



TESINA O PROYECTO DE CREACIÓN

APROBADO COMO REQUISITO PARCIAL DEL
PROGRAMA DE ESTUDIOS DE HONOR
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
RECINTO DE RÍO PIEDRAS

COMITÉ DE TESINA O
PROYECTO DE CREACIÓN

NOMBRE

FIRMA

Mentor

PROF. JOSÉ R. RIVERA BELAVAL

Director de Estudios

DRA. MADELEINE VALA BEUCHAT

Lector

DRA. MARITZA STANCHICH MACCHIAVELLO

Lector

DR. DANIEL NEVÁREZ ARAÚJO

Visto Bueno

DRA. ELAINE ALFONSO CABIYA

Director(a) del PREH o su representante

19 DE MAYO DE 2026

Fecha

Dylan Hernández Robles

Prof. José R. Rivera Belaval

PREH-4900

12 /10/ 2025

Creative Project: *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*

Introduction

The fantasy genre has been a staple of my life and my artistic pursuits since I first experienced the film adaptations directed by Peter Jackson of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) at the fresh age of seven. My commitment to creative writing, enrollment at the University of Puerto Rico and its Honors Program, and thus this project, are all a result of the interests I have fostered since then. My interests have developed in several directions; I pay particular attention to the many mediums the fantasy genre appears in, including novels, series, films, video games, etc. and how they affect, influence, and offer unique opportunities for storytelling. Additionally, I enjoy studying genre tropes, their subversions and developments. Both the fantasy genre and some of its classical tropes are central to my project, which I will not introduce.

A Study on Heroes' Journeys is a fantasy story set in a Caribbean-inspired world. Specifically, its setting speculates on an indigenous post-colonial Caribbean where the Spanish conquest and genocide failed and, centuries later, both indigenous and colonial cultures have developed different yet still tense relationships. The premise is as follows: 80 years after the disappearance of a great national hero, a scholar named Joshua sets out on a journey to retrace the hero's steps and document their impact on a world defined by two peoples who were once at war and whose old tensions take new and dangerous forms. With the hero's tale and its truth at the heart of it all, Joshua will have to reckon with this past and what his and his manuscript's role will be moving forward. This project owes its core inspiration to a Japanese animated series by the name of *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* (2023), directed by Keiichirō Saitō and originally written by Kanehito Yamada. Namely in its premise of an immortal adventurer retracing the steps of a great hero's journey to learn more about their relationship to the late hero eighty years after the

journey's conclusion. *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* similarly takes place 80 years after the disappearance of a great national hero whom the protagonist admires deeply and, being a scholar, they set out to retrace the hero's steps and document their findings.

Given this premise, and my interest in storytelling mediums and their unique capabilities, this project assumes its own unique approach to its narrative. Namely, it is told with a particular form and structure derived from my incidental – though thematically appropriate – love for epistolary novels and similar styles. This work is not an epistolary novel exclusively, however. Instead, it is composed of all Joshua's writings throughout his journey, including interviews, journal entries, letters, transcriptions of poetry, songs, oral accounts, and even notes on margin borders. On a metatextual level, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* is Joshua's own manuscript. As the intervening decades warped and shifted the life of the late hero, they became stories, and later mythologies, of the cultures and peoples that witnessed them. Facts changed, the truth became obfuscated, and sometimes certain people or organizations had a hand in spinning more convenient versions of the tale. Though in these first few chapters Joshua has already experienced much, it will take him a significantly longer journey rife with outer and inner questioning and discovery to reach any kind of truth. In this way, Joshua and his constant reflections depict the constant negotiation with history that is inherent in studying it. At the core of this work are ideas of mythologization, cultural narratives, the loss of individual experience and memory as people become history and tales, as well as a confrontation and exploration of personal and national biases, different cultural perspectives on people, history, gender, and values. Joshua's journey is one of truth-seeking, but it is also one which will ask the question of whether there is ultimate truth to be found in the study of the past.

Having mentioned cultural narratives, perspectives and national biases, and history, the last piece of this project comes into view. *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* is set in a fictional world inspired by the Caribbean before and during colonization. However, it imagines a future where indigenous peoples successfully drive back their invaders and secure a future for themselves. To properly introduce the setting, this is a world where the Kingdom of Leonilla (analogous to Spain and broader ideas of colonization) fails in its conquest of the Islands of San Miranda (analogous to the Caribbean and particularly Puerto Rico), leaving its native Casiba people (analogous to the Taínos) to continue existing in relative peace. The journey of the hero Yuiza, who is remembered

as Don Luis by Leonillan history, takes place centuries after these events, when both cultures have grown and interacted in different and complex ways. Following that, the scholar Joshua, sets out to study Don Luis by exploring first Leonilla and then the Islands, and writing *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* as he goes.

Theoretical framework

Earlier, I mentioned most of the core thematic ideas of this work, which are worth repeating here: mythologization, cultural narratives, the loss of individual experience and memory as people become history and tales, as well as a confrontation and exploration of personal and national biases, different cultural perspectives on people, history, gender, and values. These are incomplete, however, without exploring what will hold it all together, and indeed the theoretical core for this project: language. Not only is language essential to many of these ideas, being one of the primary means through which culture, storytelling, and history are expressed, but it is also a topic of great importance in Caribbean culture and discourse around colonialism. Frantz Fanon comes to mind with his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), where he ascribes a “basic importance” to language in topics of colonialism (17). His work discusses how, in the context of colonial relationships, language and its cultural baggage affords different placements in the social hierarchy to those who can utilize it and those who cannot. In his own words: “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is”. (Fanon 38) It is also important to remind here that, though Fanon focused *Black Skin, White Masks* especially on the Afro-Caribbeans’ relation to French, he admits the wider applicability of these dynamics to other colonial relationship, which is how I applied his ideas to this setting.

Language is afforded such importance in large part because it is essential for the effort of colonization to create stark divides between the “civilized” and “uncivilized”, the “learned” and the “unlearned”, the “powerful” and the “powerless”. Thus, in a space like the Caribbean where European colonization established languages like Spanish, English, French, and Dutch by wiping out native languages, the colonial language becomes an object of desire. Simply put, the closer to the colonial language an individual is perceived to be, the greater their assimilation into the dominant culture, even if complete assimilation remains impossible. For example, “a Senegalese learns Creole in order to pass as an Antillean native” (Fanon 38), an effective demonstration of

how the Caribbean is perceived as closer to the dominant culture – which Fanon usually refers to as whiteness, with blackness as its “uncivilized” and colonized counterpart – than Africa, while still being separate from France, the most dominant culture, the whitest. Furthermore, Fanon explains how acquiring proximity to the dominant culture also means distancing oneself from their culture of origin, and he illustrates this like so: “The Antilles Negro who goes home from France expresses himself in dialect if he wants to make it plain that nothing has changed”. (37) This is Fanon’s alienation: when an individual is disconnected from their group, dialect, language, and culture, they instead reach toward the dominant culture and attempt, though never fully succeed, to assimilate to it. Movement toward one direction risks often permanent alienation from the other.

In *A Study on Heroes’ Journeys*, much of what Fanon describes in his work is the kind of relationship that the Casiba and the Leonillans have. There is one major difference, however. This setting is built on the idea that Leonillan conquest failed and the Casiba retained their land and traditions. Slavery, genocide, and the mass exportation of resources were all cut short, and therefore, Leonilla constitutes a languishing failed empire. How then to justify the colonial dynamics put forward by Fanon? Some world-building specifics on the setting are necessary to understand my approach to Fanon’s ideas.

Many decades after their failed conquest, Leonillan merchants sought to negotiate fair trade with the Casiba, who agreed only under the following conditions: the Casiba’s home islands remained off limits, the Casiba would export their own resources in select Leonillan harbors which, under Leonillan law, would operate on a barter system as opposed to Leonillan coin, and the Leonillans would submit to the terms given by Casiba merchants, which meant they would only offer the Casiba the best products for bartering. What Leonillans kept to themselves, however, was the usage of their own language within these barter harbors. In the intervening decades, unique dialects developed, and relations grew and gained influence, which Leonilla saw as an opportunity to capitalize. Colonialism, after all, is not limited to war-like conquests for its domination and gain. By the time *A Study on Heroes’ Journeys* takes place, Leonilla’s introduction of the printing press allowed them to disseminate their language and culture with greater ease, and the Casiba are othered while Leonilla capitalizes on them. Their cultures at that point are intertwined in complex ways, which would allow for many of the dynamics that Fanon presents in *Black Skin, White Masks*, especially surrounding his idea of alienation and the power and importance of language.

While I said that language has an essential role in this project's theoretical and thematic core, the aforementioned world-building and its ties to Fanon does not stretch far enough to encompass the narrative itself and its full thematic exploration. Fanon may be able to explain why the setting of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* operates the way it does, but the ideas this narrative benefits from the most are better found elsewhere. I turn, then, to Edward Kamau Brathwaite and his concept of nation language. Brathwaite begins his work, *History of the Voice: The development of nation language in anglophone Caribbean poetry* (1984), by acknowledging the linguistic diversity of the Caribbean, from colonial languages such as English or Spanish, to what he calls nation language. Nation language is defined as "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by conquistadors". (Brathwaite 5) He describes these languages as submerged into the dominant ones since they were thought of as inferior to the European colonizers' languages. Nevertheless, the submerged languages influenced the dominant languages in what Brathwaite describes as a complex process which manifests itself in Caribbean literature. *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* inherits this concept of nation language, though without the African roots which Brathwaite emphasizes. In fact, Brathwaite acknowledges the omission of indigenous Arawak languages, saying that "the Amerindians are here [the Caribbean] a destroyed people, and their languages were practically destroyed". (6) That said, this setting allows for explorations of a nation language which draws from Arawak traditions, and Brathwaite's model is by no means restrictive of that. As Casiba culture and language become submerged – in the Brathwaite sense – by Leonilla's efforts for cultural domination, this nation language attains the subversive capability that Brathwaite speaks about in his work, which I will expand on ahead.

Brathwaite's work is in large part a study of poetic and literary traditions. He studies the manner in which colonial powers have "educated" the Caribbean in their own cultures and histories and the gaps that leaves for the region. This, he posits, stretches all the way from historical and literary knowledge to the very structures and rhythms of poetry, paying particular attention to the pentameter – the dominant form of the English language. He writes, "The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience"? (Brathwaite 10) Brathwaite connects the literary, experiential, natural, and historic worlds of the Caribbean in his work and in all of it he finds the same limitation. This limitation is challenged by nation language, though he admits (at the time of

his writing) that it is still a growing phenomenon with no set authorities. Here, then, is the essence of Brathwaite's argument: by utilizing nation language, which is to say, appropriating language by not conforming to standard rules (for instance, the pentameter), a more authentically Caribbean expression can emerge. It is, in short, a revolutionary act, to use one's own version of a colonial language in place of the "standard" version. This begs the question, can English – and indeed any other colonial language – be a revolutionary language? Brathwaite responds: "it is not English that is the agent. It is not language, but people, who make revolutions". (13) This argument is what the narrative and themes of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* argues, especially through the protagonist Joshua. As he travels and documents more of the hero's legacy, he learns more about Leonilla's attempts to establish cultural dominance through the repression of Casiba culture. Upon learning about the Casiba's own situation and perspective on the hero, he dedicates his work to fighting against Leonilla's ideology, and he does so by incorporating Casiba traditions, perspectives, and languages into his writings.

Brathwaite has more to add on the topic of nation language, however. As he deepens his exploration of the Caribbean's nation language, though he admits there are hardly any authoritative sources, he calls out one of its characteristics: its roots to oral tradition. The poetry and culture of the Caribbean is based "as much on sound as it is on song". (Brathwaite 17) which once more emphasizes the importance of the experience of poetry as opposed to simply its writing and reading. The experience of poetry plays a large role in his work, and he often emphasizes the sounds and mouth movements necessary for the expression of the lines, aspects which are deeply tied to language and culture. Oral tradition is, of course, central to many historic cultures, and Brathwaite argues that drawing from that tradition makes a nation language all the more unique and revolutionary. Thus, Brathwaite's call to produce not only works which employ nation language, but also to create a "re-orientation of criticism, an aesthetic, that will help us redefine our current pseudo-classical notions of literature". (49) This, unsurprisingly for a poet, is an endeavor he himself added to with his creative work.

Brathwaite's literature has itself done much in the way of his own call to action, as Clement Tayo Abegunde argues in their work *African history and poetic decoloniality: The poetries of Kamau Brathwaite and Kofi Anyidoho in perspective* (2025). Here, Abegunde utilizes both Brathwaite's poetry – specifically, *The Arrivants* (1967) and that of Ghanaian poet Kofi

Anyidoho's to display how the aesthetics of African postcolonial texts are not limited to simple language hybridity, but that it includes the incorporation of history and traditions as a revolutionary act which combats colonial ideas of Africa's lack of history and culture. It is an example of Brathwaite's nation language at work. Regarding the Caribbean, he writes, "Within the Caribbean context, history of slavery and indenture expressed in Caribbean literary discourse certainly accounts for the themes prevalent among all Caribbean writers all in the quest to retrieve the region's cultural identity". (Abegunde 69) Brathwaite is placed within this context, and his poetry, which details and juxtaposes the journeys of enslaved Africans heading to the New World with Brathwaite's own return to Africa, creates a constant discussion and reflection on the past and the experienced. Using historical allusions, different poetic modes, names of people and places, and other such elements, Brathwaite establishes a historical, cultural, and literary legacy in his poetry. Likewise, in *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*, Joshua's ultimate decision to employ nation language for his revolutionary writings is not limited to the inclusion of more than one language or the breaking down of standard language rules. Rather, he turns his writings into a repository of Casiba traditions, history, oral tales, and language. That is, after all, the reason he set out to retrace the hero's steps; to document the mark the hero has left on the world. The Leonillans utilize the hero's tale to spread their own dominance, but they do so by scrubbing the tale of all evidence of Casiba history and tradition. Instead of the tale of a Casiba woman journeying to her home, finding her place in that culture and turning to fight for it and Leonilla, the hero becomes a man adventuring into wild lands to acquire great power and fight for Leonilla's gain. Leonilla attempts to erase Casiba history and culture, while Joshua is left to create a counternarrative. Said counternarrative is built on Brathwaite's ideas of nation language and their revolutionary role in cultures impacted by colonialism.

While Brathwaite offers much to this project thematically, his ideas also lend weight to this project's form and structure. After all, Brathwaite's call to break with the pentameter is applicable to a text's construction as much as its themes. This much is highlighted in Bedour Alagraa's *Lessons from Brathwaite: Breaking the Pentameter; Deepening Black Study* (2022). Here, Alagraa argues for the pedagogic value of nation language in teaching Caribbean thought in literature. She cites *History of the Voice* directly all across her work, whose objectives are as follows:

(1) understand how bridging or breaking the pentameter via *nation language* is a practice that can apply to many literary genres (and, in fact, unburdens us of our attachments to genre), not

only to poetry; (2) understand how *pentameter* might be a way to name a process of exalting the role of language in transforming our ideological and political commitments; and (3) push against the reduction of New World/Caribbean writers' interruptions of standard English mechanics (henceforth, the *metre*) as simply "disrupting Western episteme" and instead consider these feats of language as operating in a terrain that is both connected to *and* uncaptured by Western episteme. (164-165)

In studying several Caribbean texts, she utilizes Brathwaite to contextualize many of the often strange (by conventional literary standards) creative choices as examples of nation language, which is here expressed as a "semiolinguistic *elsewhere*" (165) where both Africanity and standard English do not reach. That is to say, the unique expression of language which Brathwaite reached for in his own work, and which Abegunde considered essential to Brathwaite's poetry. Alagraa provides several works of literature as examples, but for the sake of brevity, I will bring one which best fulfills all three of her objectives: M. Nourbese Phillip's *Zong!* (2008)

To begin with, Phillip's *Zong!* breaks typical genre conventions by being a hybrid of a long-form poem and an archival document. The subject matter is the eponymous Zong, an infamous British slave ship which killed over a hundred insured enslaved people to cash in on money and prevent uninsurable losses such as water supply. Phillip accomplishes the breaking of genre conventions by merging their long-form poem with the original archival document which dismissed the Zong massacre as a punishable crime – discarding "property" did not constitute a crime. On its own, this crossing of genre boundaries does not constitute an example of Brathwaite's breaking of the pentameter; Phillip's writing does. They leave gaps all over the work, empty spaces which render the text – both poetry and archive – almost unreadable. As Alagraa writes, "the record, the archive itself, is the tombstone that marks the spot of the dead underwater and, from there, [Phillips] begins to craft a poem that is replete with the unanswered questions left by the massacre". (172) The silences, then, become part of the reckoning with that horrible history, as opposed to mere interruptions. The conventional approach, which Brathwaite calls the pentameter, is broken away and turned into something that can give voice to a Caribbean perspective. Alagraa explains, "The Zong ledger encloses the possibility of any explanation; the ledger makes sanctuary for the dead impossible. The ledger is the metre of the archive, and it must be annihilated. Philip has broken, shattered, eviscerated the metre so that poetry might be possible". (172-173) Alagraa echoes Abegunde's argument. Nation language, as Brathwaite posited and proved with *The*

Arrivals (1967-69), is not limited to subverting the western standard. Rather, in so doing, it also stands on its own apart from that standard, though indelibly connected to it.

Following on Alagraa's argument, I would connect *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* to Brathwaite's nation language, not only in the previously discussed thematic sense, but also in the construction of the work itself. As stated before, this project takes the form of Joshua's manuscript, composed of interviews, journal entries, letters, transcriptions of poetry, songs, and oral accounts, among others. As all creative projects, the seed of this idea comes from personal interest, but its connection to Brathwaite is nevertheless important. This work's form already resists easy categorization; as Joshua writes his adventures, so will I. Alagraa argues that "Myth and poetry, ledger and archive, script and silence are all thrown into disarray once we take Brathwaite's call seriously". (174) This call to break away from the standard – the pentameter – is, as Abegunde argues, not just an aesthetic one, but one which speaks to a deeper cultural tradition in the Caribbean. The allegorical roles of the Casiba and Leonillans, along with the speculative setting they reside in and the colonial dynamics they are engaged in, all speak to the Caribbean's complex history. Narratively, Joshua's journey will be one of reckoning with his world's history, his place in it, and how his own literature can play a role in his culture. Said literature, then, assumes the form it does because of those thematic ideas and what they have to say about our real-world context through fiction. What results is a work of fantasy with a Caribbean inspired setting, which uses a unique form to interrogate and explore thematic ideas that relates and studies both fantasy tropes and Caribbean history and traditions. Brathwaite's nation language, and its use in our culture, has been and will continue to be implemented all throughout.

Literature Review

Although this project has existed in some form for years now, its current shape has only come about recently. *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* requires several different research avenues, and as such they will be separated into specific sections according to the general research questions which resulted in the works they contain. These sections are as follows:

1. The broader fantasy genre and my inspirations
2. Caribbean literature
3. The process of world-building

4. The form and structure of epistolary stories, and other similar works.

1. The fantasy genre and my inspirations

The proper start of this project was marked by an introspective exploration of my approach to writing. Why do I write? What is my approach to writing? How should I go about it? All were due considering, and to answer them, German poet Reiner Maria Rilke proved more than sufficient. Specifically, his *Letters to a Young Poet* (1934) discuss these questions at length. The work is a compilation of letters Rilke sent to a dear friend by the name of Franz Xaver Kappus, which discusses the poet's approach to writing in all its introspective intricacies. This work does not include any of Kappus' letters to Rilke; we only see what Rilke responds to. We must extrapolate from there. There is a distance, then, between what we conjure up about these letters—as educated and informed as the conjecture may be—and what might have truly happened.

To wit, the letters themselves. One of the first points he brings up is quite telling; he argues that criticism is the least appropriate way to interact with art. That road leads to misunderstandings and a reduction of the interaction with art, where opinions strive to defeat each other. Instead, he ties art inextricably to the creator, saying that they live alongside our own lives, even as ours ends. From there we can understand his advice: to make his poetry fundamentally his own. Rather than seeking advice or appraisal from any external source, he argues that one must interrogate oneself before and during the making of art. Rilke's suggestion of seriously asking oneself whether they *must* write or not is particularly noteworthy. He describes answering the question in the darkest and quietest moments of the night. A simple yes would suffice, and from there one must organize their life around their writing. That said, this sentiment does betray Rilke's reliance on solitude, which I fundamentally disagree with.

Rilke's loneliness is a paradoxical one. Where on the one hand he recommends and extols the virtues of loneliness, he also describes writers and their writing, as well as a reader and what they read, as relationships. He describes them as being built on love, sincerity, and growth. Of course, the loneliness here refers to isolation from other people, their expectations and discourses. Though not said outwardly, Rilke minimizes the importance of editorials, critics, canon, established forms and trends, theories of thoughts, etc. His experience with art is his own, not informed by these, despite never disavowing their presence altogether. Nevertheless, Rilke's letters

are a window to a very important relationship – that of him and Kappus. Whatever speculation may exist regarding the nature of this relationship is unimportant. The relationship itself is what, for me, almost comes to bite back at his own point regarding loneliness. In all these letters and their exchanges, Rilke’s own thoughts on writing became a point of discussion and inspiration for Kappus. Their exchange of ideas and works is not the extreme loneliness that Rilke recommends. The connection between creator and creation and/or reader and literature may still be a lonely one, but nevertheless every other part of that experience is a shared one, even in Rilke’s experience as judged by these letters. My very own project, though existing within me and my papers, also exists in my discourses with mentors, friends, and professors. It exists in the academic expectations of the project as well as a Caribbean literary tradition, as discussed earlier with Brathwaite. These discussions are proof of a community that I am a part of and are present in my writing just as much as my solitary moments. I do not disagree that writing and creative exploration and development may be lonely, but I do disagree that they must be. Certainly, this project – both my writing and Joshua’s manuscript – is not solitary.

From there, Rilke continues to say that one should draw from the experience of the natural world. But also, that one should forego the “habitual” forms. Instead, one should write truthfully to themselves and their own experiences and feelings. It is not surprising that Rilke will go on to affirm in the safety of childhood memories; they are particular to oneself, and the place from which we construct everything else about our experiences. Referring to my work, Rilke strikes a chord. A story of fantasy, heroes, and adventures is what is at the core of *A Study on Heroes’ Journeys*, and none of that would have its place were it not for the foundational childhood memory of a *Lord of the Rings* film. More can be said about Rilke, but ultimately, in confronting his ideas, I brought my own goals into sharp relief. Embracing the intensely personal and individual is inevitable in the making of art, but rejecting Rilke’s insistence on solitude is essential as well. After all, as an academic project, and a work which draws on and adds to Brathwaite’s ideas, solitude becomes a liability.

This leads to perhaps the most obvious body of work to review when writing fantasy: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-Earth, which includes *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-1955) and *The Silmarillion* (1977), among others. In many ways, fantasy has been shaped because of Tolkien’s works; their impact can hardly be overstated. As seen in David Day’s extensive work *An*

Encyclopedia of Tolkien: The History and Mythology that Inspired Tolkien's World (2019), Tolkien took inspiration from history, folklore, mythology, and epic tradition to create his intricate and complex setting of Middle-Earth. His world-building proved such a staple of his work that it became a staple of fantasy, along with many of the tropes Tolkien operated with.

