not having had time to catch up their skin dresses. In that place they suffered greatly from cold, the only relief being in large fires... The Christians were left so broken up, that what with the want of the saddles and arms which had been destroyed, had the Indians returned the second night, they might, with little effort, have been overpowered (97).

The death of fifty horses and the stripping of saddles, arms, and clothing happen at once in the Elvas account, caused by the attack and ensuing fire. Spanish honor and identity

are called into question as well. The Governor's nephew, "who had been deemed a brave man until now," is afraid of the Indian attack and "showed himself as great a coward as either of the others" and allows the camp town to be attacked without resistance (95).

The Gentleman of Elvas consistently questions the honor and usefulness of several Spanish members of the expedition, demonstrating nuanced view of Spanishness. What remains to point to the Spaniards' difference is the survival of one hundred swine. Pigs are indicators the Christianity of the Spaniards, as opposed to the Jewish or Moorish "other" in Spain and the Indian "other" in the Americas. After the death of De Soto, the Gentleman of Elvas describes the maintenance of Spanish civilization through pigs: "From that time forward most of the people owned and raised hogs; they lived on pork, observed Fridays and Saturdays, and the vespers of holidays, which they had not done before" (149). Pigs are the instruments of the maintenance of Spanish Christian society, providing not just physical sustenance but also marking Spanish difference. Just as Cabeza de Vaca resorts to his Christian identity to salvage his European and Spanish self, so does the Gentleman of Elvas. The Spaniard's difference from the Indian boils down to his Christianity, a final defense against the stripping of all markers of Spanishness. Interestingly, while Cabeza de Vaca's demonstration of his Christianity goes as far as allowing him to faith-heal, the Gentleman of Elvas shows De Soto as unable to perform such acts. When a cacique brings two blind Indians to De Soto and "begged him to restore sight to those Indians," De Soto is only able to speak of his belief in Christ (109-110). In Cabeza de Vaca's narrative, his relationship with divine power is much more actively radical than that of De Soto.

Ranjel's relation makes much of the loss of the vestiges Spanishness, and we must remember Oviedo's role in the "copying" of Ranjel's report and Oviedo's animosity toward De Soto. While the first-person writers have an interest in preserving their own status within the narrative of failure, a *copy* of a first-hand account by Oviedo may have different priorities. In the Ranjel account, the deadly fire mentioned above robs the Spaniards of many things, but the things that merit attention in the Ranjel account are "the sacramental cups, and the moulds for making the wafers, and the wine for saying mass" (*Relation of Ranjel* in Milanich 430). The practical items needed to sustain life, such as clothes and equipment, are ignored in favor of mourning the loss of items needed for the Catholic mass. The loss of the means to practice their Christianity is shown as most devastating in the Ranjel relation, as the Spaniards "were left like Arabs, completely stripped..." (430). Without the vestiges of Spanishness, and particularly without the vestiges needed to symbolically perform their Christianity, Spanish identity is in peril, a particular indictment against De Soto and his decisions on the expedition.

Nakedness and lack of any Spanish vestige is a recurring theme, and in the Ranjel relation it is particularly awful when it affects a Spanish noble. The Ranjel relation emphasizes the indignity:

And that you many know, reader, what sort of a life these Spaniards led, Rodrigo Ranjel, an eye-witness, says that among many other great hardships that men endured in this undertaking he saw a knight named Don Antonio Osorio, brother of the Lord Marquis of Astorga, wearing a short garment of the blankets of that country, torn on the sides, his flesh showing, no hat, bare-headed, bare-footed, without hose or shoes, a

buckler on his back, a sword without a shield, amidst heavy frosts and cold (433).

The shockingly degraded state of the Spanish nobleman is less a show of service to the king and more of a condemnation of De Soto's foolhardy management of the expedition. The Rangel account blames the loss of Spanishness on De Soto, and he is shown to be responsible for the suffering men. Humiliating nakedness and powerlessness, and the stripping of all markers of Spanish supremacy, are confirmations of De Soto's incompetence. Oviedo, through Rangel, has no need to explain or defend such hardships with any other pretexts. Oviedo uses Spanish nakedness as a condemnation of De Soto, while those writers who experience firsthand this literal and figurative stripping must textually grapple with it in more complex ways.

