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The New World, Digested: Anthropophagy and Consumption in Abel Posse's *El largo atardecer del caminante*

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The New World, Digested: Anthropophagy and Consumption in

Abel Posse's *El largo atardecer del caminante*

Adam Points Wilson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The New World, Digested: Anthropophagy and Consumption in
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The present thesis uses as its primary source of inspiration Argentine author Abel Posse's *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992), which boasts the historically-based, unconventional Spanish conquistador, Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, as its main protagonist and narrator. I explore the juxtaposition of two opposing forms of metaphorical consumption in the novel. To highlight the first, I apply to the fictional Cabeza de Vaca the general concept of *antropofagia cultural*, or "cultural cannibalism," as described by Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade in his "Manifiesto Antropófago" (1928). I specifically examine the symbolic development of Posse's Cabeza de Vaca as the first *latinoamericano* via cultural anthropophagy. Over time, the life-altering experiences during the course of his wanderings in North and South America convert him into an *antropófago cultural* by virtue of his conscientious, metaphorical consumption of the Other. By extension, Cabeza de Vaca becomes a model for the first *latinoamericano*, wrought, not through miscegenation, but rather through cultural contact. The second kind of consumption, on the other extreme, is represented in the novel through sixteenth-century Spain and its quasi-literal, compulsive consumption and subsequent expulsion of the New World Other. This is seen through the optic of the fictional Cabeza de Vaca in his waning moments in Seville. Posse's rendition of Spain, as seen through his historically-inspired narrator, is representative of the metaphorical indigestion caused by a thoughtless consumption of products, practices, lands, and even people from the New World. I put on display the manner in which sixteenth-century Spain is portrayed in the novel as suffering a figurative bloating, consuming so much, so fast, seemingly growing large and powerful until it is ultimately revealed as being sick and weak.

Keywords: Abel Posse, anthropophagy, anthropoemia, antropofagia cultural, Cabeza de Vaca, cannibalism, consumption, cultural anthropophagy, cultural cannibalism, *El largo atardecer del caminante*, indigestion, latinoamericano, Oswald de Andrade, the Other

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INTRODUCTION

Discreetly placed almost precisely one-third of the way through the historical novel *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992) is an intriguing declaration: “El canibalismo debe de ser una enfermedad mundial” (87). The Argentine author Abel Posse (1934–) positions these words in the mouth of his protagonist/narrator Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Based on his historical counterpart, Cabeza de Vaca has just finished giving a specific account of a type of ritualistic cannibalism practiced by certain indigenous tribes of the North American continent through which he had wandered for nearly eight years. This statement, however, is also at the end of a stream of thought in which Cabeza de Vaca connects this isolated type of ritual anthropophagy to the constant threat or fear of being ceremonially cannibalized by those who want to absorb his knowledge or qualities, be it metaphorically by the officials of the Inquisition or literally by the shamans of North America (87).¹ It is partly through this persistent dread of being eaten expressed by Cabeza de Vaca that Posse creates an anthropophagic, or cannibalistic, undertone that is ever-present throughout the novel.

I will examine and reference the context of the protagonist’s above declaration, and others of a similar metaphorical (as well as literal) nature in *El largo atardecer del caminante*, more thoroughly in parts of this introduction and during the chapters that follow. However, I would like to remain on the idea that Posse proposes through Cabeza de Vaca that “cannibalism must be a global pandemic” (“una enfermedad mundial”) for the purpose of introducing the intriguing and related idea of “anthropophagy as a worldview,” originally popularized in the

¹ Throughout this thesis I will use the terms “anthropophagy” and “cannibalism” (as well as their applicable derivatives) interchangeably, unless stated otherwise.

1920s by the Brazilian modernist writer Oswald de Andrade (more about him in a moment).² To better explain the connection between these two ideas, first I will discuss “anthropophagy,” a term that has been replaced in large measure by its fifteenth-century neologism, “cannibalism.”³ Anthropophagy is, by the simplest and most literal of definitions, the consumption of human flesh by another human being. The word tends to be used today in academia most frequently in the context of its literal definition and within the constraints of a given society and time period, or, more specifically, in reference to anthropological and cultural studies. Although anthropophagy is explored within those disciplines mostly in a literal sense, the metaphorical possibilities ascribed to the practice and the term have intrigued writers, artists, and scholars for nearly a century (myself and this present thesis included).

Few have used anthropophagy as a metaphor more noticeably than Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954). Known as one of the pioneers of the Anthropophagy movement in his home country during the late 1920s, Oswald participated in the *Revista de Antropofagia* where he

² The verbiage “anthropophagy as a worldview” was actually used by French author and philosopher Albert Camus, who visited and dined with Oswald de Andrade while in Brazil in August 1949. After the meeting, he used these words to describe Oswald’s theory of the anthropophagy metaphor in Brazil. For a more complete description of this encounter, see the blog article “‘Anthropophagy as a Worldview’: Camus Meets Oswald de Andrade” by João Cezar de Castro Rocha or his essay “Uma Teoria de Exportação? Ou: ‘Antropofagia como Visão do Mundo’” (647–68).

³ “Cannibalism” stems from the Spanish word *canibal*, which was inadvertently coined by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage to the New World due to a linguistic misunderstanding of the word *cariba* or *caniba* in the Taino language. Taino informants gave reports describing people called, or from, *caniba* or *cariba* who were fierce warriors and rivals to the Tainos and who (according to Columbus’s interpretation and subsequent recording of these reports in his diaries) consumed the flesh of humans. The misinterpretation of the word, and the anthropophagic meaning thereafter applied to it, eventually led to its almost exclusive use in sixteenth century vernacular to describe man-eaters and its use continues today in the same context. For a more detailed history of the coining and evolution of the term into its current use, see Carlos Jáuregui’s *Canibalia: Canibalismo, calibanismo, antropofagia cultural y consumo en América Latina*, specifically the first section of chapter one titled “La invención del canibal” (48–63) and the first section of chapter two titled “Canibales europeos” (135–44). See as well, chapter one (“Birth of the Cannibal”) of Frank Lestringant’s *Cannibals* (15–22).

published his famous essay “Manifesto Antropófago” (1928).⁴ The Anthropophagy Movement is actually a subcategory of the larger Brazilian Modernist movement of the time. According to Carlos A. Jáuregui: “*Antropofagia* hace del canibalismo una *metáfora* vanguardista *de choque* con el archivo colonial, la tradición, el Romanticismo indianista, las instituciones académicas, el conservadurismo católico y el nacionalismo xenófobo” (*Canibalia* 393–94, emphasis in original). Jáuregui claims that this Anthropophagy movement essentially takes the idea of cannibalism and converts it into a vanguardist metaphor that crosses into several different disciplines and isms. Jáuregui further adds that with the movement, the principal symbols for colonial otherness and nineteenth-century sameness, reflected in the “*canibal*” and the “*indio amoroso romántico*” respectively, are brought together into a single figure: “un jugueteón *canibal* brasileño” (*Canibalia* 393–94, emphasis in original).

Although scholars of Brazilian literature and culture are quick to credit Oswald as the father of the Anthropophagy movement (and rightly so), it is important to acknowledge that there were several other protagonists of the movement who are also deserving of recognition.⁵ Still, the degree of attention that Oswald’s work has garnered, its lasting impact on the Anthropophagy movement, and its use as a contemporary cultural metaphor is difficult to ignore. In particular, the level of scholarly scrutiny received by Oswald’s “Manifesto Antropófago” has resulted in almost a century’s worth of interpretations and reinterpretations, as Jáuregui has pointed out, “as

⁴ The Manifesto, as well as the *Revista de Antropofagia* in which it was published, was largely inspired by the ritual practice of anthropophagy by the indigenous Tupinambá tribe of Northeast Brazil. Tribal members would ritually consume the flesh — a specific body part, or an organ — of a worthy rival or enemy tribe member, hoping to acquire their desirable traits through a sort of fusion with the host.

⁵ Other notable members who first helped propel the Anthropophagy movement or participated in the *Revista* in some capacity were: Mário de Andrade, Raúl Bopp, Antônio de Alcântara Machado, Guilherme de Almeida, Manuel Bandeira, Oswald Costa, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Patrícia Galvão, and Tarsila do Amaral. Also worth mentioning is French author Francis Picabia (“Manifeste Cannibale Dada,” 1920), who may have influenced Oswald to some degree.

it has been appropriated, resignified, and transformed; paradoxically consumed and devoured” (“Anthropophagy” 22). It is also my intention to appropriate this Oswaldian idea of anthropophagy as a universally applicable metaphor.⁶ I will apply it, however, outside the Brazilian context and use it as a lens through which to examine Posse’s *El largo atardecer del caminante*.

One individual who took up the matter of literal anthropophagy was the French philosopher and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss; although he, like many others who have studied the practice, did not discount its symbolic qualities. Near the end of his book *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Lévi-Strauss discusses the differences between anthropophagy and anthropoemia in an effort “to distinguish two opposing types of society” (386).⁷ While describing the intricacies of anthropophagy, Lévi-Strauss offers several manifestations of the practice along with their implications. The first includes situations in which individuals turn to anthropophagy strictly as a means of survival, specifically in situations of extreme starvation:

We must set aside those cases in which people eat one another for lack of any other meat—as was the case in certain parts of Polynesia. No society is proof,

⁶ The term “appropriate” can often have a negative connotation, namely that of taking something from someone without express consent. An example of this would be the appropriation of property, an idea, a distinguishing cultural practice, or anything else that could possibly offend the person or people from which it has perceivably been taken. However, in the context of this thesis and anthropophagy in general, I use the term to mean what João Cezar de Castro Rocha describes as “uma contínua e produtiva assimilação da alteridade . . . um permanente processo de mudança” (“Uma Teoria de Exportação?” 666). I will also often use as synonyms the terms “assimilate,” “incorporate,” and “integrate”.

⁷ The theme of anthropoemia, as detailed by Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques*, is almost the complete opposite of anthropophagy, if we are to understand it on a societal level. The defining component of Lévi-Strauss’s anthropoemia is an isolation or separation of the Other from the body as opposed to absorption or integration of the Other, as is the case with anthropophagy. Criminologist Jock Young expounds on Lévi-Strauss’s explanation of this societal dichotomy of anthropophagy-anthropoemia in his book *The Exclusive Society* (1999) where he likens “primitive” societies to anthropophagy and modern societies to anthropoemia or, more specifically, bulimia. I will discuss this further in the second chapter of this thesis.

morally speaking, against the demands of hunger. In times of starvation men will eat literally anything, as we lately saw in the Nazi extermination-camps. (385)

Posse reinforces Lévi-Strauss's asseveration that no people, no matter how "civilized" they claim to be, are immune to cannibalism in extreme circumstances, regardless of whether or not it is considered taboo in their society (in the case of this novel, however, Lévi-Strauss's statement is shown to be applied to the Spaniards only).

Through his mouthpiece of the fictional Cabeza de Vaca, Posse juxtaposes the (civilized) constraint of the Amerindians with the unfettered barbarity of the Spaniards. Contrary to Lévi-Strauss's declaration, the natives amazingly did not give in to the temptation to practice this particular type of cannibalism despite the continuous lack of a quality food source: "no son caníbales en el sentido alimenticio" (86). Cabeza de Vaca gives an example of this level of constraint when speaking of the natives' veneration for the doe: "Ellos las respetan y sólo en caso muy extremo las atacarían. *Ni el hambre de un mal año justificaría eso*" (91, emphasis mine). He also details what alimentary extremes they are capable of enduring:

En las malas épocas, sin queja ni comentario, se alimentan de lo que circunstancialmente pueda dar la tierra sin abundar en comentarios culinarios: huevos de hormigas, gusanos, lagartijas, culebras y hasta víboras de las especies más venenosas. Si cuadra, también comen madera blanda de cortezas rayadas, tierra de la negra y estiércol de venado. Cuando ni esto encuentran, usan una reserva de polvo de espinas de pescado y de huesos molidos que mantienen en tinajas enterradas. Mezclan esto con polvo de hojas y de cáscaras y con ello cuecen una especie de caldo muy nutritivo. (80–81)

According to Cabeza de Vaca's descriptions, the natives are very resourceful and are experts in converting practically anything into a food-source. In times of war, their options are even scarcer: "durante la campaña los guerreros guardarán su propia mierda de cada día que ofrecerán los unos a los otros en caso necesario" (81). There is one item noticeably missing from this exhaustive list that Cabeza de Vaca offers regarding the natives' various means of sustenance: human flesh.

In contrast, a handful of the Spanish survivors of the shipwreck that left Cabeza de Vaca stranded on the Texas Gulf Coast eventually did succumb when faced with the same impossible position of extreme hunger. Posse's Cabeza de Vaca, realizing the irony of the situation, describes this role reversal: "¡El colmo fue que en ese mundo al revés de la isla del Malhado, fuimos nosotros, los civilizados, los que nos descalificamos a la categoría de verdaderos monstruos por causa de nuestro canibalismo!" (75). He then recounts the events that led to five of the shipwrecked survivors cannibalizing one another and the natives' repulsion once they found the lone survivor, Esquivel, and discovered his actions. Perhaps the biggest surprise to the tribe members, however, was the fact that the Spaniards themselves did not sentence their cannibal countryman to death when they were reunited with him and learned of his deeds. Ironically, Esquivel would later be killed when one of the women of the tribe who found him dreamt that he had gluttonously eaten one of her children (75–77). Again, in each of these examples the Spaniards are the ones who practice this type of "survival cannibalism," which Lévi-Strauss references. The natives in Posse's novel show they need not eat the flesh of their fellow-hominids in order to avoid starvation.

The second example that Lévi-Strauss presents is the case of ritualized anthropophagy. Perhaps to contrast the exception of survival cannibalism and common perceptions of the

westernized myth of cannibalism (namely those of individuals who imagine the practice exclusively in terms of “savages” who go about eating other humans at their leisure and as a normal, daily means of sustenance), Lévi-Strauss describes “what we may call the positive forms of cannibalism—those whose origins are mystical, magical, or religious” (385–86). He explains the symbolism of this ritualistic anthropophagy as follows: “By eating the body of an ancestor, or a fragment of an enemy corpse, the cannibal hoped to acquire the virtues, or perhaps to neutralize the power, of the dead man” (386).