The setting of Middle-Earth is a result of Tolkien's efforts to create a literary tradition based on history and mythology for his home on the British Isles. That is why his works assume such epic proportions; in emulating the epic sagas of the past, he talked about his present and consequently created the vibrant literary tradition of fantasy. *The Lord of the Rings* is the most famous of his works, detailing the epic journey of a diverse band of rich characters in a world-trotting adventure to destroy an evil artifact and battle against the forces attempting to reclaim it. *The Silmarillion* narrates various epic journeys; it is a history book covering the many ages of Middle-Earth prior to *The Lord of the Rings*. History, the passing of time, and the ways figures turn to fiction and later legend are recurring themes of Tolkien's work, so much so that Tolkien himself spoke of his literature as coming from a text he stumbled upon one day, translated, and proceeded to publish. Tolkien's legacy in the fantasy genre is especially useful for this project, as I draw on similar ideas, though instead focusing sharply on that theme of individuals becoming historical narratives and cultural icons. Furthermore, Tolkien's efforts resonate with Brathwaite's nation language, in that both seek to rescue and/or create literary traditions which explicitly draw on history and culture. Of course, Tolkien operates on the purely fictional, while Brathwaite and many other Caribbean authors reckon with real history and its erasure. This project lies on a middle ground between the two, bridging Tolkien's genre of epic fantasy, his classic tropes of heroes, adventures, and grand histories, with a setting and story built to reflect and explore the Caribbean's history of colonialism and its cultural traditions. The fantasy genre, thus, becomes fertile ground for works that employ nation language.

Although Tolkien's works started and remain relevant to my creative interests, the initial idea of this project does not originate in him. As stated before, that root reaches the Japanese animated series *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*. It tells the story of the eponymous Frieren, a long-lived mage who decides to retread the path she and her late friends took when they journeyed to save their world from a demon lord 80 years ago. It is an intensely personal narrative, centering the grief of a woman whose uniquely long life makes it hard for her to connect with those around

her. What interests me most for this project is the way the story handles the typical fantasy adventure narrative, which is to say, the kind of narrative Tolkien wrote in *The Lord of the Rings*. *Frieren* skips the epic adventure and instead focuses on a world that has turned that adventure, and especially its legendary hero Himmel, into history and legend. She navigates this world, which has been forever marked by her friends, and the story oscillates between the present and the past that is being forgotten. The great hero's adventure leaving indelible marks on the world which one person journeys through to remember has become the core of my project. As my project has evolved, however, it has left behind the interpersonal bond between protagonist and late hero, which is the emotional core of *Frieren*. Instead, it chooses a more academic and historical approach where the protagonist, a scholar, holds a more abstract bond to the hero's tale. This approach not only offers something new to the fantasy genre in much the same way *Frieren* did by skipping the usually momentous epic adventure, but it also reinforces this project's place in Brathwaite's nation language. By relegating the hero's quest to a historical matter with deep cultural significance, and by having the story revolve around a reckoning with that fraught history and how that impacts us personally and the world around us, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* affirms the Caribbean's rich history and its prevailing legacy and uses it to resist colonial erasure and dominance.

2. Caribbean literature

If the fantasy genre was the first established element of this project, then the Caribbean setting was the most unexpected. In fact, the initial setting for this story was to be inspired by late Bronze Age Mediterranean history. The Caribbean was brought into the conversation as a source of general inspiration for fantasy world-building. Given the genre's predilection for myth and folklore, this made sense, as it would help make my work more unique. Nevertheless, the potential for a Caribbean setting was too promising, and so the entire setting changed to suit it. The difficulty became apparent, however, as my own experience and knowledge of the Caribbean, its literature, and history, was too lacking to complete a work on the scale epic fantasy requires. Thus, a large part of this project necessitated research on these topics. A review of the consulted literature and their uses for this project are what follow in this and the next section.

Caribbean literature, even Caribbean fantasy in specific, is an extensive topic, and as such, the works mentioned here amount to a sample size of the broader literature. Emphasis was given to the handling of mythological elements, the Caribbean-specific cultural perspectives and

narratives offered, and unique concepts and ideas, especially if and how they related to nation language. Perhaps the best starting point takes its influence from farther afield than the Caribbean itself. Written by Jamaican author Marlon James, *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* is a 2019 fantasy novel that deals in a blend of west and central African mythology and history. Much like Tolkien, James brought several distinct influences together and melded them to create a fictional world with a recognizable and purposeful cultural identity. The premise itself has the trappings of a classic fantasy adventure. The protagonist Tracker is hired to rescue a boy who disappeared three years ago, and despite himself he teams up with an assorted cast to do so. Similarly to Tolkien and to *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*, it is a simple premise which allows for the thorough exploration of a vibrant and fictional setting. He tells a uniquely structured tale by constantly breaking the story into non-chronological flashbacks explaining Tracker's life and his relationship to his family, his place in his culture and his gender identity. *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* mirrors not only this project, but also nation language. James utilizes first person perspective and a narration which flows between present and past to echo the oral traditions and storytelling conventions prevalent in African cultures, and in that way breaks the conventional fantasy novel. His 2022 sequel *Moon Witch, Spider King* adds another layer to this. Here, the protagonist is Sogolon, an antagonist from the first book, and the story of the first book is told through her perspective, alongside a look into her past. The subjectivity that is characteristic of African oral tradition is central here, forcing the reader to question two different and conflicting accounts of the same story. The fantasy novel, and indeed the epic quest James frames his story in, becomes recontextualized in a setting where hard and canonical truths are elusive. James employs Brathwaite's notions of nation language by having African culture, history, and traditions break with the conventional and western fantasy novel, which is to say, the pentameter.

Turning to the Caribbean, there is the delightfully bizarre 1960 novel *Palace of the Peacock* by Wilson Harris. This novel is not quite a fantasy story, instead falling into the purview of magical realism. Set in Guyana, it centers on a skipper named Donne, who undergoes a perilous journey up a river with a hired crew of diverse people. The goal is to pursue indigenous people to exploit them for labor, but the meat of the story lies in the journey itself. The premise allows Harris to go off with the metaphoric storytelling, where elements like the narration, the sense of time, the characters, and the world around them are subject to the story's particular dream-like style. Here, conventional storytelling rules, alongside the typical forms and structure of the novel, are

manipulated freely; it all serves the purpose of heightening the thoughts and feelings Harris wants to evoke: listlessness, confusion, dread, etc. The result of Harris' unique approach is a novel that, upon first reading, comes together as an experience to be felt instead of a work to be understood. In many ways, Harris' narration and style make the land itself feel alive and rich with portents of death and esoteric workings which the characters flow through. This willingness to use any and all aspects of a medium for the sake of enhancing a particular story resonates with some of Brathwaite's notions, specifically his emphasis on breaking away with the conventional, but it is also a reminder for my project. If *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* insists upon its particular form, then each and every aspect of the medium is equally malleable. Furthermore, Harris' capacity to make a setting feel like an active part of the story plays into this. The Caribbean is experienced more than it is written. *Palace of the Peacock* reflects this. My project can do so as well, especially if it intends on applying Brathwaite's nation language, an approach which centers the expression of experience, whether it be a form which can rightfully express the roar of a hurricane, as Brathwaite says, or a continuing of an oral and therefore experienced tradition of storytelling, into literature.

Following up on Harris and his evocative setting is a lesson on how the story's setting is far from the only way to break conventions. Dominican author Rita Indiana does just that by incorporating Yoruba deities into her 2015 science fiction novel *La mucama de omicumlé*, titled *Tentacle* for its 2018 English translation. Indiana resists genre conventions in this novel, for despite being described as sci-fi, she incorporates blatantly mystical elements which would be just as welcome in a fantasy setting. Acilde Figueroa, a transgender Dominican man who is chosen by an ancient deity to save the oceans from ecological disaster, is the protagonist of the story, though truthfully, he goes by several names. Indiana's perspectives shift between different characters, with three in total offset in time. One is Acilde himself in the year 2027, long after an ecological disaster has crippled the Caribbean island La Española, the other is Giorgio in the 2000s before the disaster, while the last is a fifteenth century smuggler and pirate. The classic sci-fi time travel story is played out here, but instead of utilizing advanced technology, the presence of ancient deities allows for the land to be fixed through Acilde, who unifies Caribbean experiences many years apart from each other. Indiana crosses these genres seamlessly by fixing her entire narrative squarely on a recognizably Caribbean perspective, an important case study on how Caribbean writers challenge the conventional and by doing so find a voice of their own.

As much as all these aforementioned works provide varied perspectives on Caribbean literature, there is a certain distance between them and *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*. Though they range from different sub-genres of fantasy to other parts of the speculative fiction umbrella, none of these projects focus particularly on the indigenous people of the Caribbean before and during colonization. Closest to this in concept is Marlon James' African fantasy novel. Meanwhile, Harris and Indiana launch themselves into the Caribbean's past and possible future respectively. They all speak to issues pervading the present-day Caribbean context, which is extremely helpful, even as it means that the fifteenth and sixteenth century Caribbean remain somewhat untapped. Contemporary author Alexandra Román offers one alternative for this with her 2021 novel *Obsesión: Asunción Divina I*. Similarly to James, Román situates her story in a fictional setting which draws from existing Taíno myth, as opposed to an entirely historical setting. The story revolves around Iyeguá, the leader of a long-lived people, who sends their son Narigua on a mission which will allow Iyeguá to attain divine powers. Layered in this story alongside the mythological trappings are elements of science fiction, as advanced technologies feature prominently alongside the more fantastical ones. Once again, Caribbean literature crosses these genre boundaries, though in this case it is to invite the reader to consider what the Taínos could have been without colonization. This project's setting is built on a similar premise, even as it remains firm to its epic fantasy roots, an important differentiation for this project's placement and identity in the wider literary tradition.

3. World-building

Given that much of the studied literature does not center the Taínos or their time period very heavily, the proper world-building for this project had to begin with the oldest literature possible for the period. Before that, however, it is important to pause on a potentially thorny point: how to best approach creating a world such as this. As seen before, the fantasy genre is no stranger to drawing on cultures and beliefs for its storytelling. This can be an inventive avenue for truly unique and memorable creations; Tolkien himself is one of many examples. The other side of this, however, is the risk of misrepresenting a culture and/or perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

The Taínos hardly have a place as a dominant cultural presence even in Puerto Rico. After all, the research I have done pertaining to Taíno history, culture, religion, etc. comes from a need to compensate for decades of an education that placed them as a footnote of Puerto Rican history.

As well intentioned as this project may be, in studying Taíno culture and adapting it into an appropriately fantastical setting for an epic adventure tale, that risk persists. There are many gaps in our knowledge of our own indigenous peoples, and filling those gaps with fiction is in part what storytelling and especially fantasy are well suited to doing. Nevertheless, my education and many of my inspirations come from a distinctly western fantasy perspective, which may not interact well with a culture that was harmed so deeply and existed so separately from that perspective. The best way to manage this, of course, is with careful and honest research and revision. Later on, there will be much to say regarding the still existing literature on the Taínos, but presently it is important to establish this acknowledgement.

A Study on Heroes' Journeys is far from the only project which attempts to rescue existing, though underrepresented, myths and traditions by way of literature. Though here the point of interest is Taíno culture along with an element of fictionalization, this is by no means new. Alexandra Román and Marlon James already provided examples of this, but so did Tolkien. In drawing from his influences, Tolkien sought to establish a recognizable literary tradition for his culture. Likewise, an interesting example comes in the form of *Mythologies* (1888) by renowned Irish author W.B. Yeats. Ireland's history of colonization – including its Christianization, which started in the sixth century – created a need to preserve their old stories and mythologies, and that is exactly what Yeats' *Mythologies* addressed. In this collection of essays and stories, Ireland's mythic past and folkloric traditions were preserved. Other authors would continue preserving their culture in this way. Novelist Chinua Achebe brings us another example, this time from Nigeria: his 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. In this case, the attempt at cultural preservation is done through a socially realist novel that details a fictional clan's attempts to resist British colonization and Christianization. In all these examples, there is an acknowledgement of literature's importance in preserving culture, history, traditions, etc.

The Caribbean's first written work that tried to document the lives, traditions, and culture of the indigenous Taínos is as contentious as it is momentous. Written by Fray Ramón Pané during the end of the fifteenth century, *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* is the result of a mission commissioned by Christopher Columbus to Pané, that being to stay with the Taínos and learn as much as he could about them. Pané spent two years with two Taíno men in particular who related their stories to him. The text itself covers a vast variety of topics, from the Taíno creation

myths to their beliefs of the dead and medicinal practices. As far as a starting point goes, Pané is incredibly important, but far from an uncompromised viewpoint. Simply put, there are several degrees of potential separation between the initial Taíno tales and what is kept today. The first of these is perhaps the most obvious: there may have been language barriers between the two Taínos and Pané, though Pané assures us he speaks their tongue well enough. Nevertheless, there is also the matter of Pané's own biases and understandings bleeding into the text. At times, he even expresses them quite openly. Another factor is the Taínos themselves, who might not have necessarily trusted Pané as readily as he says. Regardless, the existing text is what remains to us, and it is an invaluable starting point for world-building.

What best follows Pané's work is more literature from the period. Namely, excerpts from Christopher Columbus' letters, particularly his *Letter of Discovery* (written in 1493), and excerpts from Bartolomé de las Casas' *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552). The former is a sort of advertisement that Columbus sent to Spain's monarchy. He had just discovered the Caribbean islands and made sure to present them in as alluring and profitable a light as possible for the monarchy. Ever the merchant, his efforts were ultimately successful, and in present day this letter stands as an interesting example of the kind of narratives that colonizing empires crafted. The latter presents us with the stark opposite. De las Casas truly spares no detail in his descriptions of genocide and cruelty, but this should not be surprising. Where Columbus advertised, de las Casas committed himself to a call to arms. His language is shocking in its directness and works to constantly bring out as much sympathy as possible in its readers. Both are without a doubt emblematic of this period of history, especially when it comes to understanding colonialism and empire.

Time constraints are the only reason these two accounts were kept to mere excerpts, though seeing that this project will continue for quite some time, they will be referred back to. I discuss these two works in tandem mostly because they offer the same benefit to my project: fleshing out the cultural relations and historical precedent between this story's version of the Taíno/Spanish conflict. While in history this was a brutal decades-long conquering genocide, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* offers a world where the end was not as absolute or as cruel. In this work, the era of colonization that saw the genocide of the Taínos turns instead into the breaking point at which a long war of reclamation and survival begins. If I am to write a world where Taíno and Spanish

cultures both persisted and could eventually be redefined, then a more complete understanding of what that real relationship looked like is essential. The world of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* will feature the indigenous Casiba people, who thrive in their islands despite bearing deep scars of the conquest they barely fought back. They persist and even trade and coexist with their long-ago would-be conquerors, but the shadow of that past will forever loom and ask them to navigate that relationship carefully. Conversely, the Kingdom of Leonilla exists as a proud yet stagnating failed empire, one whose harmful notions of expansion and domination are being threatened by newer voices attempting to find a different road to prosperity, instead of conserving the only mentality they have ever known.

The process of world-building can be a never-ending one, especially as far as fantasy is concerned. To create a new world from scratch is to ask yourself questions endlessly, with only creativity and real-life precedent to act as answers. Given the limited time of this program, the world-building had to be limited to the essentials of the world. These include: geography of the world, how technologically advanced the cultures are, how they interact with each other, what tools they utilize, what food they eat, what their fashions are like, how do they interact with the natural world and/or its magical elements, what religions they have, how they measure time, how they see themselves and the world around them, among other elements necessary for a fleshed out setting.

Of course, any creative project grows in haphazard directions, so it may be best to say that the world-building of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* grew as far as the academic year allowed. It will continue in the coming years, at which point an extensive list of secondary resources will prove invaluable. There are already many works included in that list, from the anthropological and historical to the linguistic and fictional. As of the writing of report, there has not been enough time to consider them fully.

4. Epistolary tales and the like

The previous sections of this literature review have focused almost exclusively on ideas and fundamental building blocks for this project. Through literature which has served as inspiration and case study, this project's premise, thematic core, genre, and world-building approach have all been delineated. One important part of this project remains undiscussed, and without said discussion it may very well seem like its purpose is entirely creative flair. That is to say, why

choose to write in this specific form? *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* tells the tale of Leonillan scholar Joshua as he retraces the steps of a hero of old, documenting his findings as he travels and learns deeper truths about the old legend. This story could have been told in a more conventional manner. Nevertheless, I believe a more palpable sense of his adventure can be attained by having his own manuscript be the very work I write, a belief sustained even outside of the previously discussed resonances with Brathwaite and nation language. Additionally, this approach strengthens the thematic questioning of historical individuals and how history fictionalizes them; the more Joshua commits the story and legacy of the hero to page, the more the hero becomes a story themselves.

The works that follow are case studies of unique forms. I will go into each work, the form it has and how it applies them, their unique strengths and limitations, as well as what thematic relevance they hold for the stories themselves. Afterwards, I will evaluate them to better determine the approach *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* should take. My oldest encounter with an epistolary novel is also the one which taught me that form can be as much of a tool for the creator as characters, plot, structure, etc. The novel in question is *El corazón de Voltaire*, published in 2005 by Puerto Rican author Luis López Nieves. It is self-reportedly the first ever epistolary novel written as email exchanges. The premise places the book as a sort of historical fiction, detailing the research of genetics professor Roland de Luziers, who seeks an answer to a recent yet volatile question: are the remains of Voltaire's heart, one of French history's foremost thinkers, truly his? The novel is full of conspiracies, historical revisionism, scandal, and exciting discovery, yet it is all told through the emails which the protagonist sends to some of his most trusted colleagues. In many ways, the mysteries and discoveries of the story are enhanced by the way in which the epistolary style narrows the audience's perspective. Even considering the novel's relatively short length, the excitement is palpable in large part because of the constricting yet effective style it utilizes.

A story's form goes hand in hand with its medium. If implemented thoughtfully, it can enhance the story in ways only its medium allows. Rusty Quill's *The Magnus Archives* (2016) is a prime example of this. Written by Jonathan Sims, *The Magnus Archives* is a narrative horror podcast, which is to say, it is entirely reliant on diegetic audio. The story is initially anthological, revolving around Jonathan Sims, the newly appointed head archivist of the eponymous Magnus Institute, attempting to organize the messy archive which his late predecessor left behind. The

Institute is a place where people who have experienced terrifying supernatural events go to give their statements, and so each episode is Sims recording a written statement in a tape recorder. Each episode is an individual tape in the archive, and everything on those tapes happens directly in the series. As events come to a head and the seemingly disconnected anthology begins forming a tapestry of interconnected horrors, the chosen form of tape-recorded audio becomes all the more relevant. The characters realize they are trapped in the Institute, already too far in to get out, and the form reinforces that by having the audience only ever interact with the characters when they are within the recordings; the tapes themselves become their horrifying prison and the only way we as listeners can interact with them.

For its part, the written word has even more versatility than pure audio recording. *The Magnus Archives* manages to turn every limitation into a unique strength of its narrative delivery in much the same way *El corazón de Voltaire* structures itself entirely around email exchanges. An example of sheer freedom within form, though, is Mark Z. Danielewski's book *House of Leaves* (2000). Much can be said about Danielewski's work, and as such the focus will remain squarely on its form and how it uses it to its advantage. On paper, the story revolves around Johnny Truant, a Los Angeles-based tattoo artist who discovers an incomplete manuscript written by a dead man named Zampanò. The manuscript, which Truant decides to finish and publish, is a sort of research project of Zampanò's centering The Navidson Record, a series of found footage horror films supposedly showing the final events of famous photographer Will Navidson and his family, who moved to a new and sinister house in the Virginian countryside. The early sections of the book have the structure of a research paper, complete with fake citations, sources, and footnotes by both Zampanò and Truant. The further the reader goes into the book, however, the more this strict form breaks down. Initially, Truant inserts his own commentary, which turns into entire asides and eventually psychotic breakdowns as the book weighs on his mind. Eventually, the madness of what happened to Will Navidson, which somehow bleeds out through The Navidson Record, the dead Zampanò, and all the way to Truant, distorts the book itself. Rules of typography, reading order, grammar, paragraph construction, and even the way in which a reader holds a book are corrupted. Danielewski heightens the crawling dread of this transformation by beginning the story in as strict a format as possible, a research paper. Everything from the front to back covers is broken apart in Danielewski's uniquely disturbing form.

Upon establishing the form I would write in, it became clear that certain considerations had to be made to have an effective story. As much as this project's unique form strengthens it on the theoretical and thematic level, all of it falls flat if the practical execution is lacking. These concerns address this issue: how best to handle narrative voice and how best to deliver plot developments and character interaction through this specific form. *El corazón de Voltaire* limits itself to having characters recount recent events to each other, making every plot development an event in the recent past which they are reacting to. The audience becomes caught up in the feelings of the characters, and the author can structure the reveals to illicit the most effective responses from the reader. *The Magnus Archives* affords a more personal look at the characters, as the tapes become uniquely positioned to help the characters survive even as they entrap the characters even more. This personal angle is necessary for the tragedies at play, even if the story must consistently justify the presence of tape recorders and the characters must constantly describe the events surrounding them. Audio presentation and the series' voice cast smooth those edges effectively. *House of Leaves* concerns itself more with the mystery and the effects the book has especially on Truant, while recounting every other event after the fact. It is not a story meant to be understood, and so its breaking of logical and conventional rules becomes all the more effective. To better understand the ways in which these concerns can be handled in stories with particularly strict forms, however, three more works were incorporated into this study: Heather Fawcett's *Emily Wilde's Encyclopaedia of Faeries* (2023), Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff's *The Illuminae Files* (2015), and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004).

As far as narrative voice goes, the biggest concern was having a strong understanding of who the protagonist Joshua is. Because my writing tends to favor character-centric narratives, Joshua's arc and role in the story was heavily considered, but before that, a deeper understanding of how a character's unique voice can come across through specific forms was needed. Fawcett's *Encyclopaedia of Faeries* proved to be the best fit for this, with her titular character Emily Wilde injecting even the smallest moments of narration with her insightful yet flawed viewpoint. In this novel, Emily travels to a remote island village in Northern Europe named Ljosland; she is a dryadologist – a scholar of fairies – and she travels there because it has yet to be studied and would improve her standing in the world of academia significantly if she were to break new ground with this journey. This novel is told largely as journals written by Emily, and so they can afford a much more personal perspective. Fawcett is careful to color the story in Emily's vision while allowing

space for the reader to make their own judgements on Emily herself. This is accomplished in large part by having her misunderstand interactions with others and making certain mistakes which other characters can helpfully point out. Here it is also worth noting that dialogue is recounted in full with certain interjections from Emily. This also means that characters and world-building are filtered to the reader via Emily, which adds to the engagement a reader must have with the narrative. In *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*, Joshua is a very biased perspective; he believes fully in Leonilla's accepted version of the hero's tale. Because much of the story's first act serves to break down that viewpoint and cause him to reconsider his own accepted narrative, a highly personal style like Fawcett's becomes all the more attractive.