In Toca Velasco's epic poem of the Spanish shipwreck, nakedness plays a prominent role. Keeping in mind that the poem is not a first-hand account and the work and author are removed in time, space, and consequence from an actual shipwreck disaster, nakedness likely plays a different part than in the first-hand failure texts. Nakedness serves to emphasize the misery and total loss of the shipwreck. In Jerry Gurulé's translation of Toca Velasco's *Triaca producida de un veneno. Naufragio de Española Flota*, we see the "naked unhappy people... /stepping humbly with tender/ soles on the broad shores' crude sands,/ more tears they shed, in broken springs,/ than the fields have grains, than the ocean/ drops." (267). A naked and near-dead sailor "sets out towards the shore where I stand, where upon/ arriving, he reclines the grave weight of / his nude, expiring, wounded body..." (255). The emphasis on nakedness and misery at

the end of the piece does not have the same purpose as in the first-hand failure texts, nor is it fraught with personal or political peril for the author himself.

The epic poem names God's providence as the cause of the shipwreck, whether for punishment or some other reason. Human error is not an issue, unlike the first-hand failure texts. A storm, impossible to avoid, is the divine instrument to mete out suffering on the Spanish. Nudity, like starvation, is a device to highlight the drama and desolation of the *naufragio*. In Toca Velasco's poem, nakedness is less fraught with religious and political danger than the nakedness narrated in the first-hand failure narratives. The poetic nakedness is a consequence of God's humbling of the Spaniards, an unavoidable outcome of the shipwreck. For the De Soto and Narváez expedition texts, nakedness comes about after a series of mistakes and miscalculations by the Spanish leaders, the culmination of much previous suffering and starvation on the Gulf Coast. The nakedness of the first-hand failure texts is connected with protracted suffering on the Gulf Coast terrain, while in the Toca Velasco poem, nakedness is an immediate result of the maritime disaster, with clothing ripped off by the sea itself.

The role of the interpreter and the maintenance of Spanishness and masculinity are perhaps the most subtle and difficult characteristics of the Gulf Coast failure texts. Analysis of these aspects should provide rich material for studying not only first hand Gulf Coast failure texts, but also conquest and colonial discourse from differing centuries and empires.

CONCLUSION

The nine characteristics of the Gulf Coast failure text subgenre discussed in this dissertation can provide a useful tool to approach works that are less studied by literary scholars and students of literature. While the historical significance of these works is obvious, their categorization as non-fiction letters, journals, or accounts may make them less visible or attractive to literary academia. With a set of subgenre characteristics to approach these texts, literature students may find them more manageable and easier to analyze and explore as both non-fiction testimonies and as consciously creative narrative. The characteristics analyzed in this work are by no means an exhaustive list of the commonalities among the Gulf Coast failure texts. They are merely the first step to approach these texts as a group, providing a context to categorize the Gulf Coast failure texts by region.

The presence of the subordinate voice alone is reason enough to recognize the value of the Gulf Coast failure texts. While the spectacular successful conquest accounts attract the most attention, the military subordinate often has much more to add to the discourse of conquest. Just as Bernal Díaz del Castillo adds infinitely more richness to the discourse of the conquest of Mexico than Cortés' letters, the subordinate voice does the same for the failed conquests of the Gulf Coast. But unlike successful conquest texts, the subordinate voice is the principal voice in failure texts. Without the military or social subordinate, we would lack any historical or literary perspective on the Gulf Coast expeditions. These subordinate or minor voices provide rich possibilities for study in historical, anthropological, and literary fields.