Posse’s *Cabeza de Vaca* offers a similar observation of this “positive [form] of cannibalism” prior to expressing his constant dread of possibly being ritually cannibalized himself:

... ellos ejercitan una especie de canibalismo mágico o sagrado. A veces devoran ciertas partes de seres con cualidades destacadas. En el caso de guerreros muy notables, parece que comen los pies y las manos, pero cociéndolos de manera muy especial. Yo temí que pudieran decidir comerme para absorber esos descubrimientos de nuestra civilización. (86–87)

This idea of appropriating virtues (or, in this case, “descubrimientos”) of a worthy enemy (or simply put, an Other to the host society) through a literal ingestion of that individual’s flesh in order to enhance one’s own strength, or incorporate them into one’s identity, is the very essence of the symbolism made imaginable by the practice. This allegoric application of anthropophagy is what fueled the Anthropophagy Movement (to be discussed in more depth momentarily) in the early part of the twentieth century in Brazil. Since that time, the central elements of the anthropophagy metaphor have been dissected, scrutinized, and re-applied in Brazil by a plethora of scholars from different disciplines, in popular music, film, and literature.

Other scholars outside of Brazil, however, have also taken up the task of exploring anthropophagy's symbolic qualities. One such individual is the aforementioned Jáuregui, who conducts an intensive examination of the cannibal trope in his book *Canibalia*. In his introduction, Jáuregui uses the term “cannibalism” —as he describes the oft-visited theme of anthropophagy— “como frecuente metáfora cultural . . . [que] constituye una manera de entender a los *Otros*, al igual que a la mismidad; un tropo que comporta el miedo de la disolución de la identidad, e inversamente, un modelo de apropiación de la diferencia” (14, emphasis in original). As Jáuregui implies, the idea behind Anthropophagy is a sort of vehicle through which one is able to discover his or her own identity by coming to know and understand the Other through their differences as well as their similarities.

Brazilian scholar João Cezar de Castro Rocha shares Jáuregui's symbolic definition of anthropophagy. He suggests that “as sociedades que praticaram o canibalismo ritual empenharam-se em assimilar o outro mediante sua ingestão física e simbólica,” further adding that this concept of cultural anthropophagy is “*uma definição metafórica de apropriação da alteridade*” (“Uma Teoria de Exportação?” 662, emphasis in original). What is most salient in both of these scholars' explanations is the common idea that anthropophagy is linked to the appropriation of the Other's differences. This interest in the Other is recurrent in *El largo atardecer del caminante* and is also a sticking point of Oswald's “Manifesto Antropófago”: “Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropófago” (27).

Let us not, however, overlook the Manifesto's first lines, which almost immediately precede the previously cited lines and lay the groundwork for the Oswaldian concept of an anthropophagic view of the world: “Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente. Única lei do mundo” (27). Posse's *Cabeza de Vaca* realized, figuratively

speaking, that this “canibalismo mágico o sagrado” was not just an isolated case relevant only to the indigenous tribes of North and South America, but rather had widespread applications:

De alguna manera uno está siempre amenazado. Sea por la inquisición, por los dominicos de España, por estos chamanes emplumados, o por el poder rencoroso de los alguaciles del emperador Carlos Quinto. El canibalismo debe de ser una enfermedad mundial. (87)

It is easy to interpret this metaphorical description of anthropophagy by Posse’s protagonist as negative because of the reference to a looming threat and the sarcastic correlation to sickness. Cabeza de Vaca undoubtedly could have given more examples of ways in which he felt threatened. What most stands out, however, is the manner in which he quickly moves from an anthropological description of a localized case of ritual anthropophagy to a more sweeping, global metaphor that he readily applies to numerous facets of his own life.

Maria Helena Rouanet considers this metaphorical approach to anthropophagy as essential to its discursive functionality. On this point, she laments the limited, literal definition often attributed to the term by dictionaries, which have reduced it almost exclusively to a gustatory term. She warns that, “não se deve perder de vista o aspecto ritual dessa prática. Na verdade, a antropofagia se caracteriza por ser um processo de *assimilação crítica do outro*, e é por essa perspectiva que a funcionalidade discursiva de sua valorização deve ser pensada” (174, emphasis in original). At the very root of this concept of anthropophagy is the problematic task of defining Self through a true discovery and critical examination of the Other.

The notion of anthropophagy as a cultural metaphor stems in large part from several scholarly interpretations of Oswald’s “Manifesto Antropófago” and its role in the propagation of

the Anthropophagy movement in Brazil. “Manifesto Antropófago” actually worked in concert with an earlier publication of his, “Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil” (1924). The two, in effect, functioned together as a double-edged sword.⁸ On the one hand, “Manifesto Pau-Brasil” was the modernist response and critique to the mechanical way in which Brazilian poets in the 1920s simply copied the French *parnasianismo* without much creativity: “Só não se inventou uma máquina de fazer versos – havia o poeta parnasiano” (22). On the other hand, “Manifesto Antropófago” called for a Brazilian national and/or cultural identity, or *brasilidade* (“Brazilianness”), that was characterized by the consumption of certain aspects of foreign cultures into the Brazilian body while also acknowledging the importance of the existing cultures (indigenous/African/Portuguese) in Brazil at the moment.⁹

This *brasilidade* is portrayed in “Manifesto Antropófago” as innately, culturally “cannibalistic” in that it is the end result of the metaphorical devouring of several other cultures, products, practices, traditions, and perspectives (namely those “foreign” to Brazil): “Perguntei a um homem o que era o Direito. Ele me respondeu que era a garantia do exercício da possibilidade. Esse homem chamava-se Galli Mathias. Comi-o.” (29). The intention is not to make a mere copy (as in Oswald’s view of the typical Brazilian poet’s version of *parnasianismo* at the time), but rather something completely new as it is mixed with other, already existing cultures of Brazil.

⁸ When referencing the “Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil” I will refer to it simply as “Manifesto Pau-Brasil.”

⁹ An interesting side note: Oswald manages to reflect this idea of assimilation of the foreign with the local in the Manifesto as a whole. In it we find a mix of concepts, histories, philosophies, religions, literature, etc. foreign to Brazil (Freud, Rousseau, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Keyserling, Napoleon, among others), along with those that are thought to be native to Brazil (e.g., the idea of ritualistic anthropophagy and mention of the Tupi and other groups indigenous to Brazil along with their religious/cultural worldviews natural to that country). In essence, his Manifesto cannibalizes those “foreign” elements into the host body and creates something innovative, yet different.

As is believed to be the case with ritualistic anthropophagy, the components of the foreign that are “consumed” mix with those already present in the host body in such a way that the “new” creation is neither foreign nor indigenous, but rather a completely different being that, after the process of mixing is complete, is yet to be defined. Castro Rocha appropriately summarizes Oswald’s vision of this movement:

Oswald envisaged anthropophagy as a technique of cultural contact grounded upon the systematic and creative incorporation of otherness into one’s own identity, which, by definition, becomes a continuous process of self-fashioning and self-confrontation through the endless incorporation of new shapes and the crossing of previous boundaries. (“Anthropophagy as a Worldview”) ¹⁰

Through this “endless incorporation” (at the very core of the anthropophagy metaphor), Brazilian national identity is constructed as ever-changing and neither exclusively Portuguese, African, nor indigenous, nor a mere copy of the foreign. It is something completely new, based on an amalgamation of the many cultures (including “imported” ones) that are part of Brazil. The uniqueness of this idea of anthropophagy as a marker for a Brazilian national identity hinges on the fact that, as Castro Rocha observes, “tal forma cultural não oferece a estabilidade exigida pela noção de identidade nacional, que tende a representar-se como fixa, sempre idêntica a si própria” (“Uma Teoria de Exportação?” 666). The fact that this “Brazilian identity” contradicts the typical definition of homogeneity used in conjunction with the idea of national identity is precisely what makes it intriguing and even a desirable way of viewing identity on the

¹⁰ A similar quote by Castro Rocha is found in Portuguese in the book *Antropofagia Hoje?* in his essay “Uma Teoria de Exportação? Ou: ‘Antropofagia como Visão do Mundo’” (666). I chose to use the English version because I found both the wording and meaning to be more salient for the purposes of this thesis.

individual, collective, and national levels. In this way, Oswald's cannibalism is presented as a positive construct. Posse takes this positive idea of cannibalism and applies it to his protagonist Cabeza de Vaca.

Although this model of cultural anthropophagy has been used most often in reference to Brazilian literature and cultural studies, there has been an infrequent but growing application of this Brazilian lens through which to read, interpret, and analyze Latin American literature, as in the case of scholars such as Jáuregui and others.¹¹ With our view fixed firmly on the concept of cultural cannibalism as a positive construct and as a means to negotiate the symbolic appropriation of the Other through an "endless incorporation," and its universal metaphorical applications, it seems appropriate here, then, to consider it in the Latin American context through an examination of the anthropophagic tone in Posse's *El largo atardecer del caminante*. By using the fictionalized narrator-protagonist and historical Spanish conquistador Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca as the focal point of this case study, we will observe how he is portrayed in a positive manner as *antropófago cultural* and thus a symbolic representative for this Oswaldian model of anthropophagy.

In Chapter one of this thesis, I not only examine Posse's uses of anthropophagy as a metaphor throughout the novel, but also the references to literal cannibalism (ritual, survival, or

¹¹ The Mexican José Vasconcelos is an example of an individual outside of Brazil who employs several elements that mirror Oswald's cultural anthropophagy. Vasconcelos, in his essay *La raza cósmica* (1925), rather than focus entirely on a metaphorical cultural mixing, highlights the benefits of the literal mixing of races (miscegenation), the end result being a more perfect human being. Vasconcelos envisioned a race even more evolved than the European, or Anglo, male of the time period, who was widely touted as more pure and competent. This concept (and similarly, Oswald's Anthropophagy), however, did not come without detractors. It was widely rejected by indigenous groups (and those who sympathized with their cause), which claimed that this type of miscegenation implied an outright exclusion of their communities. They also claimed it promoted a forced assimilation, which diminished their right to maintain their cultural identity, free from external forces or societal expectations. It is important to note that the general idea that the mixing of cultures and/or races could yield positive results was not unique to Vasconcelos's or Oswald's respective home countries during the 1920s.

otherwise). I contend that these mentions of figurative and literal anthropophagy work together to create an anthropophagic tone in the novel. I also argue that Posse's fictionalized Cabeza de Vaca serves as an *antropófago cultural* through the constant digestion and integration of the Other into his Self. Through this anthropophagic process, Cabeza de Vaca becomes a consciously ambivalent character who validates the claim of several critics that he represents the first *latinoamericano*.

In Chapter two, my focus shifts slightly (without abandoning completely the tone of cannibalism) to sixteenth-century Spain's consumption of the New World as described by a waning Cabeza de Vaca during his final years in Seville. In this chapter, I examine the specific mentions of consumption as they relate to Posse's portrayal of this country's unbridled, literal and figurative ingestion of American products and practices as well as its accumulation of territories. This "ingestion" is exemplified in the first pages of the novel when Posse's Cabeza de Vaca describes the scene of a hectic walk through the city as gold is brought from the Americas:

Era un día de revuelo en la ciudad ... llegaba de América lo único que interesa a estos ingenuos entusiastas. La gente vive como riqueza propia este oro de la Corona.... España *se indigesta* de oro robado: máscaras rituales, aguamaniles, formas de dioses para nosotros desconocidos, vasos sagrados, collares de princesas vejadas y vendidas como putas a la soldadesca. (19, emphasis mine)

According to Cabeza de Vaca, all of Spain experiences a metaphorical indigestion after taking in a number of pilfered American artifacts made of gold. Cabeza de Vaca's use of the word "indigest" instead of "digest" or "ingest" is of particular importance as it paints an image of discomfort, almost a type of sickness that accompanies such rapid consumption without thought

for the repercussions. This greedy, gluttonous portrayal symbolizes Spain's volatile interaction with the American Other. This depiction stands in opposition to Cabeza de Vaca as the novel's embodiment of the "primitive" practice of anthropophagy, which inversely represents an inherent incorporation of and attempt at understanding the Other.

An underlying motive for highlighting these two opposing forms of metaphorical consumption that Posse portrays in *El largo atardecer del caminante* (through the fictional Cabeza de Vaca and the contemporaneous sixteenth-century Spain) is to expose a broader message hidden in the novel. That message is that an individual who may be considered Other, according to the norms of the society in which he or she exists, can allow themselves to either be consumed by those who create the norms (drowned out, or homogenized, so to speak), or they can resist by adapting to their situation and metaphorically become the one who consumes, and ultimately have the final say in his or her resulting identity rather than having it imposed upon them. Posse makes of Cabeza de Vaca a figure who, despite his own character flaws, represents a marginalized individual who is capable of making the necessary adjustments to take full advantage of the circumstances, but is also aware that "la única realidad que queda es la historia escrita" (33). In response to this reality, Cabeza de Vaca decides to literally re-write (his own) history—effectively denouncing works of *cronistas* and *historiadores* (along with his own *Naufragios*)—because he recognizes that, in the end, "[t]odo termina en un libro o en un olvido" (33).

CHAPTER I

**CREATING A CULTURAL CANNIBAL: LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE
CANNIBALISM IN ABEL POSSE'S *EL LARGO ATARDECER DEL CAMINANTE***

In one of the initial chapters of Abel Posse's historical novel, *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992), the fictional Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca is visited at his home in Seville by the *cronista* Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (one of several fictionalized historical figures to appear). Prior to their conversation about a possible "true" version of the explorer's wanderings through parts of North America, Cabeza de Vaca notices Fernández de Oviedo's surprise at his house being located on the outskirts of the city, next to "la judería," or Jewish ghetto. Perhaps attempting to make Fernández de Oviedo feel even more uncomfortable than he already appears to be, Cabeza de Vaca somewhat sarcastically explains:

¿Sabe usted? Con los años me siento mejor cerca de los moros y de los judíos. Esta casa la compré muy barata por su ubicación, con el poco dinero que me quedó después de las confiscaciones... Buena gente estos judíos... Estas casas caleadas, estos patios, al fin de cuentas es lo mejor que ya queda en esta ciudad de cagatintas, delatores y leguleyos. (29)

This innocent jest by Cabeza de Vaca is easily overlooked since the ensuing conversation deservedly takes a more prominent role in the chapter. However, in this seemingly ephemeral statement is found one of the novel's first depictions of a Cabeza de Vaca whose relationship with the Other (in this case the Jews and Moors) lacks the discomfort that seems typical among the Spaniards when in contact with those who are —culturally or otherwise— different. In fact, Posse's Cabeza de Vaca actually shows signs of an affinity towards the Jewish Other.