Moving to the second relevant consideration for this project's form, some of Fawcett's writing strengthens an already convincing argument. Plot developments can be delivered in the way that López Nieves and Fawcett tend to center. After significant plot progression happens, the protagonist will recount it in their journal for the reader to consider. *The Illuminae Files*, meanwhile, offers a different alternative. In its deep-space sci-fi setting, two spaceships race through the stars with thousands of refugees on board while being chased by a heavily weaponized ship set on destroying them. The protagonists Kady Grant and Ezra Mason are refugees, though each is situated on one of the two fleeing ships. Both occupy different positions on the two ships, allowing for different viewpoints between them; while Kady is a social outcast and a hacker trying to figure out the conspiracy which resulted in the destruction of their home, Ezra enlists in the ship's military and quickly becomes disillusioned by the fierce hierarchy of command. As for the form of the story, it is told through call logs, recordings, text messages, journal entries, and many other forms of documentation. The sci-fi setting allows for this more easily than a fantasy one would, but what is important here is that some of these allow for conversations and events in the present tense. This may seem mostly inconsequential, but *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* is not limited to just journal entries for its narrative. Where journals and other similar forms (tape recordings, emails, etc.) maintained López Nieves, and Fawcett firmly in the past, Kaufman and Kristoff judiciously choose certain forms when wanting to highlight different moments. Calls between the two ex-lovers Kady and Ezra might be in the present tense just as Ezra flying a fighter jet during a battle, while camera recordings of Kady infiltrating servers or official military reports of Ezra being interrogated for insubordination are told in the past tense. These evoke different feelings in the reader, and *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* is enriched by having a similar toolset.

One final consideration comes into play for this project, and it is one which the last work of this literature review addresses handily. Given the premise and thematic concerns of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*, its creation process has truthfully involved crafting two stories at once. Firstly, the basis of the tale, the true life of the hero Yuiza who would leave an indelible mark in both Casiba and Leonillan culture. Secondly, Joshua's adventure eighty years after Yuiza, when their tale has become a matter of national and cultural narratives. The idea of Joshua's adventure is that the further he goes, the more he learns of who Yuiza was, the more their original adventure becomes clear to the reader. In that manner, these are two narratives in one. When it comes to studying how to go about crafting narratives like these, which mirror each other, David Mitchell provides a fascinating example. In what can best be described as a work of speculative fiction, for it covers several genres in one, *Cloud Atlas* offers anything but a direct narrative. Instead, it nests no less than six narratives into each other. When one reaches a high point, another begins and interrupts it, only for another to do the same. By the time the first narrative is returned to, it has been thoroughly recontextualized for the reader. In crafting six distinct narratives which interact with each other, Mitchell provides an intricate and powerful blueprint for this project to study in detail.

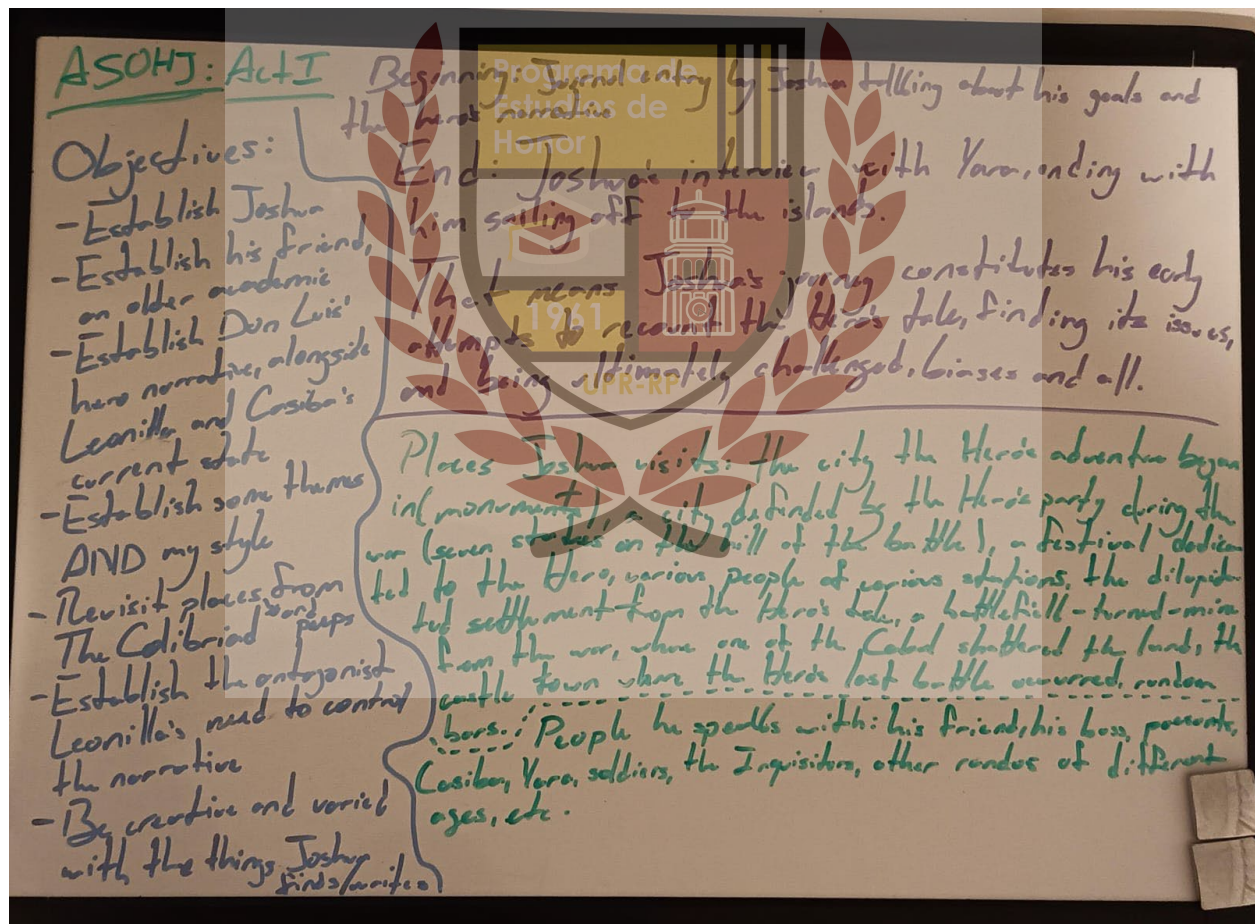
Justification

In the previous sections, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* basic premise, theoretical framework, and literary inspirations and case studies have been explicated on at length. Now must come the whole. What does this project add up to? At the basest level, this project contributes to a growing community of fantasy and broader speculative fiction for the Caribbean. As well, it employs Brathwaite's idea of nation language in its construction and storytelling, further solidifying this project as a work of Caribbean literature in conversation with the region's vast and rich literary and cultural traditions. Following that are the three aspects of the project which set it apart from the rest, both individually and in tandem: the epic fantasy roots stemming from Tolkien, the speculative Taíno-inspired setting, and the form of the narrative. The first connects this project with Caribbean literature, but also with the vibrant tradition of fantasy literature which spans far more than simply books and/or Tolkien. The second offers considerations for the Caribbean which seem rarely explored. In doing a setting where Taíno and Spanish cultures can be explored in different lights, the history of the Caribbean can be reckoned with while putting the culture of the

region's indigenous Taínos at the forefront. Lastly, the form of this story hopes to show even more variety in the kinds of literature which the Caribbean's speculative fiction can offer.

Results

The task of writing a semester's worth of fiction required enough planning and structure to ensure a smooth creative process. Because the last semester provided the opportunity to write a World Bible and establish forms, plot, characters, and thematic ideas in order to plan ahead, this semester began with a simple concept map of my goals with these first chapters of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys*, pictured below:



For greater clarity and comparison with forthcoming discussions, the following is a transcription (taken from my personal notebook) of the relevant plot beats covered in this semester's work. It is a useful point of comparison with the originally proposed structure of Act I, also listed below:

Transcription from notebook:

1. Joshua leaves Caelma.
2. Beginning of his journey goes well. Lucás gives promising lead.
3. After addressing the Casiba poorly, he decides to disregard their perspectives. Lucás advises him not to. Gets passage to Añoranza with a Casiba named Marcos.
4. He reaches and loves the Añoranza festival. Speaks with its leader.
5. Has his falling out with Marcos over differences of perspectives.
6. He encounters the theater troupe and discovers the source of their take on the hero.
7. He travels to Gozarna.
8. He reaches the book owner, haggles, but fails to get the book.
9. The Inquisition arrives in the city and the owner of the book hands Joshua the book. The Inquisition discovers Joshua as a target.

In the end, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* saw six chapters – a current total of 75 pages written over the course of the semester and its extraordinary circumstances, both personal and general. Taking from the originally proposed structure of Act I, these six chapters cover the following events:

Originally proposed structure of Act I:

1. Joshua begins the tale having recently graduated from the Royal Academy of Leonilla's Capital. He declines the prestigious opportunity to become a chronicler for the monarchy, instead opting to leave the city altogether on his personal journey.
2. Before setting out, he recounts the story of the the Leonillan hero Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, reiterating his love and pride for the story and the role it played in his own studies. For Joshua, Leonilla is as ever, a land of heroes.
3. He sets out to the city where the Hero's tale started, which now features a proud statue of the man.

4. He stays with a trusted friend and mentor, a native of the city, and takes an account of the city's perspective on the Hero. He tells his friend of his plans, and his friend warns him not to go too far into this study. The Hero's legacy is a fierce point of pride for Leonilla, after all.
5. He continues traveling Leonilla, stopping at various points from the beginning of the hero's journey as well as the civil war that drew them back to Leonilla. Adventures ensue.

As any other creative project, the process itself took the story through many changes, eventually resulting in an expansion of the events set out in numbers 4 and 5 listed above. I would focus on those two points first before speaking on the first three, since the former are better examples of how the theoretical framework put forward beforehand was implemented. The latter are better used to illustrate the writing process as I experienced it this semester.

In my theoretical framework, I pinned language as the core of all the story's themes, citing Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to illustrate language's importance in the history and discourse around colonialism. In practice, Fanon helped define a general world-building approach. The entirety of this project's first act takes place within Leonilla, and as such, all the people within it are subject to the kingdom's particular colonial rhetoric around language. Leonilla enforces their own language as a tool for cultural control. Because their relationship with the Casiba is one built on commerce within Casiba-controlled ports in Leonillan land, they have instituted their language – known colloquially as Lionspeak – as a method of control. This has proven effective within these communities, as Joshua himself experiences when interacting with the Casiba of the port city of Santísimo. He notes how quick they are to swap from their native language they speak amongst themselves to address him in Lionspeak. A further detail which Joshua takes for a mere novelty is that the Casiba of Santísimo often take up two names, one in their native language, which connects them to their heritage, and the other to fit in more easily in Leonillan life. Lionspeak is the way of the land, and the Casiba who live there have had to comply to it for years.

Joshua is, as a Leonillan man, unaware of the pressures Leonilla exerts upon its more marginalized communities. Many of the conflicts he comes across in these early chapters is due to his ignorance of his privileged position as a formally educated Leonillan man from the capital and of the many struggles the Casiba face. His initial forays in Santísimo amount to little because the

locals find a man like him disagreeable. He trespasses in places and does not understand the cultural importance of the spaces and objects around him. He dismisses the importance of Casiba perspectives, even going as far as ignoring his mentor's advice and choosing not to seriously learn their language save for passing curiosity. His disagreement with Marcos – whose Casiba name is Niabón – stem from their irreconcilable differences regarding how they remember the hero Don Luis. All this leads him to embracing Leonillan narratives, which is to say, that which he finds familiar, as well as people who agree with him, such as Don Julio Fernández. Joshua's actions do not come from a place of malice, rather they are, to him, scholarly informed dismissals of irrelevant information. Many of the Casiba around him see through this and thus refuse to collaborate with his efforts.

Joshua's early attitudes toward the Casiba and his own study are a result of his upbringing and education. Leonilla's first formalized education system is, unsurprisingly, as much of a tool for control as any other. From the crop of students they nurtured, they hope to create chroniclers, historians, and artists who can continue pushing for Leonilla's accepted narratives. After its invention, the printing press became another tool in the exact same way, as it allowed Leonilla even greater dominance over cultural narratives like that of Don Luis. The Casiba, who rely on oral traditions, monuments, and social customs like the areito, have their access to these tools for cultural preservation slowly restrained. In Santísimo, the grounds for their areito were transformed into a space to memorialize Don Luis with a statue. The Casiba community chose to build it instead of letting Leonillans trample on their space completely, and as such their cultural expression lands in a nebulous space of being simultaneously coopted by the dominant power and still a true expression of their own perspectives, as seen by their inclusion and honoring of Don Luis' old team. Joshua, for his part, exhibits a certain self-assuredness that stems from taking the historical narratives taught to him completely at face value. Despite his own position as a marginalized peasant whose single capacity to read earned him his education, he views his own societal struggles as proof of his righteousness in his journey. Instead of seeing some of his struggles in the Casiba and vice versa, he sees himself in Don Luis and thus, Leonilla's overall rhetoric as expressed through its language of power.

The tale of Don Luis is, despite all other differences, always a story of a hero traveling between and saving two different yet related lands from treacherous villains. For the Casiba, Don

Luis, or rather the historical Yuiza which Marcos recounts in Añoranza, has a very specific meaning which they guard closely. For Leonilla, Don Luis is a classical conquering hero who journeys to far off lands, returns with riches and blessings gained by his individual might, and uses them to deliver his nation from conflict. Regardless, it is the story of an individual who fought for the protection of the islands of the Casiba and for the Leonillan Crown during their civil war. The complexities in between these interpretations are what Joshua has to parse throughout this story. However, to illustrate the success of Leonilla's control of historical narratives, Joshua begins firmly rooted to Leonilla's side of the story. His arc is largely about discovering the complexities of Don Luis' legacy and reconciling them with the colonizing and controlling Leonilla he never realized he was a part of, as well as paying the consequences of being on the wrong side of Leonilla's narratives as the story continues. Thus, his journey is built specifically to mirror that of the original Yuiza. He follows the Hero's trail from arriving to Santísimo and interacting with Casiba culture, to encountering conflict in Añoranza and resolving themselves to continuing their path. The diversion, however, is what seals the rest of Joshua's journey. Both Yuiza and the fictional Don Luis depart to the Islands after Añoranza, where they spend several years exploring and fighting the villainous Cabal. When the Cabal orchestrate a civil war in Leonilla, they return once and for all to settle the score and return the monarchy to power. In his own stubbornness and ignorance, as well as his growing frustrations with Casiba like Marcos, he opts to follow the story of Don Luis after he returns, handily skipping all of the Casiba portions of the story.

The contrast between the historical Yuiza and Joshua is, I argue, an intentional application of language as a conveyor of history and culture, as well as Brathwaite's nation language, as it essentially has Joshua make his biggest mistake from the beginning. His arc begins in ignorance, and thus that ignorance must be shattered to get him to truly engage with what is at stake: cultural narratives, control of history, and the dynamics of power through language. Yuiza returns to her inherited culture and connects with it. Joshua wants to inherit the story of Don Luis but by denying the Casiba heritage, he is left astray and cannot find the deeper connections of the story. He inherits Yuiza and her culture by means of Leonillan colonization and he is content within that because of his ignorance. His path, through no little pain and turbulations, will lead him to the same place it led Yuiza: the Casiba. From there, he must go to the Islands, understand the role he and his literature can play, and deprogram his mind from the Leonillan perspectives which have ruled him so thoroughly. He returns, in other words, to the Hero's path, now fully understanding it, and in so

doing accomplishes a feat just as heroic as ending wars and saving lives: he remembers the past and helps give voice to marginalized people in times of mounting oppression.

All of that being said, the current six chapters of the story serve mostly as set-up for what the story will become and argue. Brathwaite's nation language is positioned here as a main thematic idea, but it is still a nascent one by the time these six chapters conclude. Joshua has yet to understand the stakes of the situation, as he is too preoccupied in his own idea of adventure and discovery, as well as his ignorance. They also establish several characters who will return and bring their own aid to Joshua's journey in his own way: Isabela (the book owner's daughter from Chapter VI) and Lucás will both return to the story once Joshua comes back to Santísimo, and they will participate in his writing of the tale, both armed with new knowledge of the worsening situation in Leonilla. More importantly, Marcos, the areito performer, will meet Joshua again, and their argument will be resolved with Joshua admitting his faults and asking Marcos – who already utilized the areito as a way to preserve cultural memory – for his aid in finishing his project. Even as early as his first appearance, Marcos understands the thematic weight that language has in this narrative and eventually, so will Joshua, who will prove himself to Marcos in turn.

On the other hand, Fanon's ideas of language and its relationship to colonial relationships serve their world-building lore well, but in speaking of Joshua's arc and how much he will change, Fanon's concept of alienation comes back into play for the story. The Casiba who live in Leonilla already exhibit great differences from the ones in the Islands. Marcos himself is one such case. He is a young Casiba who is adamant about staying true to his roots, even if it means defying authority as seen in the festival in Añoranza, but he is ultimately alienated from his Island relatives. He knows Lionspeak, uses a Leonillan name, operates by their rules, and knows their customs. Añoranza's leader Don Julio Fernández is an example of the opposite. He is a Casiba man descended from a person who saw and was saved by Yuiza herself and who allowed the censorship of Don Luis' story take hold. Despite that, he embraces Leonillan culture entirely, taking up their language, clothing, and even a Leonillan family. In meeting the Casiba of the Islands and seeing their own perspectives on this complicated history, Joshua will come to see just how alienated the Casiba in Leonilla are and wonder to himself what Yuiza thought of seeing how she was one of them like Marcos. Joshua himself will experiment an alienation similar to what Fanon describes.

Of course, his is not rooted in linguistic proximity to the colonizer. Instead, it is rooted in understanding the role he and his culture play in the oppression of the Casiba.

Chapter VI of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* ends with the first signs of Joshua's almost idyllic adventure coming to an end. The Leonillan authorities whose role it is to enforce the interests of the system have painted a target on his back, which will only end with Joshua at the lowest possible rung of his society: a prisoner and enemy of Leonilla. While the ending of chapter VI is meant to leave an ominous hook for the reader to continue following the project, the first six chapters serve mostly to establish the plot, setting, world-building, characters, themes, and ideas, as well as Joshua himself and, as I will now discuss, the form of the story.

The most ambitious aspect of this project, as well its most thematically potent, is its specific form. It also provided me with the greatest difficulty during my writing. Not only is the story written in a pseudo-epistolary style, but it is, therefore, first person. It is also thematically integrated into the previous discussions surrounding language and the processes of keeping history and memory alive. As Joshua travels and collects information, he fills in his messy journal, which is in turn the physical manuscript that I write. This necessitated that I capture Joshua's voice at every possible moment, as his perspective is the most important to get right for the narrative to work. In execution, this goes beyond the prose and style of writing. For instance, the very first page has Joshua writing and striking out his sentences as he attempts to compose the best possible first sentence for his work. His voice is an eager one, messy and constantly lost in his thoughts, but it is also attempting to harness a more elevated and scholarly tone which he consistently fails to achieve. He transcribes most of what he finds, and in analyzing it is quick to go on personal tangents because he is so emotionally tied to Don Luis' story. There are also opportunities to harness other peoples' voices by including segments of the manuscript written by other characters, such as Lucás' short addition, or the inquisitor's missive which Joshua acquires through unknown means.

That said, the first three chapters as they stand in the first draft are proof of the difficulty of writing a form like this while setting up a narrative of this scope. During the literature review, there were several works with unique forms that served as inspiration for this project, and so there was sufficient room for interpretation and experimentation. Concerns such as establishment of the world and the protagonist, the premise, tension and engagement, and the gaining of story

momentum were at the forefront of the writing process at this point. Truthfully, the first three chapters were an exploratory period for my writing, but they will nevertheless require fine tuning to match the execution found in the last three chapters.

Because this first draft of *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* numbers at 75 pages, a link to the full document is placed here in place of the entire draft: [Act I of ASOHJ.docx](#)

Conclusion

A Study on Heroes' Journeys is by no means a finished work, nor was it intended to be so from the beginning. As a companion piece to a different work of mine which tells Yuiza's story, both projects will need a great deal of time before they are complete. Nevertheless, in defining the shape of this project, I have been able to reconcile with the greatest difficulty of my undergraduate years, which was finding the middle ground as a creative and academic writer. The very first time I wrote about this project explicitly was in a year-old essay which spoke on that very topic. Yet from its inspirations in fantasy works like *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* to the current shape of Joshua's story as a pseudo-epistolary speculative fiction work of Caribbean literature, *A Study on Heroes' Journeys* has allowed me the space to develop precisely the sort of career I would follow – which is itself a key goal of the Honors Program as a whole. In finding this work's place amidst literary genres like epic fantasy and Caribbean speculative fiction, as well as with its theoretical backing in Caribbean-specific discourses around colonization and language as tools of both control and revolution, the foundations for this long-term project and eventual finished work are strong and promising.



Chapter I

3rd of February of the

Among the scholarship of Leonilla's most renowned, the study of history has not been nearly as comprehens

My name is Joshua — Joshua de la Ría Cosme and I am a student of heroes

Our great nation's greatest hero, the greatly renowned Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, disappeared 80 years ago. Despite fervent scholarship on his epic life, there has been little follow-up on the circumstances of his

Leonilla is a nation of heroes, and though its best was left for last, their name continu

Herein I commit my study – if indeed it can be called something so great – of Leonilla's greatest hero.

I am Joshua de la Ría Cosme, though *just* Joshua evades that great mouthful. I recently received my scholarly honors at The Royal Academy of our Most Sacred Leonilla. Indeed, I am crowned a scholar and, though the fate of us – the first graduated scholars of the Academy's nascent record – is to serve primarily as scribes and record-keepers for our esteemed Royal Family and their affairs, I have decided on something... different. Perhaps I should explain. I will be brief.

In its great history, Leonilla has seen many individuals of the studious sort. They draw out the history of this nation's many battles, victories, and, if and where applicable, its crushing defeats. Indeed, some of their names are etched now into my mind for their contributions to our remembering the great men whose legacies we bear. Ricardo, López, Arrom, Baralt, and many others are responsible for our knowledge of Leonilla's First Expansion, The New World Expedition, The War with the Casibas, the history of the Royal Family of _____, and of course, The Epic of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro.

I am a great admirer of these men and their works, for my fascination with their tales enabled me the drive to learn my letters. I thank my mother and father for that passion. Even in our run-down home they somehow always delivered some book or other onto my lap. Had they not worked so hard for Leonilla, I would not have had the chance to do the same. Thus am I here, on the day of my graduation, preparing to abandon it all.

I shall embark on a journey this day, one which may very well take me a long time. I look forward to it. Initially, I thought it would have to wait another few days, what with the great ceremony the Academy was sure to host. Oh, it would be amongst the highest of honors to be there. But I simply cannot stay put! My colleagues will call me a fool, as they have doubtlessly thought to do many times, but I have reigned myself in far too much. Now that the official recognition of my graduation has arrived, I may depart in peace. I have left in my quarters a more official notice of my departure, though I am sure this disappearance will be something of an exciting scandal once it reaches others' ears. It would do me well to see their faces then!

Addendum: What follows is a letter I received shortly before departing on my journey.