The subject of the shipwreck is an enormously popular focus of study in many areas, including American, British, Portuguese, and Spanish literature. By using the treatment of the shipwreck as a starting point for analysis, the Gulf Coast failure texts could be introduced to a much larger academic audience. The related subgenre characteristics of starvation and thirst, the failed use of European items, and geographical difficulties also could be tools to compare and contrast the Gulf Coast failure texts with works such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, captivity narratives, *novelas de caballería*, and even classical seafaring narratives such as the *Odyssey*. The intertextuality and interplay among these many genres and periods has great potential for study and could present the Gulf Coast failure texts to a wider reading public.

The Gulf Coast failure text characteristic of the search for a city-state template is perhaps a distinctly Spanish trait, in contrast with British conquest or colonial discourse.

The Spanish dependence on consecutive Tenochtitláns can teach us about the Spanish pattern of conquest and colonization. The narrative search for a rich Apalachee should have a place among the popular works about El Dorado and Cíbola. The “lost city” text could be a subgenre in itself, of interest to literature and history scholars. Related to the search for the city-state is the avoidance of work in the Gulf Coast failure texts. This characteristic can be of use to those who study Spanish medieval and Renaissance thought and society. The avoidance of work outside of one’s immediate station shows the relative rigidity of Spanish military and social order. It also provides a tool for comparing and contrasting the Spanish conquest and colonial pattern with that of other empires.

The topic of the interpreter is one that is useful across any conquest discourse. The reliable or treacherous interpreter takes on an important role in the failure texts, as the fate of the Gulf Coast expeditions often hang on the “tongue.” The popularity of Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s account of Doña Marina/Malinche and the reclaiming of Malinche by Chicana writers and activists could open the door for studying the subject of the interpreter as subordinate, scapegoat, or just part of the cast of characters of the Gulf Coast expeditions. The idea of the Gulf Coast go-between (in language and race) is fertile ground for future study, and the failure text interpreters may be among the first on the list of these mediators.

The theme of Spanish honor and masculinity is an especially relevant topic in literature, history, and gender studies. The Gulf Coast failure texts provide a unique opportunity to examine Spanish strategies to maintain honor and masculinity even when all vestiges of Spanish power are stripped away. While successful conquest tales bristle

with the accoutrements of Spanish military power like armor, horses, and swords, the failure text writers must contend with the complete absence of such symbols. The failure writers, in the tricky position of keeping intact honor, masculinity, and usefulness to the Spanish crown even in dismal failure, provide us with abundant textual strategies for analysis.

The characteristics and categories analyzed here should not isolate these failure texts, but rather open up new possibilities for comparing and contrasting all texts from the conquest and colonial periods. For future study, the characteristics of the Gulf Coast failure texts (perhaps in addition to other features) can be used to compare and contrast exploration and disaster texts of the Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French, allowing these Gulf Coast failure texts to reach an even wider audience of students and academics. Potential future study may contrast failure texts with the successful accounts of conquest written during the same historical period. As with the case of the first-hand Gulf Coast failure texts contrasted with Toca-Velasco's epic poem, these nine characteristics may be clarified or expanded to examine the differences and similarities among eyewitness first-hand failure writing and those written second-hand, distant spatially or temporally from the disastrous events.

The Gulf Coast failure text traits have practical use in the classroom as well. Having used the idea of subgenre characteristics of Gulf Coast failure texts in the undergraduate classroom, I can affirm the usefulness of subgenre features when first approaching a potentially difficult text. For instance, when teaching a course in U. S. Hispanic literature, a passage Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* is usually included. Because as a conquest/colonial work it falls outside of Dr. Nicolás Kanellos' very effective outline of

genres of native, immigrant, and exile literature, students may practice the exercise of adding a hypothetical column to Kanellos' three, to brainstorm the characteristics of conquest/colonial or failure literature.

The analyses of the features of Gulf Coast failure texts in this work are designed only to be a beginning, a convenient instrument to introduce these important works to a wider audience of students and academia. My intention for the list of features is for it to be neither complete nor be completely accurate for every single work. I hope that it will serve to expand the study of these important Gulf Coast works beyond the history department to the literature department, and that the concept of failure texts will be yet another method to classify and study the valuable documents of the conquest and colonial period.

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