It could be argued that Cabeza de Vaca is simply taking advantage of economical housing due to the proximity to the *judería*. However, the fact that he first confesses his comfort in the company of Jewish neighbors and ends by sharing a high opinion of their character that contrasts with the “cagatintas, delatores y leguleyos” of the city effectively dispels that notion. There is clearly something about the Other that appeals to Cabeza de Vaca:

Varias veces me he metido por la *Alcaicería*, el barrio de estos flamencos, alemanes, italianos y franceses; que no es otra cosa que un *suk* moro: solo tiendas.
... Me gusta caminar horas por ese nuevo mundo. (27–28)

Much like the *antropófagos* of the American continent—who would literally eat a body part or organ of a captured, valiant enemy (an Other to their specific group) in order to absorb their outstanding qualities—Posse’s Cabeza de Vaca is attracted to the Other’s differences and, likewise, he creatively incorporates elements of them into his Self in a metaphorical and, at times, literal sense. Although the above excerpt shows an older Cabeza de Vaca who is comfortable, and even prefers to be, in proximity to the Other of the *Alcaicería*, the Spaniard first learns the art of Anthropophagy as a young wanderer on the American continent.

While learning to assimilate the virtues and differences of the American Other into his identity when in the New World, Cabeza de Vaca naturally distances himself from his Spanish legacy. He, in fact, represents a new Other, the first Latin American as it were.¹² He achieves

¹² Hernán Cortés’s son, Martín Cortés (briefly mentioned in the novel)—whom Cortés fathered with Doña Marina (La Malinche), his indigenous mistress and interpreter during the conquest of Tenochtitlan—has long been a popular choice by scholars as the first symbolic Latin American, by means of miscegenation: the first *mestizo* of record engendered on the mainland of the American continent. Another historical figure who has been branded by some scholars as the first Latin American, through a type of *mestizaje cultural* (in a similar fashion to Cabeza de Vaca), is Gonzalo Guerrero, who was shipwrecked on the Yucatan peninsula several years prior to Cortés’s arrival. Consequently, there has been debate as to whether Guerrero’s *mestizo* children he is purported to have had with his indigenous

this distinction not through miscegenation, but rather through conscientious cultural contact, or a metaphorical, cultural anthropophagy.¹³ The figurative cannibalism that Cabeza de Vaca practices creates a new category somewhere in the middle of these conflicting identities. Carlos Jáuregui suggests that “the metaphor of cannibalism has been not just a paradigm of otherness but also a trope of self-recognition, a model for the incorporation of difference, and a central concept in the definition of Latin American identities” (“Anthropophagy” 22). Jáuregui identifies the cannibalism metaphor as a source for the internal back-and-forth, which is a major tenet of Latin American identity. However, the idea of using anthropophagy as a cultural metaphor to construct a new, constantly shifting identity from several seemingly competing ones was (and continues to be) employed in Brazil. This is in large part a direct result of the modernist poet Oswald de Andrade’s frequent use of the anthropophagy metaphor in his writings. It is through these symbolic (as well as literal) references to cannibalism by the fictional Cabeza de Vaca that Posse also creates the anthropophagic tone that permeates the novel.

The author makes a point of creating a Cabeza de Vaca who is ambivalent towards the internal tug-of-war that continually pulls him back and forth: away from his heritage, towards a newfound culture, and back again. In describing the fluctuation he experienced during his initial transition back into Spanish society, the fictional Cabeza de Vaca relates:

Era otra vez don Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, el señor de Xerés. Pero era otro, por más que yo simulase. Era ya para siempre, otro. . . . Era como un

bride would more appropriately be deserving of the title of first *mestizos* in the New World rather than Martín. Indirect evidence also supports the idea that *mestizos* were likely in existence in the Caribbean several years prior even to Guerrero’s alleged *mestizo* children in the Yucatan.

¹³ In Posse’s novel, the fictional Cabeza de Vaca classifies the *cronista* Pedro Cieza de León as a member of the same new category of Other of which he identifies himself to be a part by means of cultural exchange. Of Cieza de León, the explorer states: “Muy de niño habían llevado a Cieza a las Indias. Conservó un ojo prístino, porque lo que se ve y vive en la infancia suele transformarse en amor. A su modo, se transformó en un ‘otro’. Ni tan español ni indio” (212).

conquistador conquistado. . . . Un excéntrico. . . . Ni tan rebelde como para negar al dios de su infancia, ni tan sumiso como para esclavizar y matar en nombre de un Rey. (177–78)

In personal correspondence with me, Posse provided added insight into this idea of his protagonist being stuck between two cultures. He explained that Cabeza de Vaca

fue un doble extranjero. Un extranjero de ambos mundos y ambas culturas. . . . Quedó herido espiritualmente para agregarse al siglo de la conquista. Y quedó bastante perplejo ante su visión de la América profunda que recorrió sin espada y sin Biblia, como caminante que recibe otra visión de habitar el mundo. (Personal Correspondence)

Additionally, the author commented on one of the most common interpretations from critics that came closest to what he originally envisioned for his protagonist-narrator:

Hubo muchas críticas y recensiones y algunos hablaron de Cabeza de Vaca como el “primer latinoamericano”. En realidad el personaje mostraba esa ambivalencia que hace que los latinoamericanos sean culturalmente diferentes. (Personal Correspondence)

Posse cites this ambivalence as being a distinguishing Latin American trait. It is a characteristic that sets Cabeza de Vaca apart from his contemporaries and is essential to his function as an *antropófago cultural* within the novel.

Cabeza de Vaca’s remarks to Fernández de Oviedo about his fondness for the Jewish/Moorish Other are just one of many subtle utterances that Posse places in the mouth of his narrator-protagonist that are symbolic in nature. This particular description of Cabeza de

Vaca's interaction with the Other (which occurs toward the end of his life, but at the beginning of the novel) is preceded by almost a decade of intimate contact with the Amerindian Other, a period which Posse carefully reveals, bit by bit, through Cabeza de Vaca's narration of his apocryphal writings.

During this same exchange with Fernández de Oviedo, we hear perhaps the most complete assessment by the fictional Cabeza de Vaca regarding his own transformation into a being that is neither Spanish nor Amerindian Other. Fernández de Oviedo pushes Cabeza de Vaca for any hint of the rumored "versión secreta, una tercera versión" of his American wanderings. The conversation then takes a vital turn for the purposes of our examination:

—Debo confesarle que a mí lo que más me convenció de su relato es cuando usted habla de tres categorías diferentes: usted habla de cristianos, de indios y de un misterioso *nosotros*. ¿Quiénes son esos misteriosos *nosotros*?

—Me toma usted en frío. Me cuesta explicarlo... Es como si lo hubiera escrito sin haberlo razonado debidamente. Tal vez me haya querido referir a los que ya no podemos ser ni tan indios ni tan cristianos...

Oviedo me mira perplejo.

—Sí, ese nosotros, anda por su relato como un fantasma indeciso...

—Tal vez sí. Tal vez hubo un momento en que, en efecto, empezó a haber cristianos, indios y nosotros... Nosotros, simplemente. (32, emphasis in original)

Cabeza de Vaca realizes, almost mid-sentence, that while he identifies with and shares characteristics, beliefs, practices, and perspectives of each respective culture, he no longer truly

belongs to either. In fact, his transformation is so complete that he belongs to a whole new category, a new Other. Seymour Menton argues, in speaking of this new category to Fernández de Oviedo, that “Álvar Núñez da a entender que es el primer mestizo cultural” and further adds that Cabeza de Vaca could be accurately termed “el nuevo hombre mestizo, el *nosotros* o ‘el otro’ en terminología actual” (423). He is Other to the Amerindians and Other to the Spanish: “Nada me une ya a mi pueblo ni a la ciudad de mi infancia (que es la misma pero yo cambié). . . . No. Ya soy definitivamente otro” (117). Cabeza de Vaca declares this feeling of “otherness” in the above two examples, and in several more over the course of the novel.¹⁴

This outcome of a “new” Other is reflective of the desired result of the *antropófago* after consuming his victim or enemy. Carlos Jáuregui explains this anthropophagic outcome as it relates to Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifiesto Antropófago.” Referencing one of the first, and arguably most famous, lines (“Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropófago,” 27), Jáuregui states:

Al antropófago lo define el deseo de incorporar lo que no es suyo. . . . Nos une lo otro, el Otro; o mejor: el deseo por el Otro. El [Manifiesto Antropófago] implica un yo que digiere y que en el acto de comer cambia. Después del festín no se es el mismo, pero tampoco se es lo devorado; en la incorporación algo siempre se pierde y algo siempre se gana. . . . En el acto de comer, lo *Otro* es incorporado y deja de ser ajeno. (*Canibalia* 431, emphasis in original)

¹⁴ Some additional declarations from Cabeza de Vaca that reflect this feeling of “otherness” at different points in the novel include: “Yo ya había perdido la costumbre de ser soldado español (tal vez incluso de ser español)” (45), “Y yo me sentí como hombre de ellos, de ese mundo y no del cristiano” (102), “[los jefes] ya me veían como un forastero peligroso” (103), “Soy otro. Soy el que vio demasiado” (118), “yo nunca había creído en ese futuro. . . . Fui un peatón, un caminante. . . . [E]n lo profundo de mí nunca había cumplido con los propósitos del Imperio” (152), “Pero era otro, por más que disimulase. Era ya, para siempre, otro” (177), “Un excéntrico. Un otro” (178), “Soy un fracasado, historia pasada” (209), “Yo no era un hombre fiel al Imperio. Yo era un ‘otro’” (216).

As Jáuregui notes, the *antropófago*, during the act of eating the captive's flesh, incorporates his Other's differences in such a way so as to expel a portion of his prior Self, thus narrowing the gap between the two. Cabeza de Vaca's constant references to feeling like an Other suggest, like the *antropófago* who consumes (or appropriates) the other, that he has experienced a similar transformation.

Prior to his accelerated transformation on the American continent (forced upon him as he is shipwrecked), Posse's Cabeza de Vaca experiences certain moments during his adolescence that set the stage for his later desire to rid himself of (and even replace) certain parts of his identity that troubled him. The lofty expectations placed on him by his mother while in his youth may have had something to do with this:

Tendrás que elegir: ser buey, o águila como tu abuelo, el Vera que sometió las Canarias. . . . Nunca olvidé esas palabras. Ella me quería fuerte, águila. En realidad no me daba mucho para elegir más que entre los extremos. (15)

From the very first pages, Posse provides his readers with a fictional Cabeza de Vaca burdened with a great heritage. Indeed, even his name seems an impressive weight to bear: "Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca. Ese apellido, que mi madre me hizo vivir desde la infancia como un destino heroico que debía ser cumplido sin vanidad, casi como una necesidad de la que ella no dudaba" (16). Having to live up to someone else's expectations left him resenting this burden: "Nada más negativo para un hombre que tener que vivir empeñado en alcanzar un destino impuesto o imaginado por los otros" (16).

During a conversation with Hernán Cortés, Cabeza de Vaca shares his inner thoughts regarding a desire to distance himself from the objectives of the Spanish Empire and, by extension, abandon the responsibility and nobility that his name represents:

[S]entí que yo nunca había creído en ese futuro. Nací con el futuro puesto, dada mi estirpe. No hice otra cosa sino tratar de desembarazarme de él buscando más la aventura que la conquista y el poder. Fui un peatón, un caminante de reinos perdidos, de nuevos misterios. . . . [E]n lo profundo de mí nunca había cumplido con los propósitos del Imperio. (152)

Cabeza de Vaca confesses that his future was already predetermined, due in large part to his family legacy. He actively tries to negate that future, however, by avoiding the purposes of the Conquest and seeking adventure rather than power. As he walks through the New World he sheds the weight of his predestined future, to re-define, or re-structure, his identity. Cabeza de Vaca distances himself from his contemporaries and from the typical conquistador mentality through a metaphorical, anthropophagic consumption of the American Other.

It is fitting that shortly after he confesses his early struggles to live up to an identity imposed upon him by others that Cabeza de Vaca makes the first reference in the novel to ritual cannibalism, albeit only a brief one: “Por fin lo mató [a Hernando de Soto] un cacique de menor cuantía y sus hombres lograron rescatar el cadáver porque los indios querían devorarlo —devorar así su coraje—” (20). This is a seemingly insignificant, ephemeral mention of a case of cannibalism, averted because of the astuteness of one of Hernando de Soto’s men, who hid his commander’s dead body in the trunk of a tree and sent it downstream in the Mississippi (20–21). This anecdote shared by the fictional Cabeza de Vaca, however, stylistically provides Posse with a base upon which he is able to gradually construct a cannibalistic tone.

Posse focuses on the portion of Cabeza de Vaca's North American sojourn in which the protagonist suffered the most drastic changes to his identity. For the author and his protagonist-narrator, the starting point for that shift comes when Cabeza de Vaca is shipwrecked on Mal-Hado: "De todos los naufragios que narré sin vergüenza ni jactancia, hubo uno decisivo, merced al cual me convertí en conquistador indigente, caminante. Fue aquel 5 de noviembre en las costas malélicas del Mal-Hado" (63). This is the definitive moment in which Posse's Cabeza de Vaca is truly stripped of everything that connected him to his Spanish heritage: horses, armor, swords, food, clothes, and much more.

During one of his early conversations with Lucinda, Cabeza de Vaca gives this young *conversa* (Jewish "convert" to Catholicism) a more detailed account of the circumstances of his suffering immediately after his shipwreck on Mal-Hado.¹⁵ This revelation offers a deeper explanation as to why this particular moment played such a vital role in his symbolic development as a cultural cannibal:

[C]uando estábamos muriéndonos de frío en las playas del desastre final, nos vimos rodeados por los dakotas adornados con sus terribles figuras negro y rojo, sus colores de guerra, y que en vez de matarnos . . . abandonaron sus armas en la playa, nos rodearon, se arrodillaron y empezaron a llorar a gritos para reclamar la atención de sus dioses en favor nuestro. Era un ritual de compasión, de conmiseración, tan sentido y desgarrante que Dorantes supuso que eran

¹⁵ It is important to understand the diverse components of Spanish identity during the sixteenth century on the Iberian Peninsula. Even before Cabeza de Vaca (or any of the *conquistadores* of the time) set out for the New World, they had already experienced a mixing of cultures for centuries. A Spaniard's identity was in as much of a state of flux, because of the exposure to and influence from Jewish and Moorish cultures, traditions, languages, and practices, as was Cabeza de Vaca's during his transformative experience among the new cultures of North America. This is represented in Posse's novel as he frequently places his narrator-protagonist in Jewish and Moorish circles.

verdaderos cristianos. . . . Lágrimas como de lluvia de verano corrían por sus rostros pintarrajeados. Nuestro dolor, nuestro desamparo, fue como absorbido por aquel gran gesto de pena ritual.