1st of February of 1058

To Joshua de la Ría Cosme,

As one of The Royal Academy of our Most Sacred Leonilla's head lecturers, it falls onto me to look after our first crop of alumni. For this reason, I find myself utterly confounded by you. Surely, I dare believe, nine years of study led by this good nation's most luminary minds would have engendered in you some respect or admiration for this craft entrusted to us. Yet you take the first possible chance to flee your role in favor of no certain cause!

This Academy welcomed any and all who knew their letters. Of course, the many Lords of Leonilla would see fit to send their scions, but we had no need to stop there, for even literate lowborn were extended this opportunity. This I reckon you know well. For all your posturing across those nine years not a single one of us found any proof of either one of your family names. We did not raise the matter for we spied in your keen deception a profound desire to learn and be of service to our good land. I now see how you decide to spend our good intentions: chasing your own fanciful interests.

This is, in all worthy estimation, a result of your obsessive interest in our histories and epics. Yes, we know well enough how your passable performance in all fields save for history reflected on you. Even then you would have become one of our own chroniclers, a position which is still your right, and dare I say, still the path which will make the shrewdest man out of you. I beg of you take that first step into your role with grace. Do so by attending our recognition ceremony alongside your peers. Should I find you absent on that occasion, I will have no choice but to believe you uninterested in this honor so graciously offered. You will be left to roam and wander, studying ghosts in the roads no proper scholar would see fit to immortalize. Spare yourself the ignominy, or at the very worst spare mine and this Academy's reputation the ignominy of being associated with you.

I expect your good tidings.

Headmaster Enrique S. Valencia Collores

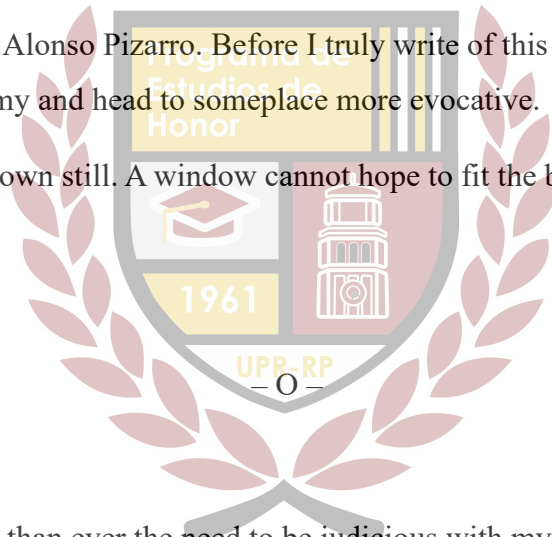
You will be left to roam and wander, studying ghosts in the roads no proper scholar would see fit to immortalize. Indeed, Headmaster Valencia! Let us put that to the test!

Truthfully, I expected a more disheartening letter.

I take offense to my decision being a mere passing interest, though. I have dreamt of this for years and planned accordingly! I write this now on the very verge of my journey and had I more time I would have told him precisely how his letter could fit in between his teeth, if only just for that dismissal.

No matter, of course. My course is set and the breeze of Leonilla's capital already stokes that fire in me. It will do me good to forget the faces of these precious *scions* of the Academy. If there ever was a true scion of Leonilla – a true heir to our founder's legacy of nation-building – then it is simply Don Luis Alonso Pizarro. Before I truly write of this figure, I will make my departure from the Academy and head to someplace more evocative.

The air here has grown still. A window cannot hope to fit the boundless sky within my quarters.



I realize now more than ever the need to be judicious with my paper. Were it otherwise I would write this following entry on a fresh page. Alas! A mere dash across the paper ought to suffice as a break. When all this is over, I will bend the ear of some publisher or other with whatever coin I have left. Perhaps it will be a smaller publisher, one not yet so concerned with the works of my peers.

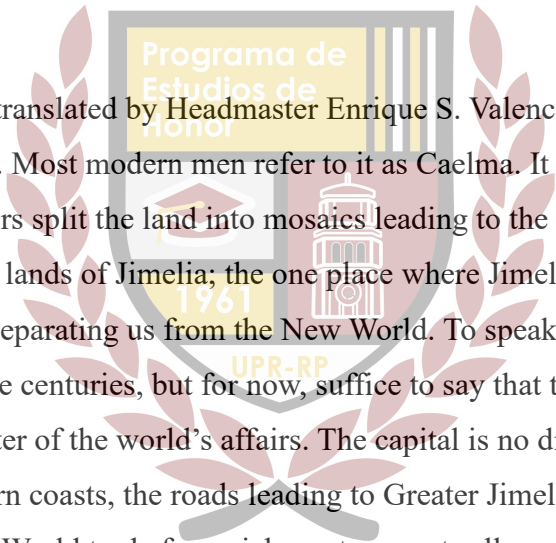
Yes, the more I think on it, the more certain I am that I must find one of the newer publishers that are spreading all about Cebada. The Academy has had printing presses since its beginnings. In those nine years I seemingly forgot how novel this new contraption is. To think more people will see books like mine with much better ease! It heartens me greatly. Even here in bustling Caelma, my mother and father went far and beyond themselves to find tomes for me. Had it not been for a nun friend of my mother's by the name of Marta who snuck out tomes from

her temple... well. I cannot imagine how the situation is in the more rural areas of Cebada, the places Don Luis came from. I believe my life would be incomplete if my study did not reach even the smallest folk. Therefore: I will be needing a publisher.

I fear I have spent too many of my precious pages on preamble, however. Let us proceed to the study itself!

– O –

~~3rd of February of the year 1058~~



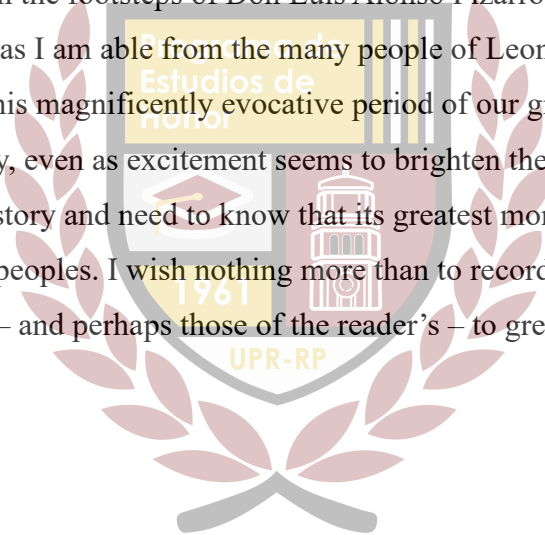
Caelum Magnum, translated by Headmaster Enrique S. Valencia as “our grandest sky”, is the capital city of Leonilla. Most modern men refer to it as Caelma. It lies in the valleys of central Cebada, where rivers split the land into mosaics leading to the sea. Indeed, Cebada is the very frontier of the greater lands of Jimelia; the one place where Jimelia touches La Cuenca, the charmingly named ocean separating us from the New World. To speak of Don Luis is to speak of Leonillan history across the centuries, but for now, suffice to say that the land of Leonilla is well positioned to be at the center of the world’s affairs. The capital is no different. Indeed, the fishing communities of the northern coasts, the roads leading to Greater Jimelia, the rich trade routes of the southeast and the New World trade from rich western posts all pass through here eventually.

It is an old city, originally a small fort built by moors long before Leonilla’s founding over 1000 years ago. Caelma served as the Monarchy’s first and only seat. It has been the source of Leonilla’s greatest armies and conquests. Now, after centuries of growth, it dominates all the roads in this great valley, and the bells from its cathedrals can be heard from farther away than the city’s outer reaches. No shepherd, farmer, soldier, merchant, noble, traveler, or priest on pilgrimage has not known Caelma.

This is why, as I sit at one of this city’s most populous roads, the presence of a great statue of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro proves his importance to our history. I speak, of course, of the stone statue sculpted by Fernando Santiago, the renowned artist so beloved by Leonillan royalty

in his time. At its base and above the sculptor's name one can find carved in stone: "Stalwart Don Luis Alonso Pizarro" Our records place the carving of this statue in the year 1028 as a commemoration of both Don Luis' last recorded adventure and ultimate demise, as well as the printing and distribution of the very first epics regarding him. It depicts the man, armored as a knight and pointing his legendary spear – Zumbador – westward. Santiago was so meticulous and gifted in his construction that, in the time of year of Don Luis' departure for the Islands of San Miranda, Zumbador follows the exact ecliptic line across the sky.

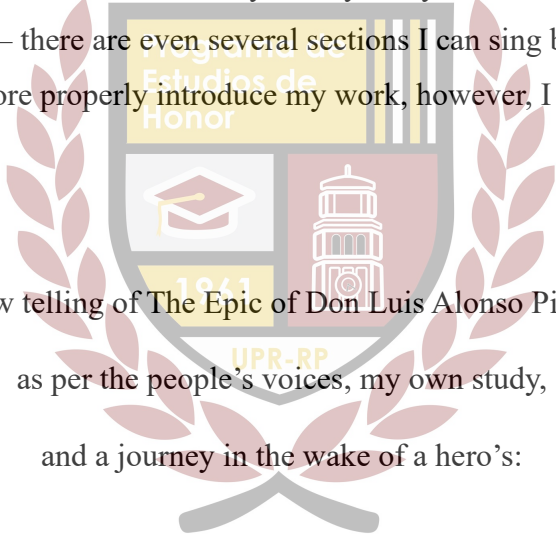
I have visited this statue countless times throughout my years, especially as I grew more knowledgeable of history and was possessed by the desire to undertake this journey. Indeed, this was the only place I could have started from. But what have I started, truly? My intentions with this journey are to follow in the footsteps of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro's life, to collect as much knowledge of his epic tale as I am able from the many people of Leonilla, and to provide my own trained insights into this magnificently evocative period of our great nation's history. I do not take this journey lightly, even as excitement seems to brighten the world around me. Instead, it is because I value our history and need to know that its greatest moments are in the hearts of even the nation's smallest peoples. I wish nothing more than to record their words and have them expand my understanding – and perhaps those of the reader's – to greater heights.



Chapter II

Author's note:

I cannot provide a full rendition of this epic here in this study. In its entirety, it is 3,730 verses long in Lionspeak, which is altogether far too long for a simple retelling. I trust, instead, that its relevance to our people's lives for the last decades has afforded it due recognizability in the minds of the people. One need not be literate to know of his great tale. Nevertheless, I will make direct inclusions of it wherever necessary for my study. I do carry my personal copy of the text at all times, of course – there are even several sections I can sing by heart, but only if sufficiently pressed! To more properly introduce my work, however, I have crafted a ~~working~~ title:



A new telling of The Epic of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro,
as per the people's voices, my own study,
and a journey in the wake of a hero's:

– O –

Knowledge on the earliest days of Don Luis' life is scarce. There is simply no way of knowing where the man was born or how he came to join Leonilla's military forces. This leads many to believe that Don Luis was lowborn, as only lowborn can afford to be so unremembered. Indeed, the Epic itself tells his story in such a manner, though it cleverly insinuates a tension to his lowborn status, which ultimately goes unresolved as the story concludes, much to the chagrin of many readers and listeners. By my estimation, I would say the ambiguity is rather the point, but I get ahead of myself.

Leonillan campaigns in the south were even more numerous in the past, when the borders between us and the moors were a matter of mere spearpoints. For this reason, the standing armies of Leonilla of the year 973 were little more than mercenary groups paid to hold aloft a banner and sport our red and gold into battle. Less so rays of our incandescent nation of sunlight and more torches sent to march the fields when the sun was elsewhere. One such group was sent to the port of Santísimo, the largest of the New World ports. A conspiracy against the crown was afoot, and the lord of that city was suspected as one of its enablers and sentenced to death as an enemy of the crown. Those were times of conflict, but they were also times of great magic. This newly named traitor of the crown was in fact a wielder of unknowable dark magic, who alongside a cadre of like-minded conspirators, intended to take Leonilla by force. He resisted even as the crown's spears fell on his home, and the resulting clash leveled his entire villa in a display of frightening magical proportions. Out of the ashes of such a struggle rose Don Luis Alonso Pizarro alongside the former lord's young charge, a Casiba boy who himself inherited traces of his master's frightening powers. He would follow Don Luis to the very end alongside another unlikely ally: a Casiba pirate captain who ferried them out of Santísimo's ports and onto the conspiracy's trail.

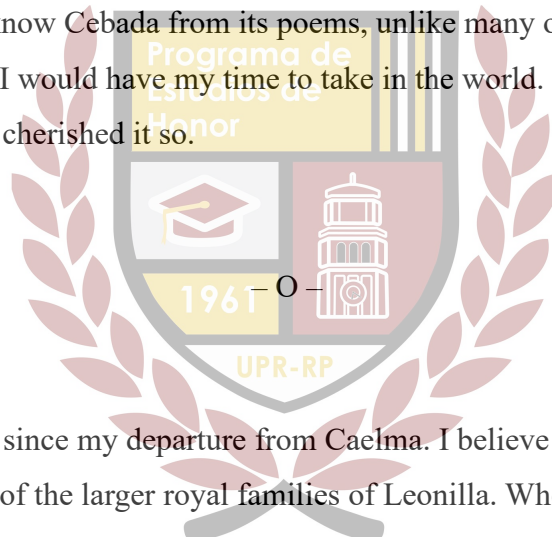
The rest of the tale can only truly be expanded upon in the very places it occurred. Nevertheless, a passable if not too condensed version of events follows:

Alongside his newfound party of allies, Don Luis follows the Cabal's trail to the Islands of San Miranda, the home of the Casiba peoples and the site of Leonilla's greatest conquest and defeat. There, he adventures for many moons alongside the proud natives of those lands, learning of their ways and relationship to their magical powers. He is chosen by an Casiba spirit to bear the light of a coming era. Thus, was he able to call upon the power of such a potent creature – just as the Founder Leonilla herself had done at the birth of our nation – and return to Leonilla a hero. His arrival seemed destined, as the land had just broken into a devastating civil war authored by the Cabal, and so he and his party, who were now six strong, laid waste to the enemy in the name of the Leonillan Crown. In the end, they felled the Cabal where they stood and gave chase to the last of their leaders. Here, Don Luis' tale reached its tragic end, for within that last battle he was betrayed by his own party, who fled the scene to save themselves from the Cabal leader's frightening powers. Stranded and alone, he fought until the Cabal was consigned to

oblivion, but alas, so was he. His party splintered soon after, but all were lost to history, though the epic closes with a grim reminder of the even grimmer fate of betrayers and the unfaithful.

The end of this epic will forever fill me with the deepest sorrow. No man of good nature deserves such a wretched fate, and yet the best man of that age was spared no kindness. Still he fought on, and that fact alone has forever made me wonder: is it in the fate of a hero to sacrifice it all? The Royal Academy offered me no answers; instead, I suppose I seek them in the voices of the people of Leonilla. After all, they are the people Don Luis sacrificed it all for.

I would return to the tale's first chapter, however. Santísimo is my first destination, as it was for Don Luis himself. I must speak more on the city's history and its relevance to this tale, but perhaps only once I reach it. For now, I would travel the lands in silence. I have never left Caelma's vicinity. I only know Cebada from its poems, unlike many of the noble men I studied with for nine years. Thus, I would have my time to take in the world. Perhaps then I will understand how Don Luis cherished it so.



It has been a week since my departure from Caelma. I believe I am currently in the territory of Mérida of one of the larger royal families of Leonilla. Where Caelma and the lands of the Royal Family of _____ lie in the center of the nation, Mérida stretches out to the west and toward the coast. On a map, it is as a great column dominating the western reaches. Rivers and mountain ranges to the southeast make the borders with Gran Aluciana, the southernmost reaches of Leonilla. To the north yet more mountain ranges stretch to cut off Mérida from Oviedo Lugo. Mérida is left with much fertile land, rivers aplenty, few mountains, and the window to the world's largest and most perilous sea.

Leonillans here are talked of as a stalwart and varied people. Indeed, Mérida is one of the longest standing territories of Leonillan history, with the highest lords and ladies – the family of Mérida, of course – descended from the very men who fought to found our nation. Indeed, some of their youngest studied alongside me. I found one ~~Antonio de Mérida Segundo~~ in particular to

cut an especially handsome figure, though I cannot say if it is special to his heritage. During the Civil War, Mérida was the least affected territory, as it already had long and lucrative ties with the Crown. Where Oviedo Lugo is a tapestry of ruined former territories kept together by the few houses that did not turn against the Crown in that dark time, Mérida stands as strong and resolute as ancient oaks do.

Mérida has been known to hurt in the past, however. Perhaps there is no better example than the New World Trade Treaty of 909, which established ports like Santísimo. The Casiba are, as a rule, a very protective people who demand more than they give and give only as much as they see fit. Yet they are also people of the New World, the masters of the Islands of San Miranda, where treasures of nature abound.

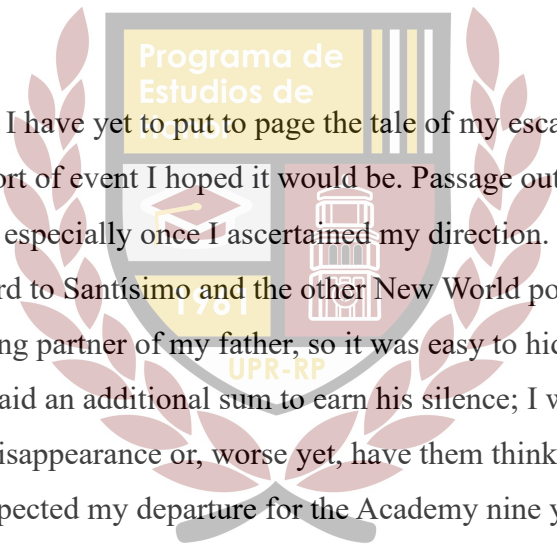
The remarkability of those islands had once pushed Leonilla into a nascent golden age of trade and discovery. The often maligned, yet perhaps simply misfortunate, Pinta Trade Group who first proposed crossing the great sea to reach the New World began this era. They fell to destitution and infamy when the Casiba retaliated against Leonilla with open conflict. Decades ensued of the greatest war Leonilla has known, and though our naval might was significant, Casiba magic and ingenuity won them the fight in the end. That golden age died almost as soon as it was birthed, though it died with much less ceremony. Indeed, many of Leonilla's current troubles can be traced back to that crushing defeat.

So it was that a century after the end of that war, and after commencing overtures for an equitable peace, Leonilla acquiesced to Casiba trade demands. The Casiba trade in goods, not coin, and they demanded a space where gold held no true weight. Several ports along Mérida's western coast were established, all of them under Casiba market control. They brought their own goods and operated a market they set the rules for. Those goods would then pass out of the ports where they would acquire value in Leonillan coinage. Cities like Santísimo would be overseen by Leonillan lords whose chief responsibility was upkeep of the land and enforcement of the law. This, of course, was not as beneficial to the lords of Mérida. They not only hosted the new Casiba guests and were deprived of direct profit for their goods, but they also saw more and more of a Casiba population growing outside of those cities.

If Gran Aluciana is where moors and Leonillans mingle, then Mérida has become the place where Casiba and Leonillans mix most. As I ride across the Méridan roads I have already

seen a number of Casiba in towns and cities – some even traveling! Never have I seen so many of them, doubly so because they are so easy to pick out. Their skins fall anywhere between clay and, in the most beautiful cases, bronze, their faces are open and plain with long noses which curve down. I have yet to see one of blue or green eyes; I only see them in darker and darker shades of brown, almost as black as the straight hair they keep cut short or tied into ponytails and braids behind them. Many even speak Leonillan well, though I have heard something of an accent in them, as well. The histories and epics say magic comes naturally to these people, but to my disappointment I have yet to see any spectacle.

– O –



It occurs to me that I have yet to put to page the tale of my escape from the Academy. Tragically, it was not the sort of event I hoped it would be. Passage out of Caelma was remarkably easy to secure, especially once I ascertained my direction. Merchants regularly leave Caelma to journey westward to Santísimo and the other New World ports. As it happens, one of these merchants is a drinking partner of my father, so it was easy to hide away in his carriage. Easy, but not free. I even paid an additional sum to earn his silence; I would rather not concern my parents with my own disappearance or, worse yet, have them think me mad.

I believe we all suspected my departure for the Academy nine years ago to be final. Once I earned my honors I would rightfully belong to an entirely new spectrum of society, I merely had to accomplish it. They were proud and tearful. Indeed, I still wept for being bereft of them even as I filed in alongside proud scions.

When my merchant friend took me through the city gates, I admit I hid beneath the tarps of his carriage. To see my father on the battlements in his soldier's garb would have risked me faltering. I refuse to do that, even if it pains them to learn I am not working in the annals or royal courts. Before long I will personally return to our home to give them a copy of my study, and hope that its pages give voice to the empty disappointment my absence may leave.

We shall soon arrive at Santísimo, if my new friend is any shrewd judge. In the weeks between Caelma and Santísimo, our lonely carriage has been joined by several other merchants

on the road. We made short stops at towns and cities and, seemingly every time, left with more merchants in their own carriages trailing after us. We are now a veritable caravan as Santísimo rolls up from between the hills on the horizon.



Chapter III

And so, Don Luis swung wide the gate
with Zumbador ablaze!
He stabbed and high he flew like light!
To sky blood flew always!

Always when Luis like light he flew!
Cabal's dark arts tore walls
of stone and steel and yet Luis flew
like light to force him fall!

Soria was free, they knew full well
the coming calm of peace!
Don Luis would bid the land "unite!"
his cape without a crease

He flew as light, he flew to peace!
He flew so calm, without a crease!



I heard that song last night in something of a gathering just outside Santísimo's gates. I was initially puzzled as to why we did not enter the city proper when we arrived yesterday evening. My merchant friend —~~I shall call him Ruiz~~— simply told me that the Casiba close entrance to new merchants at sunset. Quite the curious habit!

We simply grouped ourselves by the gate and walls so as to be fully in sight of the city guard (note: I took notice of Casiba soldiers amongst the Leonillans in the garrison. The history of Santísimo is a mixed one indeed!). Soon after, there burst a roaring bonfire that brought with it drinks aplenty alongside whatever rations the merchants felt like parting with. I confess I may have lost myself in drink slightly, and thus I did not collect as much information as was perhaps ideal. I did salvage that song, amongst several others.

Its name is "The Soiree of Soria", a ballad which recounts the sweeping victory Don Luis enabled in the northeastern city of Soria. The song itself is quite popular; indeed I have heard it several times in taverns and annals alike. In fact, scholars like my dear Enrique S. Valencia have remembered the event by the same name. Don Luis' victory that day was simply that simple and absolute; a soiree in all but name until the ballad was written and the histories which followed. That battle occurred at the tail end of the Civil War, when the Cabal's ultimate defeat was as assured as the coming of dawn. It also occurred on the other side of the nation, and yet 81 years later, it is sung by merchants around bonfires.

I also took the chance to speak with Héctor Pizarro, the lead singer, a merchant's assistant, both of whom had come from Gran Aluciana, regarding Don Luis' epic. I shall transcribe the exchange as best I am able:

J.R.C.: How did you come to learn "The Soiree of Soria"?

H.P.: Well, about as long as I've had reason to drink 'round people. Now, the Soiree is not my favorite of the war ballads but it's the one everybody loves to sing with a good cup or two down the way.

