

New Spain, August, 1539

PROEM FOR THE QUEEN OF SPAIN

Your Most Holy Majesty, Esposa to God and the Holy Majesty King of Spain,

I am in the humbleness of the poor servants of this wretched land asking of you to share the Grace and Beauty of Your Holy Motherhood to the publics of Nueva España and to give us Your Love as You would Your Own Children absented from Your Grace by the Mysteries and Wisdoms of His Holy Father. *(Khe San is a malfunction, Sir, like your mother and this whole fucking country!)* We are Love and Truth for You, as You command. The marks on our bodies are God's Will, His Gift to the Wonder of our inhumanity, Glory Be To God, and the brave deeds of the Leadership of the Church and all Soldados in finding us who have been most lost in the Darkness of Satan and the cravings of our flash and blood *(Lui lai, lui lai, you Cong-faced motherfuckers! Back up and nam xuong dat! Nam fuckin' xuong dat! Lie the fuck down! Or y'all gonna fuckin' die sucking full-metal eggs in this goddamn dog-humping ricehole piece of shit you call home! Nam fuckin' xuong dat!)* to be better. We have been blind in our pulque customs and sacrifice of the unforgiven enemies who would join us in keeping the Darkness from the True Light of Your Holy Motherness and saving us *(One more fucking Dink shows his pockmarked little Congolese dick in this bar, we're fucking outta here, and that eye-winking body-bag of a bitch on your lap ain't coming with us.)* from the depths of Hell on Earth. Please do not think of me inexperienced in the Ways of God, Your Holiness, for I am benefitted for years in the Embrace of the Mission and the Love of God, Amen. I am with horses everyday and have learned *(The LT is in the LZ with the VC without no fuckin' radio. What the fuck else could you want for Christmas?)* the Power of Prayers and Writing. The benefits of a Sacred Heart are to love all of God's Children as You love us. Your Majesty may be served in such a way by the humbleness of us and strength of our hands in the land *(Spitshine your own ass, pal! If it don't look like me, walk like me, and talk like me, I shoot it. Simple. Saves time. I fuckin' live. They fuckin' die.)* and the will of our humble publics to assemble as One in the end of civil strife and the junction of all to make gold and fight Satan with *(Hooeee, motherfuckers! Night scope this! Hot stuff for you Mamasans, coming down right now! Brought to you this evening free of charge by Little Nicky's Napalm Factory, Uncle Fuckin' Sam and the Pharoahs, and all the good people of Iowa City, Iowa! Burn, baby, burn!)* the help of Almighty and the generous Mother in Your Love. All a naked man asks is to be Clothed by Your Wisdom, Grace, and Love. *Omine Ospentu Dios,*

Forever to Your Service, I remain,

Fernando Junípero Dominguez de Ixtapatl
Nueva España, The Year of Our Lord, 1539

"Proem" is an ethnographically rich and complicated document and I think testimony to the power of laconic texts. Whether or not Fernando Dominguez was as real a person as the historical Jesus Christ, I cannot say. My sources suggest that he was a charismatic Indian from what is now México's northern territory. Apparently he was trained as a translator by Spanish missionaries, made his first trip to Spain in 1537 as a servant in the company of the exhausted and forlorn explorer Cabeza de Vaca, and was returned to México shortly thereafter. His prose/praise poem to the Queen of Spain may have been stimulated by a draft of Cabeza de Vaca's proem to the King of Spain — His Holy, Imperial, Catholic Majesty, Charles I of Spain, Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire — that eventually formed the prologue to de Vaca's account of the ill-fated Narváez expedition to Florida and New Spain from 1528-1536. In any event, the multicultural theme of Dominguez's wobbly statement can be read through contemporary eyes variously as a reminder of the crushing power of Empire, the many layers and difficulties of cross-cultural translation, the power of naming, and semiotic diversity in codes. It can also be read as a call for an anthropology and history that include not only the victors but also the vanquished, the paramount and the powerless, the voiced and the voiceless, and the observers themselves. As an erstwhile historical document, it revisits 20th century pleas for a history sensitive to its own ideology; in its passion, divisiveness, heavy gendering, and contrived supplications, it speaks to the need for an empathetic and humanistic anthropology and to much of what exists as subaltern themes in modern criticism. And not least, in what has to be a surprising form of text, it begs the presence of a modern translator's or reader's own culture with its distracting "soldier talk" as fits of profanity and interference from another violent cross-cultural collision, the war in Vietnam. The overall effect puts anthropology and history squarely in the poetic and sometimes hallucinatory world of magical realism, of fantasy and reality mixed in special and compelling ways, in this case specifically in a universe on the order of Gert Hoffman's *Balzac's Horse* (New York: IPC, 1988), Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (New York: Broadway, 1978), and *Gunter's Winter* (New York: P. Lang, 2001) by Juan Manuel Marcos. For translations of de Vaca's final text, see *Castaways: The Narrative of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, edited by E. Pupo-Walker and translated by F. M. López-Morillas, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 3-4; *The Account: Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación*, translated by M. A. Favata and J. B. Fernández, Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993, pp. 28-29.

The next selection continues the work of texts constructed on an extraordinary premise, and it does so in a comparable place. "Para Donde Vas" engages time and place with the fictionalized freedom to transcend both. Crossing these boundaries in Mexican geography and history, the passengers fly by towns, territories, and events in liminal time, a perspective of last thoughts that is neither here nor there for the passage but reaches a reality framework that is normally beyond appearance to the living, that is, one that comes from discovering the specific parameters of your own death. In this case, it frames the gateway to ancient Mexican death — one phase of an endless cycle of renewal and rebirths, propped up by blood sacrifice and the knowledge that "Life had no higher function than to flow into death" (Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, New York: Grove Press, 1985, p. 54). Love of México both calls for the sacrifice and takes you to it, albeit sometimes by strange and unexpected means.