Traté de explicarle que este hecho . . . pasó a tener una importancia decisiva en mi vida. Al menos en mi vida de ‘conquistador’. (74–75)

The compassion of others left an impression on him that changed his previous perception of this new people and, if only for a brief moment, as Kimberle S. López suggests, “there is a nearly complete identification between self and Other” (128).¹⁶ Cabeza de Vaca, through this momentary connection with the natives as they comfort him and his fellow castaways, takes a small, yet noteworthy, symbolic first step, towards “the crossing of previous boundaries,” which Castro Rocha indicates is an important tenet of Anthropophagy (“Anthropophagy as a Worldview”). Also in this moment, Posse plants a seed in the mind of the reader that perhaps the fictionalized Cabeza de Vaca has found a place where he can begin the process of self-discovery without being inhibited by forces such as his family or the Spanish Crown to influence him in determining his own identity.¹⁷

¹⁶ This episode is also documented as a pivotal moment in a shift in trajectory of the historical Cabeza de Vaca’s perspective, or at least a “softening,” of sorts, of his initial attitude toward the natives (*Naufragios* 25). While a comparison to the historical account provides an added layer of intrigue, I do not reference *Naufragios* further in this work for comparative purposes, but rather to supplement context that Posse’s novel does not provide. However, Kimberle S. López’s *Latin American Novels of the Conquest: Reinventing the New World* is an excellent source for comparing the original accounts of the Discovery and Conquest with historical novels about that period written by Latin American authors. Chapter four (pp. 114–37) deals exclusively with the themes of transculturation, identity, and colonial desire as it compares the fictionalized Cabeza de Vaca in Posse’s *El largo atardecer del caminante* with the historical Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios*. Other scholars listed in the Works Cited who examine varying degrees of correlation between Posse’s novel and *Naufragios*: David H. Bost, Kerstin Bowsher, Roberto H. Esposto, Mark A. Hernández, Irene López-Rodríguez, Seymour Menton, Javier Valiente Núñez, and Thomas P. Waldemer.

¹⁷ Cabeza de Vaca describes other conquistadors that may have had a similar desire to create a new identity on the American continent: “Ocurre que aquí, en esta América de soledades, es el único lugar

Cabeza de Vaca immediately notes a stark contrast between those who, from the European perspective, were considered “savages” and the Europeans themselves, who considered themselves “civilized”: “los bárbaros —esos que mataban por centenas hombres como Narváez o Pizarro para establecer la verdadera fe— eran quienes lloraban por mi desamparo, condoliéndose de nuestra inhabilidad y desdicha” (75). The irony of the situation is not lost on him: “Nosotros, los dominadores del mundo desnudos y sin coraza ni espada, debíamos aprender de los salvajes a coger peces y raíces no venenosas” (75). The result of this ordeal is a realization of his vulnerability and a coming to terms with the fact that perhaps his ideology, perspective, and practices could be challenged. Here begins Cabeza de Vaca’s symbolic shift in perspective and identity from that of the typical closed-minded conquistador, rooted deep in the superiority of his own tradition, to that of a curious, more accepting *antropófago cultural*.

To be clear, this is not Cabeza de Vaca’s, nor his fellow Spaniard’s, first encounter with the North American continent. Indeed, Posse leaves out some of the details about the months prior to that meeting that also set the stage for Cabeza de Vaca’s openness to his new surroundings and situation. The historical Cabeza de Vaca narrates in *Naufragios* that he was first stranded on the American continent on the west coast of Florida, near current-day Tampa Bay, as part of an expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez. This ill-fated captain divided his forces to look for a rumored viable port, sending one band by sea and taking another by land. Both groups were to meet on a designated day at a rendezvous point. However, Narváez grew impatient and ordered all of his land crew to abandon the planned meeting and travel in search of rumored riches that lay to the north. The two groups would never see each other again (6–12).

donde estos hombres empiezan a ser libres, o a ser, simplemente. Aquí pierden el yugo de los estamentos seculares” (164).

Over the next several months, rather than find the desired treasure, Narváez and his men suffered hunger and disease. They endured attacks from the natives —some provoked, others unprovoked— but also received crucial aid at times. Some months later, after travelling long distances by horse and by foot, and after losing men, provisions, and the hope of survival (much less the hope of finding gold), they found themselves stuck in the shallow, swampy areas near the current Florida panhandle. As such, Cabeza de Vaca, Narváez, and their companions had already experienced first-hand the harshness of the natural surroundings, and the fierceness (and at times, the kindness) of the natives. Believing themselves to be fairly close to Pánuco (a Spanish settlement located in the state of Vera Cruz, on the Gulf coast of modern-day México), the survivors devised a plan to reach the colony by sea. They desperately fashioned four makeshift boats and endeavored to skirt the Gulf coast to reach their destination. They grossly underestimated the distance to Pánuco, however. Two of the boats, including the one carrying Narváez, were pulled out to sea during a storm and never seen again. The remaining two ended up lost, and ran aground at or near what is known today as Galveston, Texas (Cabeza de Vaca’s Mal-Hado) (12–23).

Describing this infamous shipwreck, Posse’s Cabeza de Vaca explains that “Nuestra barca, calafateada con resina de los pinos y armada con clavos caseros, se iba desarmando en esa fiesta de demonios” (63). This would turn out to be the last of Cabeza de Vaca’s literal shipwrecks: “Lo que narré de la desgracia en la isla Malhado fue el final de una cadena de desgracias marítimas que comenzaron cuando nos embarcamos en Sanlúcar de Barrameda” (68). The protagonist, in his usual tongue-in-cheek tone, admits that his fate as a *náufrago*, or castaway, had been sealed the moment he signed up for Narváez’s expedition: “Mi primer naufragio, el padre de todos los otros naufragios fue el de haber tenido la mala suerte de haber

seguido a un náufrago. Fue como un ciego que siguiese a otro ciego...” (68). His first experiences associated with this final shipwreck involve an altercation with Nature, something of a “bonding moment” with the Amerindian Other, and not least of all, an evaluation of himself and his new situation.

As fate would have it, Nature’s storm has rendered him and his compatriots naked.

Cabeza de Vaca recalls the aftermath:

Estaba en calzoncillos ante la inmensidad de la noche fría y estrellada.

Había perdido vestiduras e investiduras. El mar se había tragado la espada y la cruz.

Quedábamos sólo cuatro en el amanecer de aquel 5 de noviembre. Sólo cuatro de la poderosa flota de Narváez.

Ése fue el verdadero naufragio: desnudo y sin España. (65)

Posse seems to suggest a sense of weakness directly related to his protagonist’s nakedness and lack of empire. López, referencing the historical account of this incident, suggests that Cabeza de Vaca’s nakedness was much more than just another casual mention of a mere lack of clothing (as was commonplace in *Naufragios*), but rather that they were left “with no material evidence of their status as conquerors” (117).

From the fictional Cabeza de Vaca’s perspective, the tempest had left him and his fellow survivors (Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, and the Moorish slave Estevanico) both literally and symbolically destitute: “Éramos como indios entre los indios; tal

nuestra pobreza, nuestra falta de imperio y poder” (74).¹⁸ Their unexpected vulnerability, and thus their dependence on the natives of the island for survival, is made evident. Posse’s Cabeza de Vaca recounts the precarious situation:

Curioso destino: haber llegado con voluntad e investidura de conquistador y enseguida haber caído en una posición inferior y más penosa que la del último conquistado.

Además, desde aquel terrible amanecer en la isla del Malhado, se puso en evidencia que sin los indios y sus artes eficaces y primitivas, no hubiésemos podido sobrevivir. (74)

With nothing to prepare them for this abrupt change and sudden helplessness, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were left to the mercy of unfamiliar surroundings and their new indigenous companions for any real chance of survival.

This episode set in motion a series of events over the course of his eight-year sojourn across North American lands previously unexplored by any known European that would lead to a high level of assimilation to the way of life of the indigenous tribes he would encounter. After a significant amount of time among the people that originally “adopted” them, Cabeza de Vaca and his fellow survivors were eventually obligated to leave to “iniciar el giro de las Siete

¹⁸ It is worth noting the often-negative, Eurocentric view that Posse’s Cabeza de Vaca displays (here and in other occasions in the novel) when comparing their particular plight to the general circumstances of the indigenous populations. His overall tone in these descriptions shows an attitude of superiority over the indigenous typical of Europeans during this time period; however, by also openly confessing that, without the help of the natives, the shipwrecked Spaniards would never have survived, he indirectly points to their own inferiority in view of this dependency. This dichotomy holds true for other moments when he is looking back and giving general descriptions of the natives. Cabeza de Vaca’s negative views towards them, coupled with his simultaneous praise for their way of life, practices, and perspectives, fuels the ambivalent characteristics of Posse’s protagonist that also present themselves through the frequent literal and metaphorical references to cannibalism.

Ciudades” (110).¹⁹ As they traveled, their assimilation was such that Cabeza de Vaca states that: “Nada en nosotros demostraba nuestro origen transatlántico. Evitábamos levantar sospechas” (144). He goes on to describe several ways in which they were able to avoid being identified as “dioses barbados que venían del mar,” which would prove detrimental to their survival. They only used euphemisms to speak of Spain or Christ, and they were careful not to show outward signs of their Christianity. They even spoke “la lengua de los caddos” well enough to effectively communicate with several different tribes that they encountered (144).

All of these tools proved to be useful, but what Cabeza de Vaca considered their “arma mayor” for fitting in was imitating the way their Indian “hosts” dressed (or undressed):

Nuestra arma mayor, nuestra identificación con el espíritu de esa tierra y con esa costumbre de hombredad de esos pueblos, era nuestra desnudez. Logré imponerme a todo intento de insistir en la indumentaria. Aunque a veces utilicen

¹⁹ The reasons for this exodus are intriguing and align with the overall anthropophagic tone of the novel. Cabeza de Vaca explains that, at first, because his body had not yet adapted to the arduous, daily tasks of tribal life, he is viewed as “un pobre mediocre” (86). He feels safest in this middle area for a time, but constantly worries about his standing in the tribe. He fears that if he is viewed either as a mere workhorse or as having supernatural qualities, that he is at risk of being either killed or sacrificed (eaten) at any moment. Cabeza de Vaca feels obligated to walk the line between these two extremes. However, he confesses that “lo que no podían saber es que si bien era casi incapaz para valerme por mí mismo, en cambio conocía secretos para mejorar la vida” (86). Cabeza de Vaca believes that he could “introduce” these *secretos*, or secrets, of Spanish civilization to make life easier for all, but recognizes that he must make them feel that the “discoveries,” or “inventions,” come from the natives, not from him. According to Cabeza de Vaca, he introduces: “el secreto del comercio” (87), “el yesquero” (104), and “el secreto de la catapulta” (109). After each “invention” that he introduces, however, Cabeza de Vaca fears that he raises suspicions “en ciertos jefes y chamanes” (85), and as a result, they want to “absorber esos descubrimientos” (87). Dulján is also aware of Cabeza de Vaca’s growing prominence within the tribe and likewise fears that the other tribal leaders will want to cannibalize him: “El cacique consideró que ya era tiempo de hacerme huir. Mi situación se tornaba insostenible. Los jefes guerreros y los brujos empezaban a creer que debían integrar definitivamente en su ser los dones extraordinarios que me atribuyeron. Estaban ya convencidos de la utilidad de devorar mis manos y mis pies y alguna otra parte, algún órgano que ellos seguramente habían precisado en sus conciliábulos secretos. Me querían comulgar con unción y respeto (como hacemos nosotros cada domingo con Nuestro Señor encarnado). Sus almas se enriquecerán con el aporte de un ser transoceánico, tan digerible como cualquier otra bestia de la tierra” (127).

trajes de cuero o de algodón, según la temperatura, los hombres del llano piensan que la desnudez es una condición básica, como en los animales. El hombre desnudo es lo justo, y estaría capacitado para sobrevivir de ese modo al igual que sus otros hermanos del reino animal. (144)

Their nakedness, which at the moment of their shipwreck on Malhado was a source of weakness, had become their greatest strength and a valuable asset for their continued acculturation and survival. Cabeza de Vaca recognized the importance of this way of dress to the American natives' overall belief system and, as such, he resisted the urge to cover his nakedness, as was his custom prior to his North American sojourn.

However, despite his cultural awareness and meticulous planning in order to blend in, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions would experience several unanticipated physical adaptations, such as the literal shedding of their skin (similar to that of snakes), the formation of protective calluses on the soles of their feet, and the strengthening of their toenails to rival that of an animal claw (144–45). Over time, the body's natural response to adapt to the harsh desert surrounding and the literal shedding of skin, wrought by nakedness, proved to be an added benefit to him and his companions, as they appeared even more like the Amerindians. It is easy to focus solely on the physical changes that the fictional Cabeza de Vaca describes here. Through the Anthropophagy metaphor, however, it is possible to appreciate the symbolic implications of these physical modifications.

Javier Valiente Núñez describes the fictionalized Cabeza de Vaca as having an identity that is “en continuo proceso de revisión y redefinición” (60) and as being “siempre indeterminada e incompleta” (65). Thomas Waldemer posits that “[c]astaways, like Cabeza de Vaca ... are forced by circumstances to recognise that identity is unstable and perhaps

indefinable” (7). It is through this gradual recognition that Posse’s Cabeza de Vaca is able to navigate the differences between the cultures of his native Spain and those of the peoples that he encounters as a wanderer. In anthropophagic terms, this means that he is able to incorporate into his Self the desirable, or even at times problematic, attributes of each of the tribes he visits.

Cabeza de Vaca’s travels from one indigenous community to the next and his intimate interaction with the natives and new environments require him to integrate these different qualities so often that he routinely must re-define his identity.²⁰

During his last days in Seville, while looking through some of his old clothing (*trajes*) from his days as a conquistador, Cabeza de Vaca ponders their figurative meaning while making a connection to snakeskin and, by extension, to the unstable nature of individual (or collective, or national) identities:

Trajes: vestiduras/investiduras/imposturas, como se quiera, pero ya parte de la vida, de la larga vida.

Sólo ocho años he pasado desnudo, sin ellos. Los ocho años famosos de mi descomunal caminata. Ocho años como devuelto a mí mismo, fuera de los trajes.

¿Por qué uno no se desprende de estos cadáveres solemnes y prestigiosos? No es fácil salirse de su tiranía. Son los únicos cadáveres visibles de nuestras sucesivas muertes. El cuerpo es ducho, más bien disimula sus muertes. Sólo van

²⁰ Cabeza de Vaca’s experience is not dissimilar to the Spanish *pícaro* tradition. The *pícaro*, or apprentice, would go from one master or mentor to another and carry lessons and/or practices with him from one to the next. Sometimes he would simply add new skills from one master to the next. Other times he would leave a previously learned ability behind in order to better learn a new one. This is partially exemplified through Cabeza de Vaca’s versatility, first as a pseudo slave/laborer, then as a merchant, and finally as a healer, or shaman.

quedando los trajes, en su tonta honestidad de fantoches, como las vainas de aquellas serpientes de Sinaloa, pieles resecaas perdiendo sus colores en el ardido desierto. Nuestros sucesivos nosotros, que se nos van muriendo por el camino.