J.R.C.: Naturally! Soria is one of the few unabashed moments of victory in the war, doubly so because it was Don Luis who earned the day.

H.P.: Precisely! But you see, there are other ballads, the longer ones that like to take you all high on hope to plummet to defeat and despair. Only to come back up! Ol' Luis' tale is nothing but that!

J.R.C.: Until it ends, that is.

H.P.: Of course, of course. Folks still sing the songs, though. And we're all still here to do so.

J.R.C.: Do you think the entire tale happened, then?

H.P.: As in?

J.R.C.: Well, history has been known to twist facts. We all know The Epic of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro. But how much did it really?

H.P.: Well, truth be told I had my days of skepticism myself. But my cousin went into a convent for knowing her letters, and those convents – the good ones anyroad – can take you quite far. She went to Soria on the way up north to the big cathedrals in Jimelia or some such, and she said to me that everybody says its true. The old broken castle gate is right in the city center to this day and its got one single dent, like a man ran it through with a spear faster than the hawk soars.

J.R.C.: Incredible!

H.P.: That's the way of it! This world of ours has magic in it, no doubt. Not many get to see it and few get to use it but it must be real. Of course it sounds like everybody's lost their wits. Men flying by the power of spiritual birds, a lord who makes a castle fly, a kid who drags the river's current up the mountain paths... But it all happened.

J.R.C.: Does the proof matter, then? To you?

H.P.: It had to have happened. What's the point in caring, anyroad? The ballad's still as good even if it's all as made up as moor mirages in the deserts. At any rate, I am happier knowing a hero with my own last name changed the world.

I am not entirely certain how to feel about his last point, insightful though he was in spite of it. The epics are our history. Without them, even Leonilla's name becomes lost. The Academy taught us that, and I choose to believe it wholeheartedly. Rather, I must. The world is magical, on that I agree, but that magic must be real because it is how we are here. We speak of our history because it is who we are.

I believe Héctor Pizarro understands that somehow, judging by those last words of his. I imagine him as a child hearing the tale of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, and just that name rooting him that much firmer to our Leonilla. ~~That is precisely why this history matters so much to me, as well. To see that our world can allow a lowborn man not born to fate to see and change the world...! What else could I do but eat every word until they were as much mine as anybody else's?~~



Leonilla is home to many great cities. Caelma is my home, of course, and I know it well. I have visited a great many others alongside Don Luis himself, through his tale. Soria, Medina Real, Gozarna, Baerga, Aluciana, Collores, and Llantorrimas are some of my favorites. Santísimo had not gained entry to that list and yet, standing as I am in its harbor, I feel compelled to correct that.

X

As one of the only cities of New World trade, Santísimo carries with it an exotic flair. Indeed, I wandered around several markets, marveling first at wooden, clay, and stone instruments, tools, and relics. Pottery of clay of myriad shapes and sizes, each with intricately sculpted symbols that the merchants told me were the sun, frogs, birds, and faces which varied from the serenely sleeping to the snarling and grotesque! I saw, then, foods and spices; there were stalks covered in golden yellow buds hanging beneath a fine powder of the same hue, a bright red powder which a Casiba man was mixing in water and handing off to his brethren,

several different dried seeds of so many sizes that the thought occurred to me: what fine things to string into patterns and hang off one's neck!

I see now where the Casiba get their predilection for things of the earth. Oh, but of course I saw stalls bedecked in gold and several jewels I had never seen before. They were molded in curiuser shapes than I had first thought, making faces like the Casibas' and patterns like the ones I saw before. There was a new one here, however. It was an angry Casiba face with great arms swinging in circular motions – a special sort of storm they call a “hurricane”.

I believe I caught my first glimpse of Casiba magic as well. At first, I thought they were simply sizing up their metal trinkets, but the more I looked, the sooner I realized that they were shaping metals and stones with nothing but the weight of their fingers! All the while they hummed strange songs in their native tongues and moved in rhythms as if listening to music I could not hear! They pressed and bent the materials as if made of clay or wet sand. At one point, I held a bracelet made of gold, one which a young Casiba artisan had just made before my eyes and, much to my embarrassment, I tried to mold it myself! It did not give in. My amazement was writ on my face, but when I looked at this talented artisan he merely seemed bored with me. I will admit I expected a spectacle out of the Casiba's magic, but to see something so mundane was somehow more enthralling.

Some strange determination possessed me, and I resolved to find myself another such sculptor. In doing so, I noticed another beauty of Santísimo's. The city seems to produce a thousand sounds all at once, but I learned to discern in it many different tongues. Lionsspeak dominated, naturally, but I also recognized Lucian in the air. To think even the moors with their desert treasures are drawn to the bounty of the New World! Some few tongues struck out as even stranger, but none were as arresting as the Casiba language. They spoke it amongst themselves (even now I hear it gliding along the harbor while writing this), but I took notice of how swift they switch to Lionsspeak whenever any Leonillan drew near. Now, I cannot well hide my whiteness of skin or bloneness of hair, so I cannot go very far with them.

That said, I only heard their peculiar language directed at me once. There are many pillars around the city, and all of them sport strange idols. Many are stone, but I have seen wooden ones, and shell idols here in the harbor. Some look like masks and others like crude renditions of people, but most feature three points, with the middle one being the largest of the three. They

resemble the mountains of their home islands. Of these shell idols, I saw an older Casiba shaping one in their unique way. The brittleness of an empty shell seemed suddenly so lithe even I could bend it. I must have startled the woman when I walked up to her to ask on the particulars of her method because she immediately shouted several recriminations in their tongue. I quickly fled, lest my intentions be misconstrued.

All of Santísimo's roads seem constructed to take you to the harbor; even the road I entered through leads directly here. Said harbor is built in a crescent-shaped bay and, following the ships and piers themselves are clusters of Casiba merchants in their stalls and tents. Interspersed among them are roofed structures of Casiba make. They are round, open on all sides, and held by strong wooden pillars. From there, Casiba officials survey all the trade, ensuring that their particular rules are followed at all times. At the center of this great crescent of commerce is where I stand. A large empty rectangular space lies here, bordered by tall stones with Casiba symbols on them. A statue of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro stands proud at the core.

Just as in Caelma, Don Luis dominates the heart of the city of Santísimo. Unlike Caelma, however, this one is backed by the sunset, as opposed to pointing westward with Zumbador. Furthermore, it is a much larger piece, easily double the size of the one in Caelma. It was also clearly not carved by Fernando Santiago – this stonework looks to be a result of Casiba methods. Unsurprising, I suppose.

I suppose further that, though Don Luis doubtlessly has a statue in all of the cities I have come to love through the tale, each of the cities must have their own manner of remembrance. Soria surely does, though there the statue of Don Luis may be unnecessary. Surely, Héctor Pizarro's shattered gate is memorabilia enough! I jest, of course. At any rate, the statue here is truly perplexing to me. Don Luis stands dressed in regal Leonillan armor, but on his face are painted the bright red colors of Casiba skin markings. Despite its great size some enterprising sort painted that on him in the way I have seen before. Indeed, the Casiba garrison I spied the evening before had markings on their faces and arms, bright red like the spice I saw mixed into water just earlier. Are these a warrior's markings?

More perplexing still are the five smaller statues behind Don Luis. They are his companions, those who would betray him in the very end. History does not remember their

names – I would say it refuses to – and statues of them are exceedingly rare. I should mention them now, as they will doubtlessly return to the forefront of my discussions:

The warlock: A young Casiba man who acquires the Cabal's magic through tragic circumstances and becomes Don Luis' first companion. He was something of a foster child of Don Luis and remained his most loyal companion until the very first and last betrayal.

The captain: The most wicked of the five. She was a pirate captain when Casiba pirates were common. She is also the one who abandoned Don Luis in the final battle and bid the others follow her.

The sellsword: A moor whose services Don Luis earned by overwhelming their not inconsiderable might. Don Luis commanded loyalty through power just as much as virtue, though they too ultimately betrayed him.

The statue: A woman carved of Casiba stone and given life to be a weapon. Don Luis taught her greater virtues, but she grew cowardly and fled the final battle.

The giant: The supposed last giant. He is a figure of much controversy. Being creatures of legends, the Epic is rather unclear on whether he truly was a giant or a prodigiously tall Casiba. Perhaps there is some truth to Héctor Pizarro's words because, well, what should it matter? Beings like this are a relic of the past, and as such I take my position on the side of prodigiously tall islanders.

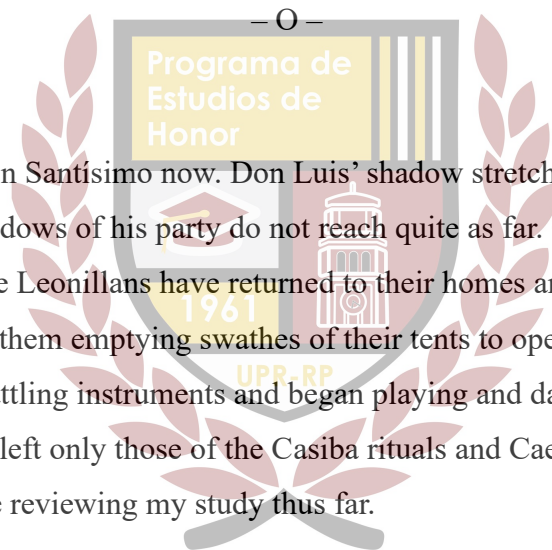
Don Luis' tale is one of heroism and virtue, and there is no virtue in the five who left him to die that day. Many – myself included – believe them undeserving of immortalization. But here they are carved at just the height of a man, standing away from Don Luis and looking at the horizon, no doubt looking away from him in shame. Yet the Casiba carved them with just as much care. I took note as well that they are all dressed in Casiba fashion, unlike the great Don Luis. As I drew closer, I saw the same markings on their skin.

Here, I bore witness to an interesting person. I saw a Casiba man approach the statues with a container of that same red mixture and begin applying the markings. Meticulously did he paint their stone skins. I interviewed him at once, but he proved obtuse. My questions on their

relative size and positioning seemed unheard, but when I inquired after the marking, he said only this:

“They fought for a long time, and they did it for us. They would want to be remembered like this. We will never forget to give them their due.”

I admit the statement has left me chewing on my cheek. Of course they fought for us, but they also deprived us of the hero who made it all possible. For them to want to be remembered as honored warriors is as nonsensical as bending stone with your hands. Perhaps there is a reason for it, a mundane one by Casiba reckoning. But that is enough for now.



The sun is setting in Santísimo now. Don Luis’ shadow stretches over where I sit, cutting the harbor in half. The shadows of his party do not reach quite as far. Caelma seems so far away from this land now that the Leonillans have returned to their homes and the inns. The Casiba remained, however. I saw them emptying swathes of their tents to open rectangular spaces where they brought drums and rattling instruments and began playing and dancing. Now the endless sounds of Santísimo have left only those of the Casiba rituals and Caelma feels distant. I stared at them for some time before reviewing my study thus far.

I had until now refrained from considering my adventure too closely. Weeks had passed and the enthusiasm was a simple matter to maintain. Here in Santísimo I have seen the sea and heard Casiba voices and seen a visage of Don Luis I do not quite recognize. My enthusiasm is begging to know whether it is true or if I am merely bereft of my own choice. Perhaps the idleness allowed me to toy with such notions.

Before leaving Caelma, I sent a letter to a former teacher of mine. He was a chronicler, an avid enjoyer of history, but he left the Academy some years ago before I truly came into my own. At that time, I had not made the decision to embark on this journey. When I did, I knew he had to be the first to know. Luckily this teacher of mine was a native of Santísimo; he made it clear that he would return here when he left. I have shared all of my plans with him via my letter and now I

simply await him in the most obvious place. My idle mind has never been of much benefit to me, and I have often found myself wondering if the worst or most inopportune happenstance befalls me. Prayers to the Mother have rarely assuaged my doubts; I doubt they will now.

Of course, it was then that he deigned to speak to me. In that upturned dusk I felt as if returned to a warm classroom overlooking the rows of rooftops of Caelma.

“I had no idea you intended to talk to the Casiba by antagonizing them. Were you not trying to collect the voices of the people?”

He snickered from behind a tangled beard. I must have given him some puzzled stare because, as he neared, he glanced at Don Luis and spoke back,

“Where you and this statue now stand was a rectangle of dirt. It is where they did their areito. On barren dirt and surrounded by petroglyphs they carve with their own hands. The statue was ordered here by the Lord and a new stone platform along with it.”

“Is that why...”

“Yes, good Joshua. You do not seem the most amicable company, standing as you do gawking at this statue. They made it themselves as an act of bitter defiance. Then, the Lord forced them place it here.”

I could not help but cast my gaze about as if trying to find in the distant Casiba the recriminating stares. They continued with their areitos in their new spaces, unbothered by my being there.

“Mother’s tits, Joshua. Here in Santísimo, you will have to learn more than just Leonilla’s one precious history. Where it concerns our dear Don Luis, what you know will hardly be enough. Pick yourself up, man! Knowing you, lodging has yet to come to your mind, Mother knows how you traveled half the nation on a merchant carriage.”

“Ah, I neglected to ask.”

“So, you did. Come to my home, then. We shall have a talk, my dear Joshua.”

Chapter IV

Lucás Almeida has always been a fascinating man to me. While many of the lecturers of the Academy relished any and all opportunities to exposit on whatever subject they felt inclined to on that day, Lucás was a different sort altogether. Not many were fond of him due to his Alucian heritage, but his family's deep pockets assured him lifelong education from private tutors here in Santísimo. The tutors were Leonillan, of course, and it did not take long for him to become a knowledgeable historian and scribe to the lords of Mérida.

He somehow became a lecturer for the Academy, though he did not seem very fond of the place or its people. Indeed, he seemed to have disliked the alumni as much as they disliked him. And yet few were so well-versed in history and in tongues. He is fluent in no less than seven languages! A man like that somehow took an interest in me, and he offered me private lessons for several years. That was until his departure, of course. On that day, the two of us took residence in a seedy tavern in Caelma and spent much of his coin and much of our health on drink. I had never done such a thing, but he told me he was something of a town drunk when not occupied in the Academy.

“Seeing people speak and come together; it reminds me of home!”

He said as much. It was a community spirit I had not truly seen since leaving the corners of Caelma I grew up in. I hazarded the question of his place of birth – rumors regarding precisely that circulated ad nauseam in the Academy, what with the Alucian origin contrasting with his labor in Mérida.

“I come from Santísimo. My parents were merchants. When they saw that port city, they traded even their carriage in exchange for a home. There they stayed until I left for Mérida's grand lords and ladies.”

I did not quite believe him then. A strange detail sifted through my memories, however. He had demonstrated fluent Lionspeak, Lucian, the language of scripture, a strange clicking

language from The Great Continent south of Cebada, and two languages from the greater Jimelian continent. I never heard the seventh. And so I asked,

“Do you speak the way the Casiba do?”

He did. Whatever he told me then, which he said with the most obnoxious smile, it was definitely the language I did not hear again until walking into Santísimo. That is the man I called the closest thing to a mentor. If anybody would understand my quest, it would be him. Or so I hoped.

– O –

The following is a transcription of my conversation with my mentor Lucas Almeida as we sat in his home enjoying dinner and drinks:

L.A.: I do not say this lightly, dearest Joshua, but I knew that Academy would not be the end of you. So many of the young lords and fools there will remain as unremarkably noble as they have always been. But you? I truly hoped you would find something different.

J.R.C.: Different from a high status and life of plenty? You truly care, master.

L.A.: Oh, leave that title halfway across the nation. I am a mere old friend that you decided to visit on this journey of yours.

J.R.C.: If you insist, master. I would like to begin with-

L.A.: Was leaving the Academy easy, Joshua?

J.R.C.: Pardon?

L.A.: Your whole life was in Caelma, was it not? Then suddenly you're here. I hardly believed your letter when it arrived. Yes, you were a special sort of mmm... manic. Yes.

J.R.C.: I resent that.

L.A.: But to think you would leave the place altogether! Riding on a merchant carriage halfway across the nation – my dear, that is magnificent!

J.R.C.: It did not cost much.

L.A.: But was it worth it?

J.R.C.: ...

L.A.: I respect you for it, Joshua. I truly do. I had my home to return to, but you left yours well and truly behind.

J.R.C.: Is that why you left?

L.A.: Bah! I left that damned place because it was useless to me, that is all. This peninsula we're in – Cebada – it is magnificently and profusely bloodstained. Wars with ourselves, and before that? Wars with the Casiba across the sea, and before that? Wars with the Alucians, and before that?! Well, I truly could not find anything at all.

J.R.C.: You meant to learn the story of our founding?

L.A.: I knew that well, dear Joshua. I wanted to know if this place has known a meaningful peace. Not a lull between conflicts – peace. You may not know this, but that Academy promised us lecturers access to the crown's oldest records.

J.R.C.: Truly? But that dates back to Year 0! Almost a millennium, predating even the days of Leonilla the founder!

L.A.: Precisely! But it was more of the same, dear Joshua. Records upon records of the same. No new knowledge. Nothing to indicate that Leonilla had ever been any different to what it is now. Always an enemy to face and conquer, always a front to maintain with spears and cannons.

J.R.C.: ... And then you left?

L.A.: And then I approached the King and Queen themselves. Asked for some other records, some other glimpse into the far past. They initially declined my advances with no interest. But I suppose I insisted too much and they grew inflamed. That is why I left, dearest Joshua. What I wanted to learn could not be learned. Not from them. Perhaps not at all. The place was utterly useless to me. So I left.

J.R.C.: You gave up?

L.A.: Oh, I was told to give up. So I did.

J.R.C.: By the King and Queen?

L.A.: No. Well, after a fashion, I suppose. I was approached by officials bearing the crown's colors. They warned against this avenue of inquiry of mine, saying it was "unbecoming of a man of my stature". Furthermore, should I desire to risk such a standing, I was given the option to rescind my position as lecturer. So I did. As soon as I was able, I simply packed everything I had and left within the fortnight.

J.R.C.: Is that not too forceful for mere questions?

L.A.: Take that up with them, my dear. They read all my writings as well, of course. All of us lecturers had to confirm all our writings with the crown's scribes, the worthless bunch of naysaying acolytes. I was rather surprised they did not banish me sooner, all told.

J.R.C.: And what have you done since then?

L.A.: Absolutely nothing worth their trouble! Not that I am worth much at the moment, holed up as I am in Santísimo. I would hope as much, at any rate.

J.R.C.: Does such vaguery count as an answer, master?

L.A.: Oh, but I am proud, my dear Joshua the keen! Because you must know, I am working on something rather special. Of late, I have taken an interest in the languages that we speak, and as such, I am compiling a dictionary for Casiba words and their meanings in our own Lionspeak. Most importantly, however, I am surveying the people of Santísimo to gather the weight of their words beyond what is plain in text or speech.

J.R.C.: Why would you dedicate yourself to something like that?

L.A.: I am doing it for much the same reason you did. Or do you not feel a distinct dissatisfaction in the way our great Don Luis has been rendered? Actually, I believe it may be my turn to ask the questions. You have committed yourself to this journey of yours out of a mere intellectual pursuit?

J.R.C.: Well, it is as you say, master. Don Luis' epic is grand, indeed, but I would have its legacy beyond the printed words. I would see what people across the land have to say.

L.A.: Why?

J.R.C.: Because I believe it to be valuable and worth exploring.

L.A.: And for that you left your home, your one chance at a life of comfort and status, and all but assured being remembered as a pariah amongst your peers?

J.R.C.: Well, I do it because I care.

L.A.: But why, Joshua? Why so much passion for this figure out of legend, this- this hero from our past?

J.R.C.: I believe he is the most important man to have fought for Leonilla, master. That is why. A poor man from nothing somehow becoming a great hero who saved everything? Of course I am aware of how much that emboldens me. ... The Academy gave me much; I will admit that. But it did not give me what I wanted most, and that was to intimately learn of this land's richest histories. I have decided to bet on the land and the people in it.

L.A.: I hope you understand, Joshua, that I do not push you to be so frank out of curiosity. Leonilla has changed much in recent years, but it remains the same old creature. I do not trust that creature anymore. If you were to tell me this was a passing fancy then I would tell you to return to Caelma and disappear to its slums, infamy and all.

J.R.C.: Why?

L.A.: Because I am proud of you, my dear Joshua. I am proud and I would not let you endanger yourself so blatantly without knowing it meant everything to you.

J.R.C.: What do you mean by that? Why would this be-

L.A.: Don Luis Alonso Pizarro is a great piece of national history. As are all the greatest heroes, warlords, kings, and legends. Leonilla is a jealous creature, and it refuses to see Cebada as anything other than its own. It was not a passing fancy that led to the statue you saw in the port. The Epic of Don Luis touches a deeper vein in this land, one which may run all the way to its heart. Do you understand me, Joshua? People knew Don Luis. We walk in the cities and roads he

occupied and saved. There is weight to a legacy like that, and narratives like that are built on agreements or silence. Education, if you will. Travel Leonilla and meet many people, record a great many things, discover even more if you must. But keep your wits about you. This tale has much behind it that even I do not know; I know because the Casiba themselves are especially guarded around it, though they are no danger to you.



Chapter IV

My conversation with my old teacher left me, truthfully, somewhat rattled since that evening. I have remained in Santísimo for a handful of days while he transcribes a copy of his glossary for me – he insisted upon it, apparently certain that the Casiba have some crucial role to play in my study and that, furthermore, I would need help understanding them.

It is strange, however. I had never seen this man with a countenance as grim as the one he sported at the time. I could not help but feel gripped by his demeanor, even as it has failed to darken his brow again. It is no strange thing for teachers like him to grow as fond of their students as parents do to their children. Perhaps he is nothing but a worrywart. Perhaps the shadow of the Academy still looms large in his heart, as does his disappointment, no doubt.

I will not stop my pursuit for anybody, however. No matter what, I will see it through. At any rate, I have spent the intervening days wandering Santísimo. The statue of Don Luis here – and its contentious history – has left something of an imprint in me. If the lord of Santísimo truly forced the Casiba to have the statue over their communal grounds, then why did the Casiba build it themselves with such care? Why build his companions? Why adorn it to this day? Such questions I intended to answer in these days by following the recommendation Lucás gave me. It has been a somewhat confounding endeavor, which I have nonetheless transcribed here.