(24)

With the convenience of hindsight, Cabeza de Vaca is able to make a somewhat effortless correlation between his body's physical change in the American desert and this allegorical transformation of Self. To be sure, Cabeza de Vaca was not immediately receptive to all of the methods of adaptation that he and his companions were first forced to accept. At times, they viewed these changes as a simple measure of survival or a guise to appear more like their indigenous counterparts. In time, however, Cabeza de Vaca would look back at several of these difficult modifications with nostalgia. They became a part of him during those eight years and profoundly affected his perspective later. This shift in point of view is evidenced by his above-expressed interpretation of something as basic as clothing (or the lack thereof).

This literal shedding of skin and figurative shedding of identities (“[n]uestros sucesivos nosotros”) does not necessarily indicate that the processes involved in these transitions were uniformly positive or easy for Cabeza de Vaca (although most proved to be beneficial in the long term). Conversely, it does not imply that they were unequivocally negative. Perhaps they were a little bit of both. This ambiguity is highlighted when Posse's Cabeza de Vaca describes what it was like to learn to live off the land in a literal sense. For the first couple of days, when he consumes “la tierra portadora” his body does not react favorably, and even rejects it. Once he becomes accustomed essentially to eating dirt, however, he has no trouble describing this comestible as a “manjar,” or delicacy (135–36).

The complicated nature of Cabeza de Vaca's transitions is as deceptive as it is informative. As much is also true for the process, and the beliefs, associated with the transformation of the *antropófago*. This complexity goes beyond providing a simple blanket definition of anthropophagy as only the literal ingestion of the flesh of a captured enemy warrior and leaving it at that. There is much involved in the ritualistic process of consuming one's flesh before arriving at the potential finished product of a changed identity for the cannibal. Cabeza de Vaca—in a portion of the narration where he provides ethnographic details for the different tribes that he encounters— sheds light on some of the nuances of the anthropophagy ritual as he experienced it within one group: “Comen a sus vencidos (si fueron hombres de coraje) y sus brujos beben la sangre de los sabios conquistados. Sin crueldad ni jactancia” (160). In this simple yet honest observation, Cabeza de Vaca shows the intricate nature of the ritual, namely that each *antropófago* has different motives and, therefore, methods of ingestion depending on their particular standing in the tribe.²¹ In this particular group, the chief warriors would eat the flesh of a courageous captured enemy, while the *brujo* would drink the blood of a conquered sage. Both the eating of the flesh and the drinking of blood form a part of the overall cannibal ritual, but each of these acts of consuming is influenced by factors that are not so easily categorized as being homogenous in nature.

The above descriptions of ritualistic cannibalism, although a part of the fiction added to supplement the historical elements in the novel, suggest that general knowledge regarding the

²¹ Cabeza de Vaca offers other informative descriptions of anthropophagy that speak to the array of factors that determined exactly why and/or how the consumption of the captured individual was to be carried out: “A veces devoran ciertas partes de seres con cualidades destacadas. En el caso de guerreros muy notables, parece que comen los pies y las manos, pero cociéndolos de manera muy especial” (86–87), and: “Los jefes guerreros y los brujos empezaban a creer que debían integrar definitivamente en su ser los dones extraordinarios que me atribuyeron. Estaban ya convencidos de la utilidad de devorar mis manos y mis pies y alguna otra parte, algún órgano que ellos seguramente habían precisado en sus conciliábulos secretos” (127).

tenets of anthropophagy —and the significance of the ritual among the groups that practiced it— is in existence today. We cannot know with any real certainty, however, the *antropófago*'s exact thought process in the moments leading up to, during, or immediately after the anthropophagic feast. By this I mean their feelings, preferences, or aversions associated with the consumption of human flesh prior to, or during, the ritual as well as his or her sentiments in regards to their strength, abilities, or even identity, afterwards. Was it pleasant, repulsive, or perhaps merely tolerable in order to achieve the end-goal? Did they have a similar experience as Cabeza de Vaca?

Posse, through Cabeza de Vaca and his narrative, provides his readers with an insider's perspective of what it is like to become a metaphorical *antropófago*, and he offers perhaps a small window through which to devise a potential answer to some of the questions I posed above about the literal *antropófago*. My objective here is not to get into the mind of the American cannibal of the sixteenth century (though that would be fascinating), but rather to show that the anthropophagy metaphor is applicable to Posse's Cabeza de Vaca. This connection is made plausible through the anthropophagic tone produced by the fictional Cabeza de Vaca's consistent references to literal and symbolic cannibalisms, and the fragmented narration of the changes he incurs while interacting with the American Other.

The disjointed nature of Cabeza de Vaca's apocryphal account also plays an important role in constructing an image of the intricacies of his transformation into an *antropófago cultural*. For example, Cabeza de Vaca did not just land in this "New World" and suddenly experience a complete identification with the natives. There are parts of his Spanish identity that would always remain, as was the case with his resolute Judeo-Christian belief system that accompanied him during his wanderings. This is evidenced in his role as *curandero* when

Cabeza de Vaca recites the Catholic *Ave María* or the *Padre Nuestro* over the body of a sick person, instead of the customary prayers that other indigenous healers used (108).²² It could also be argued that the transformation that he ultimately did experience was never really complete (even after eight years) and that it continued even when he returned to his former identity as a Spaniard. As he states in his *trajes* allegory, the process of fashioning one's identity is a life-long pursuit that is never entirely a finished product.

As such, the explorer's adjustment back into Spanish society was anything but seamless. At times the "new" parts of his identity simply did not allow him to readily accept, or re-adapt to, Spanish life:

Volví a ser tratado como cómplice y protagonista de nuestra España: me dieron ropa. Después de ocho años sin camisa no fue fácil. Pero lo imposible fueron las botas. . . . Mi cuerpo no aceptaba ni catre ni cama; para dormir debía echarme por el suelo. Esta costumbre, que habría arruinado a cualquier mesonero, me duró hasta la llegada a México. Allí me metí en la cama por decoro, para que los sirvientes del palacio virreinal no descubrieran a la mañana que estaba intacta.
(176–77)

Some of Cabeza de Vaca's most difficult transitions back to his pre-exodus life included superficial practices such as wearing clothing and sleeping in a bed. The castaway essentially acted the part of a Spanish conquistador re-assimilated to the Spanish culture:

²² Additional examples from the novel relating to Cabeza de Vaca's reluctance to let go of some of his Catholic beliefs and traditions include his attempts to "preach" to the Indians (88–90), his comments on his marriage to Amaría (94–95), and his decision to "baptize" his *mestizo* children in secret (97–98).

Bebí, recobré el lenguaje de las corridas, brindé con el rejoneador triunfante, olí otra vez el aroma dulzón de los excrementos mezclados con la sangre de los caballos despanzurrados.

No era yo. Era un actor. Un histrión. Actuaba de español pleno, como si nada hubiera pasado. Tal vez, disimulaba. (179, emphasis mine)

Cabeza de Vaca admits that he had largely forgotten what it was like to be a Spaniard, much less a Spanish soldier, and he compares his first experience of wearing boots again to walking on stilts (45). His comments as he reflects on those first moments and experiences readjusting to Spanish activities clearly denote an individual who underwent a radical transformation. He is not willing to reveal just how much he had changed to his once-again Spanish compatriots, in part because he no longer identifies with them; he sees them as strangers.

The events of Cabeza de Vaca's sojourn through unfamiliar lands and among diverse peoples left an indelible mark that would affect him for the remainder of his life. This is especially true regarding his reformed views of Catholicism. During one of the most important demonstrations of his Catholic faith, the *Auto de Fe*, Cabeza de Vaca comments on his growing disillusionment with the Church:

Me di cuenta que ya estoy muy viejo y muy sabido y que las cosas que antes me parecían normales cosas de la fe, hoy me causaban un profundísimo desprecio. Sentí que Sevilla era una ciudad hipócrita, salvajemente superficial. En esa fiesta aparentemente de la fe y de la fe católica, se escondía el demonio de la intolerancia judía y la ferocidad mora.... Yo, el brujo de Malhado, tenía muchos más títulos para ser condenado que cualquiera de esos infelices, sin embargo me

tocaba estar del lado de los jueces, de los custodias del orden. En ese tablado horrible, bajo la espléndida luz de Sevilla, sentí toda la ridiculez de nuestro mundo como en una súbita revelación. Yo había curado con piedras mágicas, con polvo de cola de serpiente, con soplos y oraciones, con talismanes, por imposición de manos. Yo visité los arrabales de las ciudades secretas que esplendecen de noche y desaparecen a la luz del día. Yo, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, era allí el más culpable para los fuegos del gran Auto de Fe. (115–16)

Cabeza de Vaca reveals that, although his outward appearance may suggest he is a Spaniard, he has more reason to be set ablaze during this ritual because of his otherness than any of the Jews or Moors that are being unjustly condemned. His disenchantment with the Catholic Church, and with what he himself once professed to believe, also uncovers to what degree the acquired Amerindian parts of his identity have affected this particular aspect of his Spanish self.

At the end of the novel, there are two compelling moments that highlight Cabeza de Vaca's ultimate acceptance of the mixed nature of his identity. The first is when he is forced to do perhaps one of the most painful things for a parent: bury one of his children. The castaway explains:

Lavé yo a Amadís, casi como suelen hacer los judíos. Le arreglé el pelo. . . . [P]ermanecí a solas con Amadís y recé extendiendo las manos sobre su cuerpo. Padre nuestros, Avemarías. Pero también menté a ese dios de los llanos que llaman Aguar, a Onorname que es el dios de los Tarahumaras, que nos devuelve a la materia y las aguas primigenias, de donde surge la vida. No olvidé al dios de los mexicas, a la serpiente emplumada que nos recuerda la eternidad del tiempo. (257–58)

Cabeza de Vaca combines elements of the religious views he acquired from his time in the Americas with his Catholic traditions, as well as parts of the Jewish burial custom.²³ The second moment that confirms the protagonist's acceptance of his duality is during his pseudo final confession:

Me encomiendo a Cristo, al Dios de mi Fe. Pediré perdón por mis pecados y mis descuidos. Pero seguramente (debo confesarlo) sentiré más bien lo que creen los tarahumaras y los 'sabios del mundo de arriba', que seré devuelto, retornado, a ese infinito cosmos, a los espacios del misterioso universo.... (261)

Posse shows a Cabeza de Vaca who is no longer as ambivalent towards his conflicting identities. The explorer is confident in the *antropófago cultural* that he has become—as a result of his many years spent learning from the Other and reconciling the differences—and embraces the ever-changing, mixed nature of his inner-self.

When reflecting on the transformation wrought by new circumstances while stranded in North America, the fictionalized Cabeza de Vaca confides that he eventually decided to “aceptar mi situación, despojarme de todo lo que podría sintetizar con la palabra España. Era la tentación como de huir de mí mismo” (83). What increases the value of this confession of having embraced his new reality is the added admission by the explorer that he believes he could have legitimately escaped had he tried: “Pero ni lo intenté. Una secreta voz me tentaba para seguir andando detrás del sol, en dirección opuesta a la de mi mundo” (78–79). This figurative

²³ Whether this example is better defined as syncretism rather than cultural anthropophagy is a question worth considering. Are these terms interchangeable in this particular instance? The main tenets of the concept of anthropophagy as a cultural metaphor (as set forth by Oswald, and used by me for this thesis) match up quite well with the typical definition of syncretism, which is the mixing of elements of two or more religions whose end result is something completely new. This is precisely the idea behind the shifting identity of the *antropófago*; the creation of a new Self based on the amalgamation of two seemingly conflicting identities.

movement away from his Spanish identity, the “secret voice” (“*secreta voz*”) that led him toward the unknown—the Other—is none other than that of the *antropófago*. Posse presents Cabeza de Vaca’s “temptation” (“*tentación*”) of turning away from his former Self to his readers by placing it right in the mouth and mind of his narrator. By so doing, the author simultaneously introduces the anthropophagic mentality that his protagonist developed on the American continent.

Thomas P. Waldemer attributes Cabeza de Vaca’s changed attitude, as well as the symbolic westward movement away from Spain, in large part to the forces of Nature.²⁴ Specifically, this critic argues that the result of the fictional Cabeza de Vaca being left without a horse “obliged [him] to closely encounter new landscapes and cultures by walking among them rather than riding over them” (246). Seymour Menton agrees that Cabeza de Vaca’s self-proclaimed title of “walker” (*caminante, peatón*) in the novel is important as it adds another element that sets him apart from “los jinetes Cortés y De Soto” (423). Waldemer suggests that Cabeza de Vaca’s interaction with the non-human New World Other, accomplished precisely because he is forced to walk, plays a large role in creating “a more observant and connected attitude” in the protagonist (246–47). It is primarily through this metaphorically anthropophagic act of “taking in” his New World surroundings that Cabeza de Vaca is taught to appreciate, and even desire, the foreign. Posse makes this interpretation possible by strategically positioning Dulján, Cabeza de Vaca’s chieftain and mentor, as intermediary between the castaway and Nature.

²⁴ In “Cabeza de Vaca as Wilderness Walker and Flâneur in Abel Posse’s *El largo atardecer del caminante*,” Waldemer highlights many of the ecocritical aspects of Posse’s novel and considers them to be somewhat overlooked by other scholars that analyze Cabeza de Vaca’s transformation in the New World as occurring solely through his interaction and relations with the indigenous, human Other.

It is the *cacique* Dulján who assists in this anthropophagic task of integrating the Other that is the American landscape, and serves as Cabeza de Vaca's ecological tutor. In the process, Posse adds fuel to the myth of the native in harmony with nature, or what Greg Garrard calls "one of the most widespread and seductive myths of the non-European 'other'" (120).²⁵ It is in this role that Dulján instructs Cabeza de Vaca before sending him on his metaphorical walkabout:

¡Tienes que saber para siempre que no hay nada que debas temer de parte de la Tierra! Que tú mismo eres Tierra. Aunque tú pareces como caído de ella, o como si te hubiesen echado de ella los tuyos, los mismos que te enseñaron a vivir. Pero puedes volver, debes volver.... (135)

By advising his pupil to not fear the "Earth" ("Tierra"), Dulján indirectly defines Nature as Other to Cabeza de Vaca, who, in order to continue to adapt, must lose his fear of this different land as something wild and hostile, and find a way to reconcile the differences. In other words, he must forego the anthropocentric perspectives tied to his conquistador mentality and embrace the age-old cliché (which Posse makes little effort of avoiding in the novel) of "becoming one with nature."

One way to effectively understand and make the Other a part of one's evolving identity is through the metaphorically anthropophagic task of assimilation and/or appropriation of the

²⁵ The ecocritic Greg Garrard further suggests that the myth of "the ecological Indian" goes back perhaps as far as that of the American cannibal, which dates to the first voyages of Christopher Columbus to the Caribbean (refer to previous footnote). Garrard indicates that a driving element of this myth is a common stereotype involving North Americans and Europeans (essentially the Westernized man): "[they] apparently cannot dwell in working harmony with nature, but perhaps other cultures are able to do so.... Since the sixteenth century at least, 'primitive' people have been represented as dwelling in harmony with nature.... The assumption of indigenous environmental virtue is a foundational belief for deep ecologists and many ecocritics" (120).

differences. In the case of Cabeza de Vaca at this juncture in the novel, this is actually accomplished through the literal consumption of the non-human Other. Posse's Cabeza de Vaca recalls this metaphorical rite of passage and "experiencia de la Tierra sustentadora":

Con dos piedras y agua se preparaba un menjunje alimenticio y tuve que aprender lo más difícil, tragarlo. Me hicieron raspar la tierra para distinguir los terrones más nutritivos, si esto cabe. Si se mira bien, un simple puñado de tierra tiene muchas diferencias y posibles usos. Durante el primero y segundo día sufrí cólicos por alimentarme de 'la tierra portadora', después me acostumbré al espartano manjar. . . . Me hice ducho para urgar en pos del agua y extraerla de los troncos y frutos de tuna y otros cactus salvajes. (135–36)²⁶

The most striking aspect of this description is not that Cabeza de Vaca has to eat dirt, but rather the training he receives: he learns to identify what type of soil is most nutritious, how to determine different possible uses for each handful of dirt, and how to extract water from alternate sources, such as the prickly pear trunk, its fruit, and other wild cacti. He becomes an expert at learning how to literally live off the land. As he gains a more intimate knowledge of the land and its comestible value, his perspective of these food sources eventually changes until he thinks of them as a "manjar" rather than being repulsive.

²⁶ In the novel, Cabeza de Vaca describes becoming adept at distinguishing the different types of grass and water by their flavor, and learning to enjoy the taste of red ant eggs, blood-filled ox meat, and worms (91–92). He also learns to extract snake venom, drink it along with the snake's blood, and then eat its meat (136). What stands out most from each of these descriptions is Posse's use of verbs such as "beber," "comer," and "chupar," each of which further enhances the image of consumption. We are also left with a depiction of a man completely reliant on consuming the non-human Other.

Fittingly, Cabeza de Vaca remembers the counsel that the *cacique* Dulján gave him in order to survive extreme hunger as he left on his transformative journey into the wilderness. The chieftain's words describe man's literal absorption of the earth:

Tienes que aguantar, blanco. *La tierra te va dejando su sustancia al pasar por tu cuerpo*. Tus venas se alimentan y la sangre cobra fuerza como con cualquier otro alimento. Así se aprende a no temer más el hambre. Para siempre.... (136, emphasis mine)

According to Dulján, as his pupil consumes the earth, bits of dirt will remain as it makes its way through his body. Through the words of this mentor as recalled by an aged Cabeza de Vaca, Posse gives a vivid image of the literal fusion of man and flora. As Cabeza de Vaca discovers what the wilderness has to offer, he realizes that “en la callada y disimulada vida de los seres del desierto podía encontrar también el sustento de mi propia vida” (92). Cabeza de Vaca finds in and among the people and lands of America the “sustenance” (“sustento”) for his life (another fitting use of food-related terminology that evokes images of consumption), not only in literal nutritional terms, but also metaphorically as existential lifeblood. This revelation by Cabeza de Vaca reflects the innermost desire of Oswald's *antropófago*: “Só me interessa o que não é meu” (“Manifesto Antropófago” 27).

During one of several moments in the novel when he reflects on his past adventures in the American wilderness, Cabeza de Vaca summarizes the education he received: “Realmente creo que mi entrenamiento fue muy válido. Si uno alcanza a aguantar lo peor y lo repugnante, es difícil no sobrevivir en las más adversas condiciones” (136). This learning experience would ultimately serve to prepare him for much more than just adapting to harsh and unfamiliar surroundings in Nature, or assimilating to new peoples and cultures. This anthropophagic process

of acquiring and implementing new abilities was as essential for Cabeza de Vaca's survival during his formative years in the deserts of North America as it would be for his future adventures as a sexagenarian in Seville, an urban landscape that no longer resembled the city of his childhood. Cabeza de Vaca's predisposition to routinely incorporate new and previously unfamiliar customs and practices into his existing repertoire in order to maximize his full potential is indicative of his transformation into an *antropófago cultural*.

CHAPTER II

CONSUMING THE NEW WORLD: SPAIN'S IN(DI)GESTION OF THE AMERICAN OTHER IN ABEL POSSE'S *EL LARGO ATARDECER DEL CAMINANTE*

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Abel Posse's historically-inspired narrator-protagonist for *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992), returns to his home city of Seville after what would be viewed by most of his contemporaries as largely unsuccessful and unproductive adventures and ventures on the American continent (North and South America, respectively). During the narration of the apocryphal version of his journeys afoot, Cabeza de Vaca recalls a question posed to him during his first conversation with Hernán Cortés after arriving at Tenochtitlan following almost-eight-years of wandering in North America: “¿qué trajo Vuesamercé a la Corona?” (177). The memory of this query leads Cabeza de Vaca to self-reflection (as often is the case during his narrations):

Había sido un conquistador inútil. No había tomado posesión ni servilizado súbitos. No había rebautizado las sierras, los ríos, el paisaje. Pensándolo bien, ahora, había algo de cómico en todo lo mío. (177)

When judged against the imperial measuring stick of *conquistadores* such as Cortés, Cabeza de Vaca's contributions pale. The protagonist-narrator makes abundantly clear throughout the course of his narrations that he and everyone else of historical importance are aware of this disparity.

Although he is cognizant that his contemporaries view him differently, as Other, Cabeza de Vaca is not troubled by the comparison. In fact, he embraces his marginalized status with a self-deprecating humor that permeates the novel:

Era como un *conquistador conquistado*. Sin embargo me respetaban por algún oscuro motivo que todavía, con los años, no descubrí.

Un excéntrico. Eso es lo que llama la gente un excéntrico. Ni tan rebelde como para negar al dios de su infancia, ni tan sumiso como para esclavizar y matar en nombre de un Rey.

Un excéntrico. Un otro. (177–78, emphasis mine)

Cabeza de Vaca finds it difficult to explain why other *conquistadores* held him in any sort of regard despite the fact that he was so unlike them. This strange admiration, although at times perplexing to Cabeza de Vaca, actually plays in his favor as Posse's protagonist-narrator.²⁷ Once it is determined that Cabeza de Vaca does not belong in the same category as his fellow-countrymen or Spain itself, that he is somehow better than them, he becomes an easy figure to use in contrast to the extreme disparaging depictions of the other conquistadors, the Crown, and the country as a whole.

Seymour Menton gives his assessment of how he believes Posse's Cabeza de Vaca (precisely because of those distinguishing characteristics) measures up quite favorably to his contemporaries:

Álvar Núñez se destaca en la novela como el único conquistador bueno. Es el único conquistador peatón en contraste con los jinetes Cortés y De Soto. Es el único conquistador que no mató a ningún indio ... que trató a los indios como seres humanos, tratando de comprenderlos y de ayudarlos.... (423)

²⁷ Posse is deliberate in his use of Cabeza de Vaca as an introspective, historically-based narrator. Being inspired by an historical figure helps the reader forget that he is in fact Posse's fictional creation and gives Cabeza de Vaca added credibility.

For Menton, Cabeza de Vaca stands out from the other *conquistadores* because he walked rather than rode a horse, he never killed even one Indian, and he strived to understand the American natives and treat them like human beings. As such, it is through the optic of this fictional Cabeza de Vaca that we are offered a marginalized historical figure's view of his Spanish contemporaries, as well as his view of (what Posse describes as) a sixteenth-century Spain “de grandeza terrible, cruel, de Imperio” (Personal Correspondence).

In *El largo atardecer del caminante*, Spain (and more specifically, Seville) serves as a symbol of indigestion and anthropoemia (to be described later) by way of an impulsive and compulsive consumption of the (American) Other. This “consumption” is portrayed in two ways in the novel; first, through Spain's intake of American products and practices and second, through Spain's accumulation of American lands. This type of consumption contrasts the fictional Cabeza de Vaca, who is Posse's representative of the first *latinoamericano* via cultural anthropophagy. In the previous chapter, I examined the general tenets of ritualized anthropophagy: to appropriate or incorporate the distinguishing attributes of the Other through a literal, conscious consumption of their flesh in order to transform the identity of the individual *antropófago*.²⁸ When I state, “consuming, or consumption of, the Other,” this means, in a broader sense, “interacting, or interaction with the Other.” At the root of the *antropofago*'s model of consumption is careful planning and consideration for the intended outcome of consuming the Other. Much in the same way that I earlier examined anthropophagy largely in

²⁸ A good example from the novel that accurately illustrates the individualized motives of the *antropófago* during this ritual of anthropophagy comes from one of Cabeza de Vaca's descriptions of some of the subtle, yet profound, differences that he observes during his walk among the different tribes that he encounters: “Otros pueblos ... transforman la vida en cosa de heroísmo y arrojo. Luchan siguiendo a sus jefes guerreros y a sus brujos que los incitan a la grandeza. Beben durante semanas alcohol de tuna, agradeciendo sus triunfos. Danzan, aman, se adornan. Comen a sus vencidos (si fueron hombres de coraje) y sus brujos beben la sangre de los sabios conquistados. Sin crueldad ni jactancia. (160, emphasis mine).

metaphorical terms, in the current chapter I explore a figurative in(di)gestion and anthropoemia resulting from an insatiable, thoughtless consumption of the American Other, one that is represented as chaotic and lacking a sense of accountability.

In his book *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Claude Lévi-Strauss examines the differences between anthropophagic and anthropoemic societies. He uses the term anthropoemia as a metaphor for expulsion, exclusion, and isolation and in an attempt to contrast this concept from the metaphorically inclusive practice of ritual anthropophagy (cannibalism). He makes several interesting points regarding the pitfalls of using one's own culture to judge another's. The overall implication behind the observation, however, is that the defining tenets from either of these so-called "anthropophagic" or "anthropoemic" societies cannot and should not be used as a barometer to determine whether one is more civilized, barbaric, advanced, or underdeveloped than the other. To the outsider, the culture being observed will always seem barbaric when compared to their own customs (385–86).

In the book *The Exclusive Society* (1999), criminologist Jock Young draws from Lévi-Strauss's observations when discussing primitive societies (which he labels as anthropophagic) versus modern societies (also our current-day society, which he labels as anthropoemic). Young explains that:

"Primitive" societies, [as Lévi-Strauss] argues, deal with strangers and deviants by swallowing them up, by making them their own and by gaining strength from them. They are anthropophagic, whereas modern societies are anthropoemic; they vomit out deviants, keeping them outside society or enclosing them in special institutions within their perimeters. (56)

The critic breaks down modern societies even further from Lévi-Strauss's description until the result is what he terms "bulimic":

[T]he paradigm case for a discontented society is one which ... voraciously devours people and then steadfastly ejects them. A bulimic society: "**bulimia**: a condition of continuous, uncontrolled hunger. When compensated for by forced vomiting or overdoses of laxatives the condition is called *bulimia nervosa*". (81, emphasis in original)

Young suggests that modern societies go one step further than Lévi-Strauss's depiction, a combination of an overwhelming need to consume and a subsequent compulsion to expel what was ingested. Posse's sixteenth-century Spain fits the mold for Lévi-Strauss's modern "anthropoemic" society, or Young's "bulimic" one. Regardless of the categorization, the essence behind both is a consumption of the Other based on an uncontrollable impulse that results in expulsion rather than inclusion of that which was consumed. Using these parameters as a guide to view these contrasting "primitive," and "modern" societies makes it possible to place Posse's Cabeza de Vaca and the other *conquistadores* and/or Spain from the novel on opposing ends of the spectrum.

While narrating some of the experiences of his voyage as *Gobernador* of Paraguay, Cabeza de Vaca recounts an episode involving his crewmembers that leads him to give perhaps the most damning description that illustrates Posse's view of sixteenth-century Spain, one that highlights this idea of anthropoemia/bulimia. The citation, although long, is worth including. The Spaniards had just arrived at the southern coast of Brazil (prior to their long march inland to Asunción), and Cabeza de Vaca, upon observing his men swimming in the pristine waters, describes the following:

Veía desde lo alto del castillo de popa . . . a la marinería chapoteando, nadando, gritando, alrededor de la nao. Los cuerpos . . . parecían escuálidos batracios blanquecinos. En esas aguas transparentes, salobres, me parecía que eran purificados, *redimidos de una España, de una cultura, muy enfermas.*

Recordé a Dulján, cuando se propuso ‘devolverme a la naturalidad del universo’. Viendo a esos seres disímiles . . . sentí una súbita piedad. Gozaban una alegría de colegiales en recreo, de presidiarios liberados.

Nunca como en ese momento sentí la revelación del absurdo de esa condición humana de los ‘civilizados’, de los cristianos, que más bien viven a espaldas de su propio cuerpo y de la misma naturaleza.

Gritaban, reían, se intercambiaban groserías. Parecían intrusos en el sereno palacio de la Creación.

Vi que uno atrapó un pez de maravillosos colores, con cola en forma de penacho. Lo mostró, se rieron. Se lo arrojaron uno a otro como en un juego de pelota. Y no lo devolvieron después al mar. Lo arrojaron hacia la playa, para que muriese. ¿Por qué? ¿De dónde proviene ese impulso que a todos ellos parece natural? El pescado se sacudía, lo veía apenas. Sólo distinguía la arena que levantaba en los coletazos de agonía.

¿Qué profunda maldición cainita mueve a los hombres de esta arrogante ‘civilización’ conquistadora?

Volví a la camareta con pesadumbre.

Pronto exigirían ser tratados como señores, pretenderían sirvientes y esclavos. Querrán su torpe paga, su América. No dudarán de su superioridad.