– O –

Note: This forthcoming section of dearest Joshua's study has been appended by myself, Lucás Almeida, upon my repeated insistence. As ambitious and permanently in his own head as Joshua is, he occasionally fails to see the view in front of him – Santísimo is a place of grand views which are shaped by the Casiba most of all. To understand what they have to say, a basic understanding of them must be reached by the reader. This I argued to Joshua over several days,

but I suspect he does not understand the point. No matter. To the benefit of the Leonillan reader with less than surpassing knowledge on these people, here is a much abbreviated (~~on Joshua's insistence, though as I read his work, I see brevity is not his greatest asset~~) account of their culture and history:

Notes on their culture:

- Contrary to our worship of the single Holy Mother who created the world and her children – mankind – in it, the Casiba have much less centralized beliefs. Rather than congregate in our domed churches to render prayer unto the heavens in song as we do, they believe in many scattered spirits who reside everywhere in the world. They commune with these spirits constantly and for all manner of advice utilizing carved idols called cemíes.
- Cemíes can be made of stone, wood, shells, and other materials and take several forms. Sometimes they are masks or humanoid effigies, but the most common shape is that of a three-pointed stone. Many have carved faces of beasts or men. They are quite the spectacular sight. The Casiba believe them to be inhabited by the spirits of the same names, though the plural form of the spirits is “cemí’no”. As well, they believe they hold great power and influence over the world.
- Perhaps the flexibility of their beliefs is what allowed many of them to take in the Holy Mother’s words for themselves. Certainly, that belief was forced upon them centuries ago and was forcefully thrown aside once the Leonillan threat was neutralized. Nevertheless, in contemporary times, some Casiba have been known to willingly engage with the beliefs, though they incorporate them into their own systems, as opposed to becoming devout followers of only the Holy Mother, as the Holy See no doubt prefers. Several tensions have arisen here, since the Holy Mother can be the only true goddess of the land, but the Casiba merely incorporate her into a wider group of great nature spirits.
- Interestingly, many Casiba here in Cebada take up a second name, usually from our conventions. They have found that doing so, and furthermore that keeping their original

names hidden, improves their relations with Leonillans and other foreigners. A friend of mine who uses the name Diego hides his first name of Canóbana, only disclosing it amongst his own and with close friends like me. They do not much care for the accuracy of the language, however, even if they know its inner workings well. There is even a man who goes by the name María, and when asked about it, routinely says that he simply enjoys the musicality of the name and cares little for its gendered nature. Much like their language overall, they use their Casiba names amongst themselves and other trusted friends and are quite adept at switching to their Leonillan names if necessary.

- Oral tales: As opposed to their flexibility of religious beliefs, the Casiba were much more reticent to begin writing. In port cities, they began employing record-keepers to oversee and chronicle daily trades which they store in vast libraries they nonetheless memorize themselves. That keen ability to memorize words is what makes the written word rather unnecessary to them. As a bard learns their songs, the Casiba learn vast and complex histories and tales. They have people whose role is to commit to memory these histories which are then passed down to their successors. They share these tales frequently, especially in their areitos, and with such accuracy that a trained scholar like Joshua would have much to learn from simple conversations with them. We shall see if he is up to the task for now.

- During the Leonillan Civil War, many Casiba sided with the Monarchy, who promised them protection at the request of Don Luis. Santísimo and other cities were spared the worst of the fighting as the war dragged ever north and eastward.

Discovery: Relations with the Casiba date back to 321 years ago. More precisely, the year 737, when a long-forgotten mercantile guild crossed the great ocean west of Cebada under the auspices of the Monarchy. They searched for easier trade routes to the far east but found themselves in islands of eternal spring and strange new peoples, or so they said. Their words proved honeyed enough, however, because over the course of several more

expeditions, they created settlements on those islands – now baptized as the Islands of San Miranda – and began the labor of cross-ocean trade. In order to do this, however, they went from learning of the locals to enslaving them.

The Casiba War, or The War for the West: Officially declared in the year 750, this was the inevitable conflict Leonilla caused on those islands. Of course, the bloodshed began long before the year 750, if the infamous account of Friar Pedro Tomás are to be believed. Slavery and the taking of lands made the Casiba respond in kind; they put to work the magics for which they are so renowned. The war itself was much less organized than typical wars. The Casiba held the lay of the land, while Leonilla held overwhelming firepower and technological advantage. Nevertheless, Casiba numbers, their slow-going but eventual transition from individual rebellious cells to organized fronts, their magics, and the logistical difficulties of Leonilla's ocean travel led to a Casiba victory in the year 804. The Leonillans leave the Islands of San Miranda altogether in their most crushing defeat to date.

Reunion: Over a century later, Leonillan envoys cross the ocean once more, looking for riches and trade as that ill-fated mercantile guild did so long ago. The nation's continuing decline due to several failed wars caused this change of heart toward the Casiba. In the year 904, they met with the caciques (the lords, we shall say) of the Islands. In the year 909, several influential Casiba lords, shamans, warriors, and sailors travel back to Leonilla, and set shore here in Santísimo where they negotiate with many Leonillan lords and the crown themselves. The tense days that followed resulted in all Casiba being granted Leonillan citizenship, the establishment of several trade laws, and the founding of trade ports like Santísimo. The Casiba would have no Leonillans on the Islands; instead, they would cross the seas themselves, bringing their own goods to select ports and under their laws of commerce. This truly begins at the tail end of the year 910.

Exchange: The rest of that century presented many difficulties and opportunities for all involved. While Leonilla held – and still holds, truthfully – many superstitions against the Casiba, they could not well argue with the revitalization of trade that they provided. Port cities like Santísimo grew exceedingly large and wealthy, and Leonilla became a center of commerce across the lands once more. More discoveries followed, as well. Proper

scholarship into their special magics began and quickly found the potential of all men to harness said abilities. Though few do, with proper training and understanding of the natural world, all men can exert power like the Casiba once do so easily. Leonillan spirituality took longer to acclimate to the idea, though in present times that budding field has long since been cut and torched. As well, deeper understandings of Casiba traditions allowed for better integrations between our cultures, which is best seen in places like Santísimo; I will explain this better at a later time.

Don Luis: Though born a Leonillan commoner, this hero's epic is much more involved with the Casiba than it is with the romantic and chivalrous heroes of Leonilla's past. For one, his companions were all either Casiba or some other being from the Islands. As well, his power – that of a divine beast akin to those of Leonilla's ancient past – were gained during his time on the Islands. As the epic says, it allowed him great speed, flight, and the creation of blinding lights. Scholars believe the beast to have been a kind of bird native to the Islands called a zumbador and, alternatively, a colibri.

The Cabal: Perhaps the most interesting part of the epic for me, they were a secret council of corrupt lords who learned Casiba magic and used it to drive Leonilla into its first civil war. It was onto this conflict that Don Luis and his allies had their most remarkable moments – the ones my dear Joshua has always been so enamored by. In the end, though he is betrayed by his own, Don Luis vanquishes all of the villainous Cabal. His allies, mostly disappear from the records, though it is presumed they returned to Leonilla. Only the Captain is heard from again – they directed an attack against the crown in Caelma and were ultimately killed in the attempt. Such a brazen and rather unmotivated act led to much harsher persecutions of pirates and more stringent security efforts in port cities across Cebada.

Note: What is most curious to me of this epic's cast is just how many of them ultimately served to heighten the suspicions against the Casiba. The Cabal were proof of the maligned and ambitious lords who fractured Leonilla, yes, but they also wielded magics of the Casiba to do so. The ultimate villains of the piece could be argued to be Don Luis' companions, who fled to the Islands from whence they came.

I am circling a point here. Having lived in Santísimo all my life, I can say without a doubt that the times of Casiba trade prosperity in Leonilla have waned for some time now. Santísimo is the largest of the trade cities, and thus can endure the most, but even it has seen a decline. Perhaps the novelty of Casiba goods has run its course, though I doubt it. Leonilla is a lover of history, and thus I cannot help but look back at the epic of Don Luis for some answers. I see in it premonitions of today's times. The suspicions against Casiba have made their communities outside of ports shrink and struggle. Dangerous magic became a talking point of the Monarchy and the Holy See. Trade struggles, as do their communities. More and more do I see Leonillan print speak ill of the Casiba while revisiting and affirming tales of Leonilla's great histories. I hear the Casiba tongue less and less even within Santísimo.

May this suffice as my signature for my contribution, and may this contribution be of aid to you, dear reader,

Lucás Almeida



I am sure that my old master will not be too taken aback by my using the bottom of his written page. Paper economy, and all that.

Over the course of these few days, I have struggled to put together testimonies from Santísimo's Casibas. They are more guarded around the tale of Don Luis than any other subject I have thought to bring them, though I have received some worthwhile information. Groups go silent if I speak with them – quieter still once Don Luis is mentioned! They do not say a word to me in their tongue, and if they do, it is snickered between themselves. I cannot help but feel that I am not included into some sort of inner circle only they can see. Nevertheless, my job remains the same. Here I document the questions I asked, alongside the usable answers from the few who provided them:

What records are kept by the people of Santísimo regarding Don Luis?

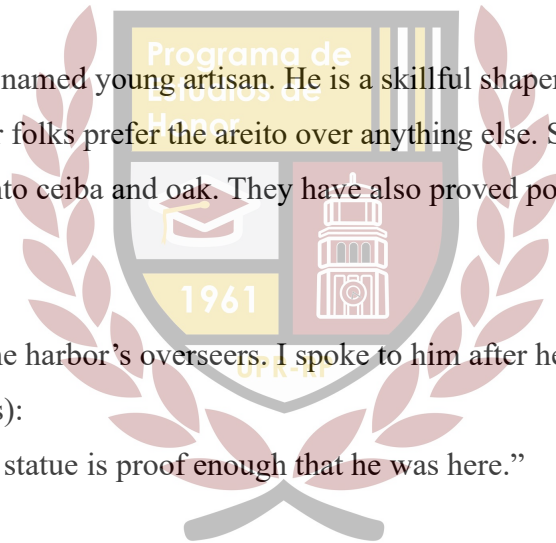
- Ester (older woman, the very same who directed harsh words at me on my first day here):
“They’re sometimes in the songs of our areitos. Go to one and listen for yourself.”

Note: I followed her advice and went alongside Lucás to the first one I found. I understood nothing of their language, though Lucás translated; it was a tale of an old cacique named Caguax from the time of The War for the West. No mention of Don Luis.

- Marcos (a rather beautiful man who performed in the areito):
“Though your Don Luis spent little time here in our city, this is where they all first came together. It is where they set sail and where they returned after their journey across the sea. Those are the tales that we speak the most of here.”

- María (a strangely named young artisan. He is a skillful shaper of wood):
“Many of the older folks prefer the areito over anything else. Some of us have taken to etching our tales into ceiba and oak. They have also proved popular with traders and locals!”

- Jumacao (one of the harbor’s overseers. I spoke to him after he stopped me from talking to the dockworkers):
“Written? No. The statue is proof enough that he was here.”

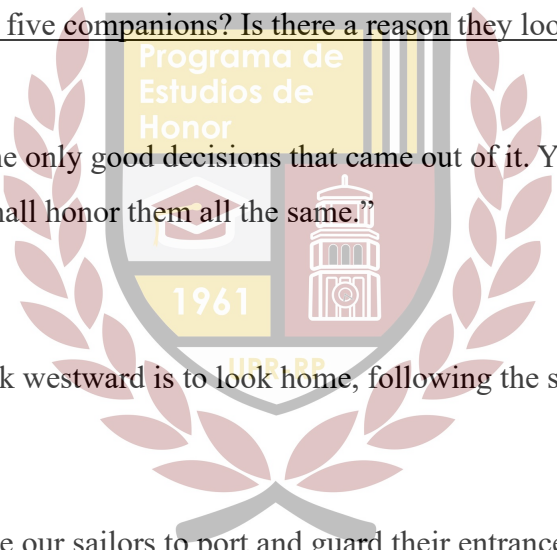


What is your opinion of the statue of Don Luis at the port’s center?

- Sofía (a woman working out of the local brothel):
“Take it down.”
- María:
“It has definitely become something of an attraction. I am glad we take care of it, but I would rather move it to have our areitos there once more. Also, don’t ask old Ester about it.”

- Jumacao:
“We have requested the lord to move it three different times, which he has refused. I also once caught a younger man trying to ruin it.”
“How, you ask? You know our magic. Something like that.”
- Caridad (a passerby trudging along three children):
“It is of remarkable craftsmanship, even with all that happened. I help my husband reapply the markings sometimes.”
Note: The children seem to love the statue. I offered them food.

Why the importance of the five companions? Is there a reason they look westward?

- 
- Ester:
“That was one of the only good decisions that came out of it. You pearls think them monsters, but we shall honor them all the same.”
 - Marcos:
“For us here, to look westward is to look home, following the sun’s trail.”
 - Jumacao:
“They also welcome our sailors to port and guard their entrance. Although their welcome is not as grand as the one Don Luis offers you coming from the east.”
 - Mabó (a young boy working a tavern where I stopped to drink):
“Well that’s because they say goodbye to the sun! And Don Luis welcomes it back!”
 - Caridad:
“You met my husband when he reapplied the markings? What luck! Yes, we both think they were all heroes to us. That’s why they matter.”

Finally, there were several questions that did not yield anything useful. Of them, the most interesting was the one I expected to receive the most interesting answers from:

What do you think of Don Luis?

Perhaps I cannot read them very well, but I believe they held opinions but preferred not to disclose them. Marcos was the only one to give me a good answer:

“We... we do not quite see that person the same way you likely do. They were a hero, the only hero of this land to have stood for us. For that, there is praise and love. It is difficult to speak on. I fear that story is too much our own. We respect many versions of stories, because no one story is to be told in only one way, but it’s difficult to explain how we understand them.”

At that, I asked what he meant by differing versions. I think he attempted to deflect. He said,

“There is no sole truth, especially as stories grow older and more people know it. That is good, for it means there is always something worthy of sharing when you meet somebody new or meet an old friend again.”

I found the sentiment heartwarming. He noticed,

“I am pleased to see you so receptive! Many Leonillans prefer to think of these things as a single thing. I once visited a congregation of the Holy Mother in the south of Santísimo and I spoke at length with the priest. To think only one text – a sacred one – can exist, well, that was perplexing. Our tales hold that we emerged from a great cave on the islands. It was called Cacibajagua. But know this, we all claim our island to be the island with the Cacibajagua. They all are, so it does not matter that none of them may be. That is good; it matters not. But your people would see it differently. You are all in search of truths and absolutes, making sure everything is as understandable and organized as a market stall. That is good for a merchant, yes, because they want their wares to be understood and sold to others. But for stories? The nature of things? Why see such a thing that way and then push it forward as the only thing worth knowing?”

Plainly, though he avoided the answer I sought, I believe he told me something else of note. To think their tale of Don Luis could be so distinct that they avoid speaking on it altogether

for fear of our response. It is a strange thing to hear, and I would know more, but Marcos instead offered me dinner and then offered something much greater: passage to my next destination. My ruminations on what he said will have to wait.



Chapter V

I told Lucás of my new destination immediately. In a short few days, the town of Añoranza will hold a festival in honor of Don Luis, and Marcos will hold an areito with a group of friends for the Casiba community of the town. Añoranza was already my next destination. It is, after all, the mysterious town whose inhabitants were stolen away by the Cabal. There, Don Luis overpowered the sellsword and expanded his group. Something in that place convinced Don Luis to set sail across La Cuenca and reach the Islands of San Miranda. Such a mystique requires study, and now I even have a new friend who will take me there! However, that meant leaving Santísimo earlier than expected.

I only hope Lucás finished his glossary quickly.

I have transcribed here my final conversation with Lucás Almeida, taken just before my departure from Santísimo:

We stood upon one of the smaller peers of Santísimo's massive bay. Marcos and his fellows, all of which are apparently sailors, occupy themselves preparing our humble barge for the several days' journey to Añoranza.

L.A.: How are you feeling, Joshua?

J.R.C.: I am well, as things can be...

Note: a pause followed

L.A.: ... Indeed! And what have you thought of Santísimo?

J.R.C.: I must be sincere with you, Lucás. I cannot help but feel I have somewhat wasted my time here in Santísimo. Certainly, it is a beautiful place! The views these Casiba have are... novel. But I cannot say I find them very useful.

L.A.: And that is due to...?

J.R.C.: For starters, I feel I only half-spoke with them. I think they take for granted that I understand how they work, and when I ask further, they devolve into avoidance and *you do not understand*. How am I to speak with such people?

L.A.: Dear me, and what makes you certain you asked the right questions?

Note: Another pause.

L.A.: You must learn how to speak with people, my dear Joshua. Properly! That is something those old fools of Caelma were never going to learn, much less teach you.

J.R.C.: They were simple questions! Yet I barely got enough answers to fill a handful of pages. I do not think I am deficient in-

L.A.: But you may very well be! You are a stranger here in a city with *history*. Picture this: a lettered man comes from outside the city and begins asking questions about one of the most controversial men in *their* history – why, they likely take you for an errant royal who treats them as novelty.

J.R.C.: ... Then, what would you recommend?

L.A.: Let's begin with getting with getting you on that ship and ferrying you off. You've barely started this journey of yours, good Joshua. You seek the voices of the people? Then learn to listen and get them to talk to you, besides. Stumble here in Santísimo if you must. But you have a long way to go yet. So learn, damn you!

Note: I received a firm slap on the shoulder at this point.

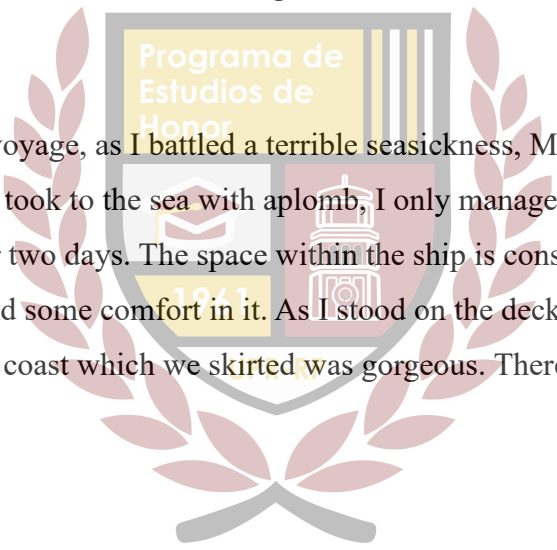
L.A.: Take this, Joshua. It is far from finished, thanks to your endless rush, but I pray it is helpful to you nonetheless.

I am aboard Marcos' ship now. Santísimo retreats from my sight slowly, as do the many tongues that float about the city's air. Now, Casiba voices are all I hear. Contrary to most of the

people I spoke with recently, Marcos' crew does not bother to use Lionspeak around me, though of course they are not addressing me themselves. Perhaps it is a matter of practicality.

Lucás' words have remained with me as he faded into a small shape in the distance. I still doubt the relevance of the Casiba to my project and am beginning to think his affection for the city may have influenced him. Still, upon his insistence, I have kept his tome, incomplete as it is, and will refer to it only if it proves useful. Truthfully, I may have bittered slightly due to this stumble. Nevertheless, while listening to the crew, I have found myself passing through its pages. It might prove a sufficient way to pass the time.

– O –



Two days into the voyage, as I battled a terrible seasickness, Marcos came to speak with me. Unlike Don Luis, who took to the sea with aplomb, I only managed to enjoy the view of the distant Cebadan coast after two days. The space within the ship is constricting but akin enough to a wooden shack that I found some comfort in it. As I stood on the deck, however, the breeze did me good, and the Cebadan coast which we skirted was gorgeous. There is a passage in Don Luis' tale I am reminded of:

Upon the ship's prow he kneeled, a perplexed
face toward the shining coast. With careful,
practiced hands he polished his arms until
they reached luster akin to Leonilla's
powerful shores of stone, sand, and crashing
cerulean waves. Even he stared, taken
by the grandness of home.

He truly sailed these seas and saw this view. Seasick though I am, I understand why he felt so small before such grandness. Yet he did not know then the scope of his adventure. Though he sailed away from Santísimo, it was not yet in pursuit of the enemy. Instead, he sought to earn the loyalty of the pirates he sailed with. Añoranza would be the place where all would unfold.

Later that day, Marcos approached to offer some of the Casiba's delicious casabe bread (Lucás had offered it days earlier and I am quite taken by it) and in the subsequent conversation, I said to him the goal of my journey. I would like to share our interaction. Not out of self-indulgence, of course, but instead because it emphasizes the importance of Añoranza. It may well be the most useful interaction I have had with the Casiba as of yet.

J.R.C.: I understand your performances are a method of chronicling. What tale do you plan to perform?

M: Why, the tale of Añoranza, of course. This will be our first time there, and so we hope to commemorate the town's difficult history.

J.R.C.: Indeed? Are there not more areitos held there? I thought most of Añoranza's people were Casiba.

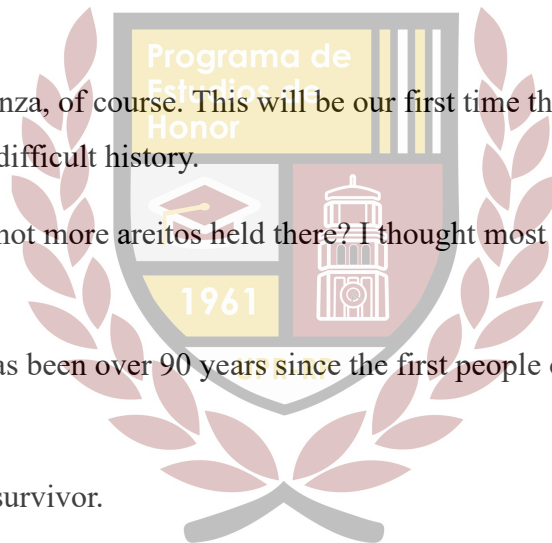
M: Mmm, somewhat. It has been over 90 years since the first people of Añoranza were decimated by the Cabal.

J.R.C.: Leaving only one survivor.

M: Indeed. But the war caused many people to flee the center and north of Leonilla. Many came to Santísimo, but when the number became unsustainable in Santísimo, Añoranza's fertile lands and serviceable port became an opportunity. The people who moved there were many of the same that came to Santísimo during the war.

J.R.C.: I see...

M: The hero was present for it, actually. The epic doesn't speak on it, but our records do. When they returned from the Islands, they stayed in Santísimo for several weeks, attempting to aid the many refugees in the city. Under their protection, the people migrated toward Añoranza and began settling the town.



Note: Records on Añoranza are sparse, mostly just in maps. This story is not present in the epic of Don Luis that Leonilla publishes. I will have to verify.

J.R.C.: Does Añoranza have records of this?

M: Perhaps if you ask the older generation. I would speak to the man who takes charge of the festival. His name is Fernández – Julio Fernández – and he is the descendant of that lone survivor.

J.R.C.: Truly?!

Note: My excitement got the better of me then, at the cost of the legibility of our conversation. I will obviate that section and summarize as such: I must visit this Fernández, a Casiba with a natural born Leonillan name, as Marcos pointed out.

From there our conversations turned toward my journey. Upon his asking, I told him all about my current mission. I will relay the last of it here, as it prefaces Añoranza quite effectively.

M: And from that place you fled to journey the land? That is marvelous!

J.R.C.: Thank you! I am hoping that Añoranza proves a fruitful endeavor.

M: Oh, I have no doubt that it will. This festival is dedicated to the Hero, after all. You will surely find something of note.

J.R.C.: And in one of the most pivotal points of his journey, no less! Where he arrives to the deserted town to find the lone survivor who tells him of the scale of the horror... All of which leads to a desperate battle and escape and finally, to his flight across the sea. It is the beginning of a good journey...

M: You are a very passionate one, I will say. I like it! Come to the areito we will hold, Joshua, and hopefully you will find a newer perspective on the Hero. We understand them rather differently, after all.

J.R.C.: I plan on it! That said I am far from fluent in your tongue...

M: Then start working on that glossary of yours – I have seen you pouring over its pages already. And at any rate, you may start with my own name. Not the one I use in Leonillan company, but the one I was born with. It is Niabón.