(218–19)

There are several things that stand out in this account. First, the fictional Cabeza de Vaca physically distances himself from his men by not joining them in the water, while his language validates the fact that he clearly does not identify with the typical Spaniard (and not only because he outranks them, as is the case in this instance). Then, his first thoughts while contemplating his men in the water turn towards his own transformative experience on the American continent, the catalyst being the *cacique* Dulján. For a brief moment, Cabeza de Vaca shows a glimmer of hope that perhaps the same cleansing forces of the American landscape, which had prompted his own transformation, would somehow purify these scrawny, malnourished, uncouth creatures. That moment of optimism is fleeting, however, as Cabeza de Vaca quickly realizes that his men are cursed with the same incurable sickness of unquenchable greed and ambition as their mother country Spain.

From his uniquely acquired Amerindian perspective, Cabeza de Vaca feels he has been purged of the disease of avarice that lies on Spain and its people and is therefore no longer unclean like his crewmen, these “cristianos.” Earlier in the novel, the historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo had questioned Cabeza de Vaca about his use of certain pronouns in his *Naufragios*: “usted habla de cristianos, de indios y de un misterioso *nosotros*” (32, emphasis in original). The use of the word “cristianos” here to describe his shipmates, but not himself, is indicative of Cabeza de Vaca’s prolonged ideological distancing from his Spanish compatriots and from his home country. In the above account, the cruel behavior of Cabeza de Vaca’s men towards the “pez de maravillosos colores” is symbolic of the Spain of the era and its relationship

with, and view and treatment of, the American Other as something to be consumed and then cast aside (or vomited out, if you will), rather than to be understood or incorporated in any way.

Roberto H. Esposito similarly explains Posse's critical view of the Discovery and Conquest era, but rather in terms of accumulation bereft of comprehension: "la idea de Posse sostiene que 1492 significó un cubrimiento y no un des-cubrimiento, asimismo la conquista sólo acumuló territorios para la Corona, y por lo tanto, tampoco fue una aprehensión de esos pueblos" (118).²⁹ Esposito, although not the first to do so, plays with the Spanish terms "descubrimiento" and "cubrimiento," (loosely translated as, "discovery" and "covering" in English). In Spanish, the verb "descubrir" typically has two contemporary meanings, "to discover" or, more literally, "to uncover," as opposed to "cubrir," which generally holds the meaning "to cover."

Posse certainly displays his view of the "discovery" of the Americas being more accurately associated with a "covering." In a later conversation that the novel's Cabeza de Vaca has with Hernán Cortés, we are presented with this alternate idea, first through Cortés himself:

¿Quiénes eran? *Nunca los he conocido...* Los traté sólo para manejarlos, para vencerlos. Fueron en realidad muy poco hábiles... Pero lo que pasa es que no creían ya en sí mismos. No creían más en el hombre, en los hombres, ni en ellos mismos... Pero en todo caso *nunca los hemos descubierto*. Más bien *los hemos sepultado*, que es tal vez lo que querían: andaban en decadencia, como desenterrados... Vusted, don Alvar, debió haberlos visto y conocido realmente. . . . Y sin embargo es también verdad que parecería que *nada hemos conquistado*.

²⁹ For the purposes of this chapter, the term "accumulate" and its derivatives (or even synonyms when being used in relation to lands and territories) should be understood as a form of sixteenth-century Spain's consumption of the American Other. Thus, an accumulation, or adding, of territories in this context would represent Spain's consumption of American lands.

Como si hubiésemos *pasado por encima, sin tocar en profundo...* Tengo apenas un recuerdo como de seres leves, de esos que habitan los sueños y que son barridos en el despertar. A veces me pregunto si no habremos sido como aquellos bárbaros que llegaron a Roma y la sepultaron sin darse cuenta de lo que hacían.
(153–54, emphasis mine)

Cortés, several years after the fact, vaguely recalls those peoples and cultures that he and others had “conquered.” The fact that Posse uses the fictional Cortés to confess that they (and by extension, Spain) may not have fully understood the repercussions of their actions strengthens the dialogue between Cortés and Cabeza de Vaca. Here, however, Posse utilizes the stronger word “sepultar” (which translates in English as “to bury”) twice rather than the word “cubrir.” One of Cabeza de Vaca’s responses to Cortés during this interchange is also intriguing and echoes what Esposto described as Posse’s view of Spain’s accumulation of lands during this period: “Tal vez no vencimos, tal vez sólo hemos agregado territorios creando una enorme España, grande y débil, pese a todo lo que dicen” (154).

Also of linguistic significance is the correlation between the words “conocer” and “descubrir.” Posse’s use of these terms close together in the quote of Cortés, and in almost identical fashion in each respective phrase, creates a sense of synonymy. Later on in the novel, Cabeza de Vaca would be the one to further expound on the synonymous nature of these words:

Cieza sabía lo que Cortés había sólo sospechado en su triste agonía: que nosotros no hemos descubierto ni conquistado. Sólo habíamos pasado por arriba. Habíamos más bien cubierto, negado sin conocer, amordazado. Nos mandaron a imperar. Eso hicimos, nada más. No fuimos a descubrir, que es conocer; sino a desconocer. Depredar, sepultar lo que hubiese. Avasallar silenciando,

transformando a todos los otros en ninguno. Señoreando, por fin, en un pueblo de fantasmas, de *ningunos*.... (214, emphasis in original)³⁰

Cabeza de Vaca's detailed explanation of certain terminology ("descubrir," "conocer," "cubrir," "desconocer," "sepultar") is instrumental in creating the critical tone in the novel and strengthens Posse's portrayal of a Spain that does not fully comprehend the consequences of its uncontrolled consumption.³¹

During one of his many recollections, Cabeza de Vaca recalls his earliest memories of Spain's intake of American products and the people's reaction as they saw, for the first time, the foreign objects. As he is walking, he realizes he is on the same route where, as a very young child, he witnessed Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón) —who had recently returned to

³⁰ Posse's Cabeza de Vaca indirectly references Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* by mentioning "un pueblo de fantasmas, de *ningunos*." Paz, in the chapter "Máscaras Mexicanas" (58–71), explains what it means to *ningunear*: "No sólo nos disimulamos a nosotros mismos y nos hacemos *transparentes* y *fantasmales*; también disimulamos la existencia de nuestros semejantes. No quiero decir que los ignoremos o los hagamos menos, actos deliberados y soberbios. Los disimulamos de manera más definitiva y radical: los *ninguneamos*. El *ninguneo* es una operación que consiste en hacer de Alguien, *Ninguno*. La nada de pronto se individualiza, se hace cuerpo y ojos, se hace *Ninguno*" (70, emphasis mine). Additionally, in the chapter "Hijos de la Malinche" (88–107), Paz argues that: "El mexicano no quiere ser ni indio, ni español. Tampoco quiere descender de ellos. Los niega. Y no se afirma en tanto que mestizo, sino como abstracción: es un hombre. Se vuelve *hijo de la nada*" (106, emphasis mine). In both of these chapters, Paz describes how the effects of the Conquest continue to influence modern-day Mexican identity. Cabeza de Vaca's commentary on the effects that Spain's "conquest" has on the psyche, and thus the identity, of the natives of the Americas echoes Paz's views.

³¹ Cabeza de Vaca also uses the word "descubrir" in regard to Spain's discovery of itself through the mirror of America. Here Posse paints a complete image of Spain's sickness and uncontrollable, animal-like desire to consume. After separating Dorantes and Castillo because they were fighting, Cabeza de Vaca is led to the realization that: "No hemos descubierto nada en las Indias. Lo que hemos descubierto es España. Esta España enferma emerge como un subterráneo río de aguas servidas en la riña de Dorantes y Castillo. El Imperio que traía el dios verdadero, se descubre con un dios miserable, que siembra muerte en nombre de la vida. En los puntos más lejanos nuestra maldad se repite como una costumbre. Estas tierras nuevas, opacas de polvo y piedra de los desiertos, son sin embargo un espejo: el espejo de España.... En el espejo del desierto nos hemos mirado y hemos encontrado un monstruo que se repite como la Hydra de mil cabezas: los Castillos y Dorantes son los Almagros, los corregidores, los Narvárez y los Soto. Debajo del águila y del león de Castilla, que lucen en gonfalones y escudos, salta un pueblo de hienas malolientes, devoradores de carroña, sembradores de muerte. Llevan a Cristo labrado en el mango de sus puñales sangrientos" (163–64).

Spain from his first voyage— lead a “desfile de indios, papagayos, tucanes y tigrillos enjaulados” (100). Of this moment, Cabeza de Vaca remembers climbing up one of his family’s Moorish servant’s backs to better see the spectacle:

Creo que vi un pajarraco casi sin plumas atado de la pata a una cruz. Vi un palo cubierto de una lámina de metal, probablemente una máscara. La gente gritaba “¡Es oro! ¡Oro!”. Y yo sólo vi como un latón más bien sucio que no refulgía ni brillaba. Era opaco, insignificante, pero gritaban señalándolo como si fuese la Macarena o la Custodia de la Catedral en la procesión del Rey. No vi nada. Sólo quedan retazos. . . . “¡Cristóbal Colomo! ¡Colomo!”, gritaban, y la gente contaba historias exaltadas, y mi madre que ordenaba la retirada hacia el sosiego de nuestra casona. (100–01)

Cabeza de Vaca’s observations of the event (from his perspective as a child in 1493) contrast the exaggerated reaction of the masses of Spain. The child Cabeza de Vaca sees what, in his mind, is only a dirty, dull piece of metal while everyone else (presumably adults) sees a mask of beautiful, shimmering gold. The final sentence of this memory accurately illustrates these two opposing perspectives: “Todos desilusionados. Desde el primer día. O falsamente ilusionados. Desde el primer día” (101). The young Cabeza de Vaca’s feeling of disappointment at not seeing gold, but rather an unimpressive piece of metal, refutes everyone else’s misguided enthusiasm. This incongruous perspective serves as another literary tool that Posse uses to highlight his protagonist-narrator’s distinguishing features, even from an early age.

Prior to Cabeza de Vaca’s recollection of that first instance of Spain’s consumption of the American Other, the ingestion of American products and practices is introduced in the very early chapters of *El largo atardecer del caminante*. From the beginning of the novel, the reader is

brought into Cabeza de Vaca's daily life as he describes the experience of seeing the New World essentially being recreated (regurgitated) in the streets of Seville (although on the periphery of Spanish society):

Se ven las piedras preciosas de los ríos de América talladas a la vista por habilísimos judíos retornados de Flandes y Génova, ahora entusiastas del catolicismo. Perlas engarzadas, zafiros, aguamarinas, rubíes. Laminan el oro de las máscaras rituales y de las momias y lo trabajan con suma habilidad. Me gusta caminar horas por ese *nuevo mundo* movido por hombres eficaces que lucen camisas y jubones de seda. (27–28, emphasis mine)

As the Spanish city is impregnated with American products, Cabeza de Vaca takes advantage of every occasion to again be in close proximity to these New World items. However, being near these objects causes Cabeza de Vaca to experience a range of emotions.

As such, Cabeza de Vaca reacts much the same way as someone who lives in a foreign country and, upon finding a particular item that reminds him or her of home, is carried into a state of blissful nostalgia:

Seguí más allá, hacia el muelle de los grandes bastimentos de Indias: azúcar, aromáticas especias, cacao, piedras medicinales, pieles curtidas, plumas exóticas y hasta sagradas —como las del quetzal— que, según dicen, las reclaman a cualquier precio las putas finas de Venecia y de la corte borgoñona. Me gusta demorarme en ese muelle. Me apoyo contra los altos fardos de hojas secas de tabaco y aspiro profundamente el olor de aquella América. Las balas de goma

látex, el susurro de las bolsas de porotos. Pero lo que más me gusta es hundir la mano abierta en los granos de cacao y aspirar el aroma denso. (41)

Cabeza de Vaca revels in the opportunity to once again see, smell, and touch those things that remind him of his life-altering experience on the American continent. As he describes these products, according to Seymour Menton, Cabeza de Vaca uses “la enumeración multisensorial de [Alejo] Carpentier pero de una manera menos erudita y más personal” (424). Through this personalized description, the reader is able to experience with the protagonist-narrator the varying degrees of sentiments that Cabeza de Vaca is forced to endure.

What causes Cabeza de Vaca to pause towards the end of this nostalgic walk among American products, however, is a moment of foreshadowing in the form of a surprise encounter with a “product” he does not expect. His excitement diminishes as what he witnesses evokes a somber feeling: “Al fin del muelle que llaman ‘de ultramarinos’, me encontré con la sorpresa de dos grandes jaulas de caña con grupos de indios que miraban sin comprender o que dormitaban echados” (41). Beyond the initial surprise of finding these “americanos” (as he calls them) on display in a manner similar to the other merchandise—which because of his sensibilities causes him a certain level of distress—Cabeza de Vaca explains that he is most afflicted by the thought, and even fear, that he could, perhaps, one day experience the horror of running across one of his *mestizo* children in those cages (42).

Cabeza de Vaca’s narration of the nostalgia and fear that he feels in the presence of American products reveals yet another way in which Posse tries to distinguish his narrator-protagonist from his Spanish counterparts. This candid description of his inner thoughts, as they relate to American objects, serves as a reminder of just how different Cabeza de Vaca is. However, the castaway does not only differ from his sixteenth-century contemporaries. In a

broader sense, Cabeza de Vaca contradicts Spain itself. Posse explains how and when this definitive divergence takes place:

El siglo XVI español es de grandeza terrible, cruel, de Imperio. Cabeza de Vaca se distingue humanamente. No supo agregar nada a la Corona. El hijo [mestizo] que pudo haber tenido lo encuentra enfermo y vendido en el mercado de esclavos de Sevilla. Allí se completa el ciclo. (Personal Correspondence)

The author here references the climax (discussed further in a moment) where Cabeza de Vaca discovers his Amerindian son, sick and ready to be sold as a slave. According to Posse, because Cabeza de Vaca is humane in his interaction with the indigenous inhabitants of the New World and does not add anything of substance to the Crown (e.g. territories or peoples), he stands in opposition to a cruel sixteenth-century Spain. During his final conversation with Cortés, Cabeza de Vaca expresses this “humanity” when he shares his personal method for metaphorically “conquering” a people: “Sólo la fe cura, sólo la bondad conquista” (154). Cortés is unconvinced that faith or kindness can be attributes of “las conquistas, reales, las que hacen los ejércitos y las administraciones,” and, to make his point, he uses Cabeza de Vaca as a prime example: “ninguno de los territorios que descubrió en sus periplos han quedado agregados a la Corona” (154). Cortés’s quip at Cabeza de Vaca’s ineptitude at properly advancing the Crown’s colonial enterprise only highlights further the contrast between Cabeza de Vaca’s approach at “conquest” and that of sixteenth-century Spain: Cabeza de Vaca “conquers” with compassion while Spain amasses (consumes) lands and peoples using armies and force.