– O –

If Santísimo stood out for its loud harbors and diverse crowds, then Añoranza can be seen as a much smaller rendition of the city. Nestled by farmland on all fronts besides the sea, this small town was already bustling with people all across its main street, which crept up a hill and down to the harbor. At the very top of that hill in the outskirts of the town, stood a tall and thin wooden tower. It was late when we arrived, and the street was already filled with people hurrying about preparing stalls and decorations all throughout the avenue. There were fewer ships in the harbor than I expected when we arrived. Marcos Niabón's crew did not bring much with themselves, save for some musical instruments and stocks of food.

We walked up the main street and reached a town center in the traditional Leonillan style: a circular plaza headed by a humble circular stone cathedral, with other important structures surrounding the plaza. An inn stood on the corner of the street, which is where I supposed we would stay. Niabón's crew paid for our stay by giving away our entire food stores to the Casiba owner. One night's stay for several dozen men in exchange for a freshened stock of food for the inn? Casiba ways have their advantages. They stayed behind to rest, but I had no intention of doing so. Halfway up the street, I spied a tavern with familiar music. I went there immediately.

– O –

It was as I thought. This tavern – apparently named “Llantoe’ Madres” – was as quaint as it was familiar. Perhaps taverns are all of a piece no matter what part of Cebada one finds themselves in... Small and dark as it was, however, it clearly receives many daily visitors. I inquired after this place to a tired-looking woman who had clearly had too much to drink. She was a widow, her husband apparently having died of some sickness or other, and she occupied her time as a weaver of cotton – a prized Casiba export.

Apparently, she was the woman in charge of the festival garb. Though giving no more information on said garb (as soon as she realized my novice status here in the city, she released a wicked grin and elaborated no further on the tradition), I did catch a certain turn of phrase which she utilized.

Upon my asking after the tavern's history, all she said – and once more I must iterate that she was truly lost in her cups – that Llantoe' Madres was as “Countess Isabela's left tit to a crying hero!” Allow me to examine further.

There comes a point in Don Luis' tale when Ledo Fernando Alicante, the former Lord of Ribera Valens and chief member of the Cabal, attacks Don Luis and his army in a pivotal battle. Lord Ledo was gifted with a devastating power, with which he not only laid waste to Don Luis' army, but his own as well. The resulting massacre was proof of his power but also his downfall; the castle they fought over was entirely leveled in the conflict, and Lord Ledo was forced to flee. Nevertheless, the damage had been done, especially to Don Luis. This is perhaps his greatest defeat and the lowest point of his tale. After such stunning victories as the Defense of Gozarna and the Soiree of Soria, this loss devastated the hero. It was then that Isabela, the pirate captain and, more vulgarly known as the Countess of la Cuenca, offered him succor – hence her turn of phrase.

Many disagreements have occurred amongst avid readers of Don Luis' tale regarding the relationship between Isabela and Don Luis. Some find it appalling that such a hero would conduct himself in such a way that he would romance the woman. Others hold fast that the two were thus engaged, perhaps out of the romance of seeing two individuals from two different worlds find love in each other. There are those that see the romance as inevitable. Such was the power and influence Don Luis commanded in those around him. I am reminded of romantic epics of Leonillan knights and Alucian princesses. The pull of the errant hero and the beauty of the foreign royal do strike true and often in our traditions. Perhaps this is no different. Nevertheless, the romance is a doomed one, for Isabela is the ultimate betrayer who leaves her beloved to an ugly fate and disappears from record.

Here in Añoranza, Llantoe' Madres proves a much more steadfast aid to this town than the Casiba pirate proved to be for Don Luis. At the very least, the prevalence of such a phrase tells me how rooted these tales of ours are.

Tomorrow, the festival begins in earnest. I am sure that Don Luis' legacy will shine brightly. I cannot wait to see it.

– O –

Añoranza came to life like thunder. No fields were farmed or ports manned this day. The avenue that Niabón and I climbed swelled with people who browsed stalls, spoke amongst themselves, and moved up and down the houses dotting each side of the street. Llanto's Madres was particularly ripe to burst. No doubt their drink adds to the vibrancy of the soul here. I stood at the top of the hill, unsure how to even make my way down. Had it not been for Niabón and his crew paving a way through with instruments and song ablaze, I would have been knocked prone dozens of times in the crowd. But on they sang and danced and played as I followed.

I saw Casiba performers grace the children with tricks of water, assorted grains and spices. They threw them high and deftly wove them in patterns through the air, never letting a single drop of spice or errant seed or droplet touch the ground.

Several artisans sold murals, vases, sculptures, and more of varied crafts. All of them bore episodes of Don Luis' tale. I was tempted to buy – yes, buy, since unlike Santísimo, Añoranza accepts Leonillan coin – a sculpture of Don Luis for myself. It would only hinder my travels, however. Nevertheless, I admired the craft: clad in Leonillan irons and leathers and sporting the Lion's crest, he stood with Zumbador held proud. Some Casiba also sold various wares bearing the figures of Don Luis' party.

What warmed my heart the most, however, was seeing children playfighting and running through the streets with wooden replicas of Zumbador. The legendary spear was lost with Don Luis, but it is widely recognizable from its simple winged construction. Like many aspects of Don Luis, it is a humble weapon for a humble man. At its base and wings it sported white and emerald feathers of the legendary bird which it housed. To see children recognize and love such an element of Don Luis' tale truly inspires me. One day, perhaps, this study of mine will grace their hands as well.

As we climbed down the hilled town, I came to realize that Niabón was about to reach the port, where they would hold their areito backdropped by the sea. Their vibrancy and power were apparent. Their music swayed the many people around us and even I could not help but feel my body move to its sway. It was then that I felt it, the magic of the Casiba flowing through all the space. The town seemed to move and breathe with the music and the people. The winds ebbed with each and every one of our movements, like the festival had become a storm and we simply blew the landscapes with our fervorous joy.

It struck me then, the knowledge that the Casibas' magic is not a result of natural gifts. All could accomplish those feats if only they knew the secrets and techniques. Mages of the past did, but after the Civil War that is all but extinct. I wonder how many Leonillans can say they have harnessed such a thing. Do I now number as part of those few?

The areito began shortly after Niabón reached the harbor. A space was opened, the barriers of the ritual marked only by how close we dared get to them. It consisted of strikes of a round drum, the shakes of their hollowed maracas, powerful songs and dances of flowing, sudden motions. They all watched each other, like some code was spoken through their movements. As they drew on and on, those of us among the crowd who knew not their words cheered and gasped at how the world bent around them. They drew up the ground with hands and feet. The waves crashed against the harbor like they were called to join the fray. Sea spray showered us like cheers of victory.

The Casiba and all others who knew their words stood transfixed, however. Clearly, they were telling a tale bordering on the rapturous. Of course, I knew the tale and the thrills of Añoranza's past, though I knew not their rendition. Only then did I remember Lucás' gift. I am blessed with few remarkable traits, one of which is my memory – a thing the Academy honed in me rigorously. That said, I exhausted myself as I tried to catch words and search for their meanings in Lucás' glossary. Indeed, I caught several: **X** Of course, many fell through my fingers. Still others I caught only to have their meanings elude me. I will nevertheless note them here: **X** Yuiza.

None cheered more than the Casiba when Niabón and his crew concluded their tale. Even without understanding it, it proved powerful enough to drive Añoranza to a thunderstorm of applause. Far too many people crowded Niabón and his crew for me to properly congratulate

them for their gorgeous performance. I left, then, sure as I was that we would meet again before the night was done. At the very least, we would meet each other, spent and sapped dry of thrills, in our small inn. I could not foretell, however, the altercation I would bear witness to just hours later.

– O –

Out of all the new insights I expected out of this journey, I had not thought I would discover new foods. To the point, casabe bread, when filled with Leonillan pork which has been seasoned with spices from near and far, is a frightening delight.

I found myself partaking of such a joy when I heard news of a theater troupe newly arrived to Añoranza for the festival. As fate would have it, I stood atop the terrace of an eatery apparently owned by an eloped Casiba and Leonillan pair. The two were marvelous, as was their food. More crucially, however, from such a vantage point I could spy the main street of Añoranza in its entirety. An apparently well-travelled Leonillan man pointed them out from within the crowd. I was late to realize that they had already begun a performance of their own.

A lone knight, followed by two Casiba (truly, two actors who garbed themselves in traditional Casiba wear and painted their skins in their clay-like hues and red markings) fought against an elusive figure in billowing dark robes. It was a reenactment of the very first duel Don Luis had against the Cabal! Upon the vacant town of Añoranza did Don Luis encounter a man of shadows who cast their arena in darkness. Despite it, Don Luis determined his weakness and fought him to a standstill in the town's center. In the end, the shadow fled for the Islands and Don Luis followed. To think this troupe so stricken by creativity that they reenacted the fateful battle within the festival itself! (I must note that several members of the troupe utilized wooden boards to make space in the crowd and allow the performance room to breathe. I would not have it known that any innocents were harmed in such a harmless act)

Finishing my meal, I quickly paid my due and raced to the street, eager to see the rest of their act. It concluded in the town square, when Don Luis cut through the baleful shadows and

almost killed the fiend. In the town's center was a great tent, one they had no doubt installed earlier, and into which the shadow fled after an exuberant bow. The Casiba and supporting actors followed. Finally, Don Luis turned to us, removed their helmet to reveal a gorgeous woman of a rather gypsy-like complexion, and announced:

“Join us after this powerful evening, oh gracious people of Añoranza! We offer the daring tale of the Defense of Gozarna! Oh yes, the tale of the seven brave heroes who routed an army *completely* unaided, saving the lives of countless Leonillan brothers and sisters! We offer you a newer tale, one which gives the history a truer and mightier turn, in this our newest act! Come, then! Once the festivities are concluded, we will offer the final act in this very place with the coming of the dawn!”

She gave a bow before dramatically flourishing her own Zumbador and entering the dark tent with cheers and applause at her back. I must admit I am perplexed at choosing such a character to play Don Luis, but I presume a troupe such as theirs is not manned enough for a fully recognizable cast. Their claims at a “truer and mightier” turn to the history of the Defense of Gozarna is tantalizing, however. I would have hastened time itself for all my excitement!

While I waited for that hour and collected my notes, however, the crowds thinned somewhat. It was the merchants' and eateries' turn to occupy people. In that lull I saw Niabón emerge in anger from the building opposite the church – a gorgeous yet humble home I would have taken for the residence of this town's leader. A man followed behind. I could not hear them, but I was surprised; never had I seen Niabón in such a rage. The man himself looked like a cross between embarrassment and fury as he saw the surrounding people. He dismissed Niabón with an ugly gesture, and my friend spat at his feet before retreating into the crowds. I asked a nearby man who that other person was. Clearly a Casiba, of course, but they soon told me that was none other than Julio Fernández... The man Niabón had told me to speak with, the descendant of the survivor Don Luis saved long ago.

The earlier clash left me at somewhat of a loss. I naturally considered moving to speak with Niabón, but he disappeared into the crowds soon after. Of course, my objective could not be stalled, either. Thus, I secured an audience with Fernández. In the midst of the festival, I expected him to be far too occupied for my purposes. Instead, he readily agreed.

Don Julio Fernández had the affect of a shrewd merchant. Even after his trouble with Niabón, he effortlessly reclaimed a pleasant composure once I approached him. I introduced myself as a scholar from Caelma seeking to learn of the history of this festival. He brightened noticeably to that. Now, I find myself in his home, a light place whose tall open windows allow the warm winds and festival noise plenty of ingress. His wife and daughters hurried about the place, apparently occupied preparing local foods – the casabe with pork I had earlier – to several stalls throughout the center. I noticed that despite being of clear Casiba descent, he had taken a fair Leonillan woman as his bride. His daughters looked even more mixed than he did!

Eventually, he found the time to sit and speak with me, offering me wine in the process. Here is the exchange:

D.J.F.: I suppose you will write everything we speak of?

J.R.C.: If it does not displease you.

D.J.F.: Very well! For the sake of thoroughness, I will ask you: What brings you to The Festival of the Midnight Trail?

Note: It is uncommon for a person to be so thorough in helping a scholar with their research. I simply must reiterate my thanks for Don Fernández.

J.R.C.: In my current quest to retrace the legendary journey of Don Luis, Añoranza was a clear destination. Coming as I am from Santísimo, travel here was a simple matter. Now tell me, what is this eponymous Midnight Trail?

D.J.F.: Ah, of course. Añoranza has made itself known as the survivor of catastrophe. This much I believe we all know.

J.R.C.: Indeed.

D.J.F.: But truthfully, it features twice in the tale of Don Luis. Once, as the site of mass disappearances and the first of his many battles against the traitorous lords of the Cabal. Years after that, however, Don Luis returned from the Islands to find Leonilla in great peril.

J.R.C.: The Civil War.

D.J.F.: Where he truly engrained himself into our history – into our very dirt! Well, the second tale of Añoranza is that of his first feat. The war left many no choice but to seek refuge in Santísimo. Only Don Luis showed us the kindness we sought when Santísimo closed their gates to us and brought us here to resettle the desolate Añoranza.

J.R.C.: You say Santísimo closed its gates to the refugees?

D.J.F.: Oh yes. Of course, my grandmother was already inside the city itself. She had worked as a helper in a small tavern once Don Luis brought her from our desolate hometown. But when the war started and the people piled against Añoranza's walls? She told me and my father many a time that she felt a kinship with those bereft people.

J.R.C.: Who ordered Santísimo's gates closed? The epic makes no mention of this...

D.J.F.: No, it does not. My grandmother never knew for sure, and I doubt any records exist. Santísimo's leadership was left up to the garrison and the Casiba merchants after the old lord Enrique Vals was killed by the Cabal. She thought little of the garrison and so blamed them. For my part, I believe the Casiba merchants had the gates closed so as to not risk losing their riches. Soldiers of Leonilla are meant to help the people. The garrison would have opened those gates.

J.R.C.: I would have to agree.

Note: This account makes me wonder what Niabón's telling would hold. I must ask him later.

J.R.C.: The festival is named after that march, then?

D.J.F.: It took the entire group several days to reach the desolate town. When they did, it was the middle of the night, and many lost heart at seeing the overgrown crops and distressed buildings by torchlight. It was then that Don Luis hoisted Zumbador as if to split the sky. He let the spear shine, illuminating the whole of Añoranza as if a star had come down from the Mother's Heaven for them alone. With the words he spoke then, we understood that this was our home.

J.R.C.: What did he say?

D.J.F.: Well, the tale varies, but if you want the exact words, I am afraid they have been lost.

J.R.C.: I see.

D.J.F.: Well, do not let that be cause for consternation. Come join us tonight for our closing ceremony!

J.R.C.: Ah, of course, that reminds me. You host this festival, yes?

D.J.F.: Very proudly so!

J.R.C.: Surely the costs of holding it must be-

D.J.F.: Entirely worth the price, scholar. If you must know, we produce enough grain to make Santísimo happy enough to trade us any necessities. I also have enough friendships with nearby settlements that we draw in the coin necessary to hire folks like that lovely troupe out there. Cheap as they are, it did not cost me much to feature them this year. They gave no complaints to holding their play after the festival is properly finished. I am looking to grow this event of ours... we shall see how successful I am.

J.R.C.: Oh?

D.J.F.: Are you surprised? Santísimo's reliance on the barter means we make no coin for ourselves. Meanwhile the rest of Cebada runs on it! We cannot very well be left behind. We draw many new people here every year, and thus it is an opportunity to make Añoranza a larger mark on the map!

J.R.C.: And learn of its history, besides!

D.J.F.: Indeed. I should never forget what it means to us. Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, the man of miracles whose very first great feat in times of war – and yet most unsung – happened on this very land. To our people... We celebrate him the most by ensuring our own growth. It is proof that we have come far, despite it all.

J.R.C.: On that note, what can you tell me about your grandmother?

D.J.F.: Aside from what I already have? Well, it is well known that she was Casiba. Añoranza has always been as mixed as it is now. Though perhaps more so in those days. The town had been languishing up until the Casiba began settling into it. Grandmother was always very proud of that. She wept more than anybody else when Don Luis led them back to Añoranza all those years later.

J.R.C: What became of her?

D.J.F.: Strange as it may sound, she was in her adolescence when she returned to Añoranza. Most would think her too young, but she knew the town better than anyone. And so she helped the people settle, distributed the properties of the former residents according to need, and all matter of other things. She became something of a leader. How she would laugh at the Leonillan men who chaffed at her authority.

J.R.C.: People disapproved?

D.J.F.: For a time. Apparently, the Casiba believe in inheritance through the mother's side of the family, as opposed to here in Cebada where the opposite is true. For the Islanders in the group she was naturally the one best fit to lead. Eventually, she married a Leonillan man. She always told us she loved him, though I can't help thinking she did so to placate her detractors. Our family has remained a pillar of Añoranza ever since. Her son, my father, took to the ways of barter and coin very well. It was he who founded the festival. I merely follow in his footsteps.

J.R.C.: And what did she think of Don Luis?

D.J.F.: She never spoke of him overmuch. It was her custom to stare at Añoranza from the farmers' hills on the anniversary of the return. My father had to pry the story out of several people before she spoke up on it, and even then she only said what everybody did. Those were changing times, you see, what with the end of the war. Leonilla changed much, and Don Luis changed with it, I suppose. She would rather root herself in her memories than speak out loud and let the voice vanish in the air...

I did not stay with Don Julio Fernández for too long. After sharing some more wine, he found himself attending to the festival's final preparations while I fought off the dizziness the

wine inflicted on me. I resolved to search for water and another hearty meal. At some point I decided not to ask about his earlier altercation with Niabón. Our time together had been too pleasant, and just recalling the vulgar manner in which he told off my friend... Well, I decided to refrain from that line of inquiry. Hours later when the festival crowds had died somewhat and I returned to the inn to begin my writing, Niabón walked into our room. I had wanted to ask if he would join me to watch the festival's culminating ceremony which was due in several hours. It was dusk at this point, still a long way from midnight. Instead, I asked what had happened.

– O –

The following is my honest record of my seemingly final conversation with Niabón. Though it shames me, as it pertains to my study I have decided to keep it here. May it serve me well in the future.

N: How's the festival, Joshua?

J.R.C.: Nothing short of breathtaking. Crowds like these are frequent enough in Caelma that one grows accustomed to them, but in a town as sparse as this? It is exhilarating.

N: Hah! So was the seasickness worth it?

J.R.C.: I would rather walk to the top of Sierra Mérida than board another ship, as it happens.

N: If you keep saying those things, you'll never make it across La Cuenca, then!

J.R.C.: And why would I ever do such a thing?

N: Aren't you retracing the Hero's steps? If you plan on doing it just-

J.R.C.: Perhaps if some madman invents a flying boat to ferry me over those damnable rocking waves, I would!

N: ... Indeed. Well! At any rate, I should get going. The rest of us are planning to visit Llanto'e Madres. The owner offered us a free meal for the areito we held. Can you believe it? First one this town has seen in longer than the Hero's time... So many of my people here and yet none of them ever bothered, I suppose.

J.R.C.: Actually, Niabón, there is something I would ask of you.

N: Oh?

J.R.C.: You see... I saw some of the altercation you had with Don Julio Fernández. Not that I heard anything, mind! Simply saw something from the distance. What happened between you two? Was that not the man you told me to speak with in the first place?

N: Bah! So he was, but I am afraid I have led you astray. He's too much like a merchant.

J.R.C.: What do you mean?

N: Well, in Santísimo he had only ever been kind. He sought me and my friends because he wanted an areito for the festival but get this! After we had our time, he asked to meet with me in his home. Do you want to know what he said?

J.R.C.: Was he displeased with it somehow?

N: Oh, that would have been a kindness. No, he was angry at us!

J.R.C.: How? The people loved the entire performance.

N: Indeed, but he was displeased with our "liberal interpretation" of the tale. Can you believe such a thing?!

J.R.C.: You changed the tale?

N: No! Well, I suppose to you we must have. I've said before that we remember the Hero differently from you lot. He knew that! And yet we choose to omit the great Don Luis' name and now we are forbidden from holding another areito here again!

J.R.C.: How can you omit Don Luis' name from the tale?

N: You wouldn't understand that much. You weren't supposed to, either! If we wanted the whole town to understand we would have come in Lionspeak like that theater troupe did! This was meant for *us*. I thought that he would understand but-

Note: I curse myself for not studying their language more with Lucás.

J.R.C.: Can you blame him, Niabón?

N: What?

J.R.C.: Don Luis' epic is not just a tale to them, free to mold into whatever suits their fancy. It is a part of their heritage, without which they would not stand on these lands. Frankly, I understand if he were angered by it. His very own grandmo-

N: You want to speak of heritage? With your *Don Luis*?

J.R.C.: Well-

N: The Hero traveled for sixteen years, Joshua. You want to know how much of that he spent in the Islands?

J.R.C.: Nine years-

N: - and three months, a week, and five days. All that time because *that's* where they wanted to be.

J.R.C.: Niabón, listen to yourself. The Hero left to pursue the Cabal and returned to stop the War. What he brought from the Islands were comrades who betrayed him and the power to vanquish the Cabal. If the Islands were his preferred place, then why return?

N: I told you already, Joshua. *We* have our own tale. It is meant for us.

J.R.C.: Then theirs is meant for them, as well.

N: Even if it isn't true?

J.R.C.: True? Do the Casiba not prefer the variance of stories over the "true" one?

N: ...

J.R.C.: Niabón, what I mean to say is-

N: You call yourself a scholar, a seeker of knowledge, and this is the best you can do? Why leave your study halls if all you plan on doing is lashing yourself to the one thing you know?

J.R.C.: Oh? I believe I am doing rather well for myself, all things considered.

N: Then walk your way back.

J.R.C.: Excuse me?

N: Lucás helped you here. I helped you get to your *Don Julio Fernández*. You even had help from the merchant who stowed you as cargo! But you are doing well for yourself. Naturally.

J.R.C.: That is not to mean-

N: You walk back to Santísimo or get another ship. None of us will allow such a fool on our ship again. See if you learn to use our words before you speak our stories at us.

– O –

Hours passed before I committed any of that exchange to page. Suffice to say that I had not expected such fury over something so trifling. Indeed, it may have been my fault for asking in the first place. Still, I hold to what I said. None should lay claim to Don Luis' tale as if all else does not matter. This study's purpose is antithetical to such a thing. I will admit to having reacted harshly to my wounded pride near the end, but that does not mean I am wrong. At any rate, it is almost midnight.

The Festival of the Midnight Trail began as a reenactment. Initially hosted by Don Julio Fernández' father, the festival is a commemorative act. Celebrations, drinks, music, and the like all came at a later point. Young though this festival is, however, the passion with which it is conducted cannot be overstated. Perhaps the memories of the war and the migration are yet fresh in these people's hearts. There is beauty in the echoing of Don Fernández' grandmother's will remaining today. The same is true for Don Luis, perhaps doubly so.

I stood atop the hill overlooking Añoranza. Everybody who had been occupied by merriment stood around me. A circle of torches lit the area, the very outskirts of the town. At the center of the group, a thin wooden tower stood. It bore carvings of the names of the settlers of Añoranza, alongside feathers dyed in several colors. Only from this view did I notice the tower was no regular post, but a monumental recreation of Zumbador. Then, the procession began.

With drums and flutes that sang joy, they announced their arrival as if to say to us and the town that they were not enemies. The procession was large yet difficult to see, for they wore flowing cloaks of black wool which concealed all their forms. Woven into their cloaks were more

of those dyed feathers. While they walked, a man I presumed was Don Fernández lead the people through the winding paths of farmland. Like scattered sheep in need of shepherding, they followed the melody he sang. They joined with their own instruments. Those who did not play walked in rhythm and in pairs, their arms locked into each other's. This I deduce to be indicative of the first married men and women of the town, whose unions brought new life to Añoranza.

They all wore masks of straw with shut eyes and when they reached Zumbador, they took their masks off one by one, tied them to the wooden colossus with their feathers, and offered a prayer all their own. Finally, Don Julio Fernández set it alight, and the people seemed to grow ecstatic.

I am no scholar of magecraft. Even if such a thing were not looked down upon, I have no taste for it. That said, I have read in some books that belief and intent are the two foundations of magic. The Casiba know it well, but us Leonillans whose doctrine of the Holy Mother abjures that which is earthly like magic, cannot practice it with such ease. Nevertheless, the Epic of Don Luis tells many outlandish stories of belief shaping the nature of the world, especially on the Islands. The dead who roamed the wilds of the Islands at night. Stone sculptures that could summon storms. Lost children turned to frogs in the wet undergrowth. Perhaps because the Festival of the Midnight Trail is not canonical within the Holy See, or perhaps because of inner workings I do not understand, a miracle happened that day. I knew it from the faces of all those unmasked – even the ones who had done this for years could not help but be in awe.

Zumbador caught fire instantly. It was no blaze of potent, angry reds. No, this flame was smooth and radiant. A warmth that promised comfort, not a heat that singed skin. Indeed, what we all saw that night was nothing less than magic, for Zumbador's monument struck the night with a flame so white it truly seemed as if a star had fallen and chosen us for its home. The joy they felt was turned to awe and then to a happiness so full I could feel it secondhand. Far and away from my most scholarly thought as it may be, but I believe everybody there felt the warmth of home.

Meanwhile, I could not help but wonder if Don Luis had seen sights like this. I wondered if he knew that so much time later, his steps would still sow miracles to bloom for newer people. Would I bear witness to more of such wonders if I just continued following his trail all the way into the dawn?

Chapter VI

Despite my falling out with Niabón, my time in Añoranza was a blessed one. How that town holds onto the memory of Don Luis is inspiring – a breathing testament to his enduring marks in this land. I am ashamed to admit that the Epic itself may have faltered here, however. The Festival of the Midnight Trail remembers, and indeed, reenacts a portion of Don Luis’ tale that is not recounted in the Epic. Añoranza only ever features as the first of Don Luis’ trials, a place of great tests of strength, fortitude, leadership and unity of purpose. It is only ever the beginning of his story, never a point to return to. I mourn that Don Julio Fernández’ ancestor did not pass on all of her invaluable memories of Don Luis, but I have nevertheless found in Añoranza proof of my journey’s purpose. There are tales the Epic does not know. I must hear and record them all.

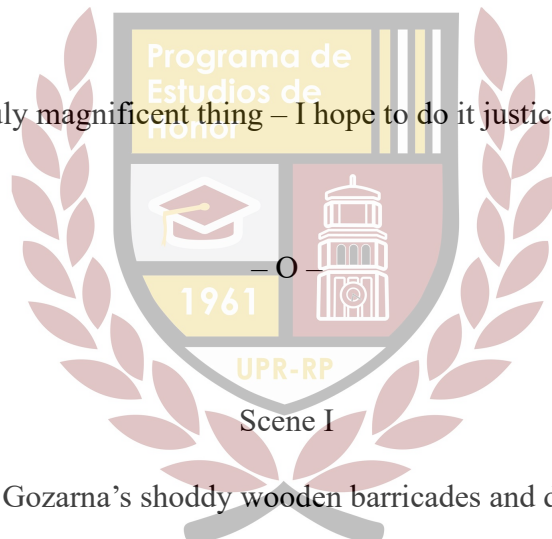
I make special note of the miracles I saw. Though magic has historically been the domain of the Casiba, that which I witnessed during the procession was a miracle which proved how it exists in all of us. I could not have imagined a greater spectacle. It has left me in further awe of Don Luis himself, who surely would have found grand sights such as those to be commonplace. After the disappointments of Santísimo, that small town did much to lift my spirits, despite Niabón’s efforts near the end.

Niabón and his crew were true to his word. They left with no further comment. As it happened, I found a new destination, one which took me deeper inland. I am now two days out of Añoranza, currently traveling the countrysides of Mérida on my own. Indeed, I write this as I take my rest in a small inn. I have found no traces of Don Luis here, and as such I move to the matter at hand: Gozarna of the Hills, my newest destination.

Don Luis takes off to the Islands of San Miranda after his trials in Añoranza, but I can hardly follow to a place so distant and unknown. Indeed, I doubt that Lucás Almeida’s glossary will be very useful to me, even if it were half as comprehensive as I expect from him. No, Don Julio’s Midnight Trail gave me a much better idea. By Niabóns reckoning, Don Luis spends nine

years, three months, a week, and five days in the Islands. When he returns, Leonilla is caught in the grips of civil war. As I now know, his first great feat during this time was the relocation of hundreds of refugees to Añoranza. His second feat, and indeed the first the Epic recounts, is the infamous Defense of Gozarna. I shall speak more on the place once I am in it, but for now it will suffice to say that I have a very particular goal in mind. Indeed, that traveling theater troupe in Añoranza were retelling the story of the defense in such a particular way that I felt compelled to ask why they departed from the Epic. Their answer? They had come from Gozarna themselves. There, they encountered a man who claimed to possess a journal written by Don Luis himself, a journal which recounted the times of the Civil War and spoke in detail of the Defense of Gozarna. I simply must know more. However, in lieu of a more detached explanation of the Defense of Gozarna, I have transcribed the play as I recall it. I will make note on the differences it has from the Epic.

Indeed, it was a truly magnificent thing – I hope to do it justice!



[The scene is the front of Gozarna's shoddy wooden barricades and dug out ditch. Don Luis sits cross-legged in the center, framed by the great oak doors of the city. He writes within a journal.

Captain Esquivel enters from behind.]

Esquivel: Ah! I have found you finally. Why do you lurk outside the city when it is so dark?

Don Luis: It is my habit to write of the day's events.

Esquivel: Why, in the dead of night?

Don Luis: I merely surveyed the city's defenses and wrote them down as I passed. Say, my good captain, how highly do you rate the odds of your troops in this coming battle?

Esquivel: Well, we have resorted to you and yours for help, have we not?

Don Luis: And you have done well in that regard! For I have devised a strategy for me and my men.

Esquivel: This late in the defense?! Why, we expect the enemy by daybreak and yet you would present a strategy at such late an hour?!

Don Luis: Captain Esquivel, do you trust me?

Esquivel: Why, I trust you as far as I trust any good man who bears our standard. Your exploits abroad certainly mark you out, although-

Don Luis: You will leave the defense of Gozarna to us, my good captain. Me and my companions will be enough to drive the traitorous invaders away.

Esquivel: Just the seven of you?! How would you accomplish such a thing? Even if you truly wield such potent powers, this would-

Don Luis: What of you, then? Captain Esquivel, the man whose charge it is to protect the people of Gozarna, and yet at the eve of attack, your men have only dug out a ditch and built wooden barricades out of scrap? Any uncharitable man would take you for as much of a Royalist sympathizer as the enemy, my good captain.

Esquivel: We are underprepared! My men would never expect Gozarna to be-

Don Luis: The first of my victories in this war. Dawn comes and I grow tired of you. Consider this my declaration, me and my men will suffice to save Gozarna's people – she and her people deserve better!

Note: Already, the departures from the original Epic are stark. I could well lose myself in the minutia of it, but instead I would focus on one major element: the journal. Don Luis was never shown to enjoy writing. Indeed, some (such as I) argue that he could not write at all, since he was lowborn. This play opens with Don Luis dutifully writing in a journal he, as far as the Epic says, never possessed. Whatever they read in Gozarna, could it truly have colored their perspective so strongly? His personality is suspect to me, as well. Don Luis was, of course, prideful and strong, able to unite and inspire any person. However, here the character of Esquivel – a minor one in

the Epic who mostly welcomes and thanks Don Luis for their aid – is shown as an ineffective fool. Don Luis takes charge as a king would, which seems to be a heroic feat.

That said, Captain Esquivel being a failure as a leader can serve to explain how underprepared Gozarna was for the Royalist invasion. That is what makes Don Luis' defense so legendary. There are other factors to Gozarna which may have caused this, but the place itself will serve as better proof once I arrive.

Scene 2

[Don Luis emerges from the gates of Gozarna. Four fighters and one giant line up behind him. He holds Zumbador aloft and a great torch alights to signify the coming morning.]

Don Luis: Come together, my faithful allies! We see their men marching from the west. Their spears are many – but fear not! They will not blot out our sun! We rise! The Royalists shall not take this city, nor shall they take this day, for its light is ours to shine across this land!

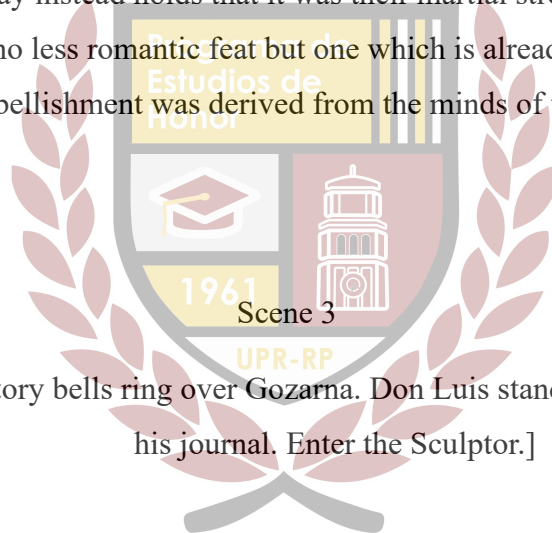
Don Luis' allies: Aye!

[The six stand side to side from one end of the stage to the other. Shadow puppets of soldiers suddenly emerge and the battle begins.]

Note: It is clear to me now that this troupe's true artistry comes in their capacity for spectacle. Hindsight afforded me that realization – I was far too taken by the grandeur of their performance. All five of Don Luis' companions were rendered magnificently here. After the show, I must have stared at the woman who performed the Statue for far too long. I was simply amazed at how incredible the painting work on her skin and clothing had been! Alas, I may have given the wrong impression. Even the Giant was a wonder; the great strong man who played the part walked on stilts that were dressed as great trunks of legs. The Captain truly wielded a great canon, and even Don Luis swung Zumbador with great aplomb. Their shadow puppetry was just as magnificent.

Alas, this scene is mostly directed towards the spectacle. Not much meaningful dialogue happened in it. Instead, we were treated to a spectacularly performed battle. By my count of the shadow puppets, this play holds that Don Luis and his allies used their significant magical abilities to defeat a veritable army of dozens. Ultimately, the Royalist army flees and Don Luis announces his victory at the sounds of the midday bell.

Briefly ignoring the rush of emotions I felt watching this play, I must express my disappointment at the direction it took. The Epic holds that Don Luis and his allies defended Gozarna without a single drop of blood. Indeed, they stood watch outside the city gates, spread out and defiant against the coming army. When the army saw them for who they were, they fled. That miracle, brought about by the sheer radiance of Don Luis, was what marked the greatest victory of that war. The play instead holds that it was their martial strength which saved the innocents of Gozarna – a no less romantic feat but one which is already seen at other points of the epic. I suspect this embellishment was derived from the minds of the performers and entertainers.



[It is now afternoon. Victory bells ring over Gozarna. Don Luis stands at the gates, absorbed in his journal. Enter the Sculptor.]

Sculptor: My, what a striking figure. Would this be your choice, then?

[Don Luis shuts his journal and turns to the Sculptor.]

Don Luis: Ah, this? No, not quite.

Sculptor: But you made for such a remarkable figure just now!

Don Luis: Did I? I thank you, my friend, but this journal of mine is nothing more than a passtime.

Sculptor: Word on the town is that your stratagems are what won the day, just as much as your power.

Don Luis: Is that what they're saying?

Sculptor: Of course! The captain of the garrison is as unhappy as scorned woman, and I take that as proof any day. You outdid all of our expectations!

Don Luis: It is nothing so grand, I assure you. Now, about the pose?

Sculptor: Will you not consider a statue holding your journal? Perhaps flourishing your quill with a mindful gaze about you? Something to capture your mind's power as much as your strength of arms!

Don Luis: Hah! There is no need for that. This war has broken our country apart. Do you know what I have learned from my travels to the Islands?

Sculptor: Dare I say the comfort of stone houses as opposed to wooden huts and leaking roofs?

Don Luis: You jest, but the comforts of Leonilla were quite well missed! But no, my friend, I speak of their pride. They are a noble people, so steadfast in their strange ways. They are as trees in a forest – stout and firmly rooted to themselves. But Leonilla? Leonilla is built.

[Don Luis walks to the side and considers the walls of Gozarna.]

Don Luis: Built and refined throughout the years. Our foundation is great but it threatens to break thanks to this war. You ask me how I would be remembered for today's events? I say by holding my arms aloft and bringing the sun out from the east every day. We are the land of the immortal sun, and our own pride can trounce any other – even that of those misguided Royalists who seek to crush our nation to satisfy their selfish wants.

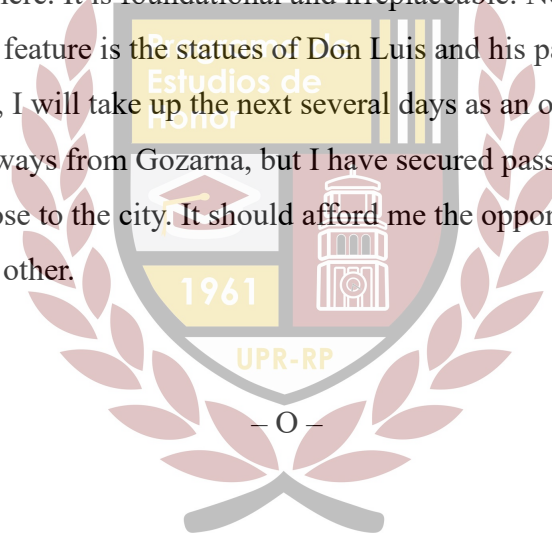
[Don Luis returns to the middle, places his shield upright on the earth, his fisted right hand to his heart and holds Zumbador up in the manner of great generals and kings.]

Don Luis: So remember me for my armor and my arms; the victory of Gozarna is ours to remember, and we are Leonillans first.

End of play

Note: After my disappointment with the second scene, I find myself enjoying this ending even more. Where he is confrontational and authoritative to the bumbling Captain Esquivel, he is kind and humorous with the Sculptor. Let it never be forgotten that Don Luis was a man of the people and that is why he is the best of Leonilla. He punishes the indolent and ineffective and elevates the simple, humble, and honorable.

I especially appreciate the discussion and reverence for stone construction in this story. Gozarna is well known for its great fortifications and rapid growth. Indeed, the city's history can be seen as a contest between the expansion of its streets and buildings and the construction of more walls, towers, and fortresses to protect them. That is why the Defense of Gozarna was so important – Don Luis and his party became the city walls when it needed them most. Stone, thus, is the object of reverence here. It is foundational and irreplaceable. No surprise that today, Gozarna's most important feature is the statues of Don Luis and his party. I cannot wait to behold them myself. On that note, I will take up the next several days as an opportunity to revise my work thus far. I am still a ways from Gozarna, but I have secured passage with a group of travelers who will pass close to the city. It should afford me the opportunity to read and review while on some carriage or other.



Two days into my travels, my erstwhile companions and I went our separate ways. It struck me in last day of my journey to Gozarna that I have not known solitude in so long. It allowed me the opportunity to truly take in our land. It is the height of summer, and the lands of Mérida are both flat and dry at this time. I thought of the movement of armies, hundreds of men marching under heat with bare rations and a unity of purpose keeping them steadfast and resilient. In long marches like that, I imagine Don Luis to be quite similar to how that troupe saw him. Yet, as I walked alone, I felt closer to the Don Luis who had not known war or adventure. Where did he come from? Did he walk alone on roads like this before ever embarking on his journey? As I retrace his path, I feel as if I step in the wake of a giant, and yet if I look at the road I know his steps were just as small as mine, even if these are roads through which he led armies.

– O –

I now understand why that troupe felt the need to tell a story about Gozarna's stonework. I have arrived at the city the locals call *La tortuga del prado*. From miles away, this great fortress city dominates the land. I believe it originated as a meeting point between shepherds and travelers. With the laying of roads which our founder Leonilla ordered, it became a crossroads for all of Mérida. And then, it built itself outwards. Through many conflicts it saw the need to build its walls, and now the city is like the stump of a tree – each ring of walls corresponding to an era of craftsmen, builders, and soldiers. It is monumental in its scale, the craft of each and every wall a feat of artistry and Leonillan collaboration.

Nothing boasted the heights of Gozarna's stonework quite like the six statues which greeted me. They stood in the flatlands before the city's walls. I saw shepherds rounding up their flocks at their bases. Each taller than the city walls, and from here – the hill right before descending towards the city – I can see precisely how much care was brought to them all. Perhaps the most surprising part was how lively and accurately they depicted these figures of legend. The captain wore the cerulean cloak she was well known for; it was sculpted as billowing along with the winds of the region. Hers and the faces of the warlock were authentically Casiba in their complexion. Even the living statue sported the intricate Casiba carvings along her body which those people use for their idols. The giant, on the other hand, was depicted as kneeling – and he still reached the same height as the rest, just as in the Epic! Of course, Don Luis stood precisely how the play described. It was a marvelous sight, and by the time I reached the foot of the statues, I felt the strain from craning my neck upwards in the entire walk there.

At the base of each one is carved on a metal plaque:

The Defense of Gozarna

Thank you to our heroes.

Nothing more, nothing less. It captures the miracle of this city well.

I knew I should have hurried, but it was my first time seeing these marvels. People crowded the city's entrance, so the base of Don Luis' statue was especially surrounded by people

passing by. I must have made my balking self quite the nuisance! Curiously, all the bases had heavily locked door in their rears. A passing shepherd and his daughter told me all. Apparently, these massive monuments were built after the war. The inside of the bases are hollow, and within them are the original six statues built by that sculptor figure the troupe described. Those were made while Don Luis remained in the city. However, the doors leading to these chambers are closed and locked by the city guard.

I should have been wiser about my spending. However, I have paid off a guard at the gate and gained entry to see Don Luis' original statue. The chamber was dark and tight, barely ten feet across. He stood in the middle, and all at once I knew how well crafted the colossal replica had been. This smaller one's base was flush with the stone ground, and it made me realize that Don Luis' eyeline perfectly matches my own. I have no way of knowing if the statues were built in accordance with their actual heights, but I choose to believe they were. It was a strange thing, seeing this man stand as tall as I did. I hardly realized how much I puffed my chest at that. Had it not been for the guard outside, I would have placed my hand in his, if only to see how well they would compare.

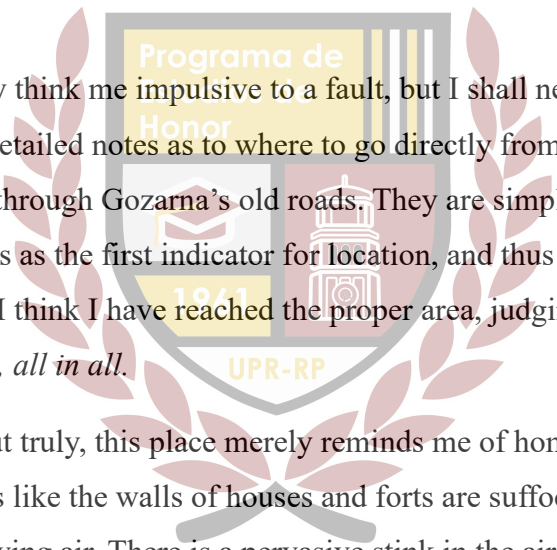
Regretfully, that sublime experience was immediately followed by a most sour one. A man blocked the entrance to the chamber, and I found him staring at me intensely. My first reaction was to recoil slightly, but I soon saw his garb and felt somewhat assuaged. He was a man of the cloth. Upon further inspection, however, I saw the black ring of cloth that hung around his shoulders. It was fixed to his chest by a badge – the bloodied wings of the Holy See. This was no mere priest or monk; he was an inquisitor.

In very few words, he asked why I stood here. I identified myself as Joshua de la Ría Cosme. I also lied. I said I remained a scholar of the Academy. I lied like that in Añoranza, but here it felt wrong for the first time. The man was quick to usher me out and harshly berate the guard who let me in. Luckily, no mention of the bribe was made. I shudder to think what fate awaited me if the guard had lost his nerve that much. The last remark that inquisitor had, however, has stuck with me – and stolen away all enthusiasm I had for Gozarna. He was in a hurry, a group of other inquisitors waiting for him just across the city gates. But I know I heard him say under his breath: *Another one interested in that tale, and a scholar to boot.* Inquisitors were rarely seen in Caelma, but I remember seeing them once. This was before the Academy, so

I was a mere boy. I saw them search and ransack the home of a man my community came to rely on. He was a good man who ran a simple shop out of his home. Neighbors spoke in the days afterwards, but none could tell for certain why he had to disappear. Some said he was Lucian, others said he had sheltered a criminal. Others still said he prayed to the wrong kind of goddess. I never knew the truth.

I have never known myself to be superstitious, but I think it better that I shorten my time here in Gozarna. Luckily, that theater troupe told me precisely where to go.

– O –



Lucás Almeida may think me impulsive to a fault, but I shall never accept being called sloppy. If I had not taken detailed notes as to where to go directly from that actor's mouth, I would never have made it through Gozarna's old roads. They are simply labyrinthine. The locals utilize the rings of the walls as the first indicator for location, and thus do I know I am within the third tier of walls. Indeed, I think I have reached the proper area, judging by the description I was given: *A rancid little place, all in all.*

They say rancid, but truly, this place merely reminds me of home. This, the southern facing part of the city, feels like the walls of houses and forts are suffocating. The heat has grown worse from the lack of flowing air. There is a pervasive stink in the air that tells me animals are brought up nearby. The streets feel like cluttered alleys, and the alleys feel unnavigable. Nobody here wears anything even resembling proper garb. I feel as if I am returning to my home in Caelma. It is humbling to think that somebody like Don Luis came from a place like this, but then again, so did I. I must not forget.

The home I sought belongs to a retired soldier, one that clearly saw no good compensation for their years of work. At any rate, it is they who possess this supposed journal. I look forward to meeting them.

– O –

Contrary to the messes outside, the comparative disorder in this small home reminds me of my own home. Everything is out of place and overfull with collected things and yet I know that truthfully, everything is precisely where it is at its most useful for busy people. It might also have just been placed there and promptly forgotten until it is next needed. I am sure the old man in this house nags about those habits. There was a charming woman coincidentally named Isabela Prado who introduced me to her grandfather, Old Man Prado