At the end of the novel, Cabeza de Vaca conveys a more personally motivated, disparaging position on Spain via his sardonic comments upon finding his son among other enslaved natives from the Americas. This is the point where the cycle of consumption is

complete for Cabeza de Vaca and, according to Posse, he begins to comprehend to what extent Spain's metaphorical in(di)gestion of America affects him directly (Personal Correspondence):

Como en el flujo y reflujo de un mar imprevisible que devuelve caracolas desaparecidas, ahora me enfrentaba con mi hijo, con mi sangre. Y ese hijo estaba depositado en un jaulón, en su calidad de semihombre, de mercadería, de 'ultramarino' recién importado. (*El largo atardecer* 239)

As Cabeza de Vaca sees his *mestizo* son, Amadís, situated in one of the cages as “recently imported” merchandise, his earlier fears are realized. Cabeza de Vaca's progeny becomes symbolic of yet another American product to be consumed by Spain and cast aside, much like the “pez de maravillosos colores” (219). The protagonist's plight takes center stage in the novel and the reader begins to feel sympathy toward the fictional Cabeza de Vaca. As events begin to unfold further, Posse unveils Spain—and its metaphorical consumption of America—as the root cause for Cabeza de Vaca's (and, more importantly, his Amerindian son's) predicament. If it were not clear already, Spain becomes an antagonist that stands in direct opposition to a now-redeemable Cabeza de Vaca. In this way, Posse also suggests that Cabeza de Vaca does not fit the model of a systemic consumption of the New World as set forth by the Spanish Empire. The protagonist-narrator's son is just one of several references in Posse's novel to Spain's uncontrolled consumption of American products, peoples, and practices.

Another layer of intrigue to supplement the topic of Spanish consumption of the American Other in the novel is Cabeza de Vaca's description of the New World practices that he sees taking on a life of their own in the port town of Seville:

Toman mucho cacao, está de moda. Sobre todo en las tabernas finas y en las hosterías donde van los comerciantes de la calle de los Francos. Lo venden carísimo, en tazones, aunque no tengan idea de cómo lo preparaban los mexicanos. (51)

Cabeza de Vaca, in his usual ironic tone, critiques the way his European compatriots attempt to mimic (or rather, “consume”) the American practice of drinking cacao without understanding its origins, or really coming close to duplicating how, or in what contexts, the natives of the American continent prepare and drink it. Cabeza de Vaca goes on to explain that the aroma of cacao holds a different meaning for him than it does for the Dutch, who attempt to sell it and whose only interest is financial gain, or for those who drink it because it represents a new trend. For Cabeza de Vaca, the smell evokes memories of his indigenous spouse, Amaría (51). While Spain, in this instance, literally ingests the cacao from the Americas, Cabeza de Vaca’s description gives the reader the impression that those who drink it do so out of avarice rather than comprehension.

Another American practice that Cabeza de Vaca sees being imitated in Seville, which he mentions in conjunction with the consumption of cacao, is the smoking of tobacco “como los caciques tupís en sus rituales” (52). What is most striking, however, is Cabeza de Vaca’s subsequent portrayal of the wealthy importer of American goods, Fontán de Gómez, who gorges himself as he simultaneously smokes tobacco:

Comió una enorme pata de chanco y después se puso a fumar. Es un nuevo cacique pero que no pierde el tiempo en buscar el paraíso....

Orondo, se infla apaciblemente. Rosado, tirante, con sensatas manos de manteca que nunca perdieron tiempo empuñando espadas. Los gitanitos mendicantes se congregan junto a la ventana de su mesa para verlo fumar como a un extraño ídolo de los tiempos nuevos. Es un brujo vacuo, un chamán de chaleco de brocado. Indiano butafumeiro. (52)

In this description of Fontán de Gómez, there are several symbolic elements related to Spain's consumption of the New World that are worth examining. The lexis that Cabeza de Vaca uses is especially important. Fontán de Gómez could have been eating anything, but Posse has him devouring a large leg of *chanchó*, or pork (ironically fattening himself similar to a pig), all the while he smokes this new, trendy American product. The image of fattening does not stop there, however. Cabeza de Vaca depicts Fontán de Gómez gradually "inflating," a combination of inhaling the smoke from the cigar and consuming the *chanchó*. Fontán de Gómez becomes red and tense as he overeats, and Cabeza de Vaca describes his hands as soft and fat, butter-like. Fontán de Gómez's gluttonous feast, as described by Cabeza de Vaca, is not unlike Spain's obsession with acquiring territories. Through this scene of gluttony, located early in the novel, Posse makes possible a direct correlation between Fontán de Gómez and Spain. Later, Cabeza de Vaca's response to Cortés regarding the "conquest" of the Americas completes this connection: "sólo hemos agregado territorios creando una enorme España, grande y débil" (154).

Shortly after Cabeza de Vaca describes the feasting of Fontán de Gómez, the protagonist-narrator explains that the rich trader has used the gold he obtained from importing American products to establish a boardinghouse, a brothel, and a latrine. Cabeza de Vaca does not waste the opportunity to link Fontán de Gómez to Spain:

Comer, follar, cagar. Fonda, burdel, jamerdana. He aquí un hombre que opera exclusivamente en torno a la esencia, como dijo el sarcástico Bradomín. Son en realidad los tres verbos de esta nueva España rica y poderosa. Una Roma que pronto se irá deshaciendo en Babel. (52–53, emphasis mine)

Unsurprisingly, Cabeza de Vaca identifies the words “eat,” “fornicate,” and “defecate” as the three verbs that now characterize this new, rich and powerful Spain to which he has returned. All the descriptions that Cabeza de Vaca gives revolving around Fontán de Gómez represent Spain. Also, they demonstrate that the type of consumption that Posse envisions is at times both a literal and a metaphorical type of in(di)gestion. The result is a blurring of the two; they appear one and the same.

Two examples will help illustrate the blended nature of these two types of consumption that Posse establishes in the novel. The first is presented to the reader as Cabeza de Vaca recounts the circumstances surrounding one of his walks through Seville during a particularly exciting event: the arrival of gold from America. He describes the scene:

Era un día de revuelo en la ciudad: habían llegado galeones por el Guadalquivir y se había reforzado la Torre de Oro. Señal de que llegaba de América lo único que interesa a estos ingenuos entusiastas. La gente vive como riqueza propia este oro de la Corona. Hablan fuerte, ríen. Ven en el oro su seguridad, el futuro de sus hijos. Es tiempo de pura insensatez. España *se indigesta* de oro robado: máscaras rituales, aguamaniles, formas de dioses para nosotros desconocidos, vasos sagrados, collares de princesas vejadas y vendidas como putas a la soldadesca. Hay algo de fatal en todo esto....

Toda España se está adornando con las vestiduras de dioses muertos. (19,
emphasis added)

Cabeza de Vaca sarcastically chides the people's excitement at seeing American products made of gold. His criticism turns into an incriminatory declaration that Spain is suffering a type of metaphorical indigestion because of a lack of understanding of that which is being consumed. He even uses inflammatory words —such as “insensatez” and “fatal”— to highlight the absurdity of the situation from his viewpoint.

The second example is Cabeza de Vaca's depiction of the flow of gold as it comes from the Americas, arrives in Spain, passes quickly through the nation and out the opposite end: “El oro que entra por el Guadalquivir sale por los Pirineos” (28).³² Indeed, the Spanish Empire historically had difficulty holding on to the gold and other valuable resources that they extracted from the Americas. The majority of those riches would often go to other European countries to which Spain was indebted to pay off loans and other provisions that were provided to fund and outfit the Spanish Enterprise and its expeditions. This would eventually leave Spain vulnerable and weak. As the reach of the Spanish kingdom extended further and further, the ability to sustain this vast empire would become unsustainable and ultimately resulted in its demise. When broken down into terms of alimentary consumption, it is not difficult to imagine an individual rapidly ingesting through the mouth some exotic or foreign food only to have the body react negatively and expel it almost as quickly as it was consumed. In this example, the “food” does not sufficiently interact with the body in a way so as to garner nutritional value. The end result of this rapid consumption of the foreign is an “indigestion” that leads to what would equate to either

³² The Guadalquivir is a prominent river in Southwest Spain where ships brought gold from the Americas. The river flows through Seville. The Pirineos (or Pyrenees) is a mountain range that forms a major part of the Northeast border between Spain and France.

an impulse to regurgitate or a bad case of diarrhea. This is a vivid image, but it is one that is made possible through Posse's consistent use of references to American products being metaphorically ingested by the Spain of the time period and not quite mixing or interacting well with the host body that is doing the consuming.

At work continually in the novel is the juxtaposition of two completely different forms of metaphorical consumption. The first is represented through Posse's Cabeza de Vaca who, while stranded on the American continent, "consumes" the American Other out of a mixed sense of necessity and genuine desire. He, in effect, represents the "primitive" practice of cultural anthropophagy. João Cezar de Castro Rocha appropriately describes the cultural metaphor of anthropophagy as "um procedimento cultural que implica uma contínua e produtiva assimilação da alteridade . . . um permanente processo de mudança e, portanto, de novas incorporações" ("Uma Teoria de Exportação?" 666). Central to this type of consumption —of anthropophagy— is the conscious, disciplined desire to understand the Other that is being consumed with an eye on the final outcome, a new, more evolved identity.

The second kind of consumption, on the opposite extreme, is the novel's representation of sixteenth-century Spain as seen through the viewpoint of a fictional Cabeza de Vaca living out his last days in Seville. Spain, through this perspective, is revealed as a façade. Fueled by an uncontrolled impulse to consume the American Other —not out of a desire to comprehend those products, practices, or peoples who seem different— the novel's Spain suffers from a sickness similar to bulimia that results in a general weakened state rather than the great and powerful Empire it attempts to portray to the rest of the world. Posse's Cabeza de Vaca posits an identical opinion of a weakened Spain, despite its accumulation of territories and the appearance of wealth (154). The secondary effect of this debilitating sickness is presented in the form of a figurative

indigestion, indicative of an excessive amount that has been taken in too quickly without regard for the consequences. The reader is left, ultimately, to decide which of the two approaches yields greater results, consumption for quality (Cabeza de Vaca) or for quantity (sixteenth-century Spain).

CONCLUSION

El largo atardecer del caminante (1992) is the least-touted of the novels of the Discovery and Conquest era written by the Argentine author Abel Posse (the others being *Daimón*, 1978 and *Los perros del paraíso*, 1983). The possibility for multiple, intriguing interpretations is not lessened, however, because it did not receive the same critical acclaim as the other two works. In fact, it is partly because this novel is figuratively marginalized that it interests me. Posse's clever and consistent use of metaphors makes it possible to connect two seemingly incompatible topics such as ritualistic anthropophagy and consumption.

In Chapter One of this thesis I have argued that Posse's narrator-protagonist, the historically-based Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, undergoes a lengthy, complex transformation during his wanderings among the Amerindians, and through the natural American Other that has converted him into an *antropófago cultural*. The application of anthropophagy, or cannibalism, as a cultural metaphor was made popular in the 1920s in Brazil, mostly due to the modernist writer Oswald de Andrade and his famous essay on the subject, "Manifesto Antropófago" (1928). I have applied many of the concepts of this Oswaldian *antropofagia cultural* to *El largo atardecer del caminante* due to the narrator-protagonist's constant literal and figurative references to cannibalism.

Because of his continuous, metaphorical anthropophagic consumption of the American Other, Posse's Cabeza de Vaca is portrayed as Other to the two communities that define his life: his original Spanish identity and his newfound American one. Caught in the middle of these seemingly conflicting realities, this Cabeza de Vaca, according to Posse, characterizes what several critics of *El largo atardecer del caminante* consider the first *latinoamericano* (Personal Correspondence). Posse's Cabeza de Vaca attains this label not through a physical

miscegenation, but rather a metaphorical, cultural anthropophagy. As he wanders from one tribe to the next he incorporates into his Self, new languages, abilities, practices, and even forms of literal and figurative sustenance. These interactions change him to the point that he no longer feels he identifies entirely with his Spanish or American persona. Posse suggests that this inner struggle is representative of what makes Latin Americans different: “el personaje mostraba esa ambivalencia que hace que los latinoamericanos sean culturalmente diferentes” (Personal Correspondence).

In the second chapter of this thesis, I have continued with the overall theme of consumption that is prevalent in the novel without wholly setting aside the topic of cannibalism. I examined how sixteenth-century Spain is portrayed, and contrasted through the optic of the novel’s Cabeza de Vaca while he lives out and narrates his final months, weeks, and days in Seville and contiguously narrates the writing of his secret version of his journeys on the American continent. Through the perspective of a waning Cabeza de Vaca, Posse presents his readers with a sixteenth-century Spain that rapidly, and symbolically, consumes American products, lands, and peoples without much consideration for the repercussions. This rapid in(di)gestion causes a series of figurative gastrointestinal problems that weaken Spain from the inside, regardless of how large the empire seems to grow. Cabeza de Vaca first expresses this dyspeptic sentiment in the novel when he explains the inflow and outflow of gold from the Americas: “El oro que entra por el Guadalquivir sale por los Pirineos” (28), and then as he describes Spain’s metaphorical bloating: “Tal vez no vencimos, tal vez sólo hemos agregado territorios *creando una enorme España, grande y débil*, pese a todo lo que dicen” (154, emphasis mine).

Posse consistently uses these and other metaphors to illustrate the end result of a form of consumption based on avarice and materialism and a general lack of comprehension or regard for that which is being consumed. This contrasts the *antropófago cultural* in the novel, represented by Cabeza de Vaca himself, which is presented as a being who is much more contemplative about what is being consumed and how it will interact with his body as well as the desired outcome in regards to his abilities and identity. It is through these cannibalistic and gastrointestinal descriptions that Posse is able to offer some of his most damning criticisms of the Discovery and Conquest, Colonial, and post-Colonial time periods. These literary tools also guide the reader in applying these criticisms to their own era.

Notwithstanding the author's overall critical stance in *El largo atardecer del caminante*, Cabeza de Vaca's unique dual narration, his sarcastic —yet comical— observations of Spain's potential ruin, and his self-deprecating commentary on his life leave an impression post-reading that somehow contradicts the often-critical tone. The reader is actually left with a sense of hope. Perhaps the two opposing styles of consumption that Posse portrays in the novel —that of the accepting *antropófago* and that of the compulsive bulimic, respectively represented through Cabeza de Vaca and sixteenth-century Spain— will finally find a way to reconcile the differences. This reconciliation, as fate would have it (and as the fictional Cabeza de Vaca may have anticipated), would eventually be left to some future wise individual “de otra época, no de ahora” (184) who would learn from the errors of previous generations, to a “buen lector” (262), to someone like you.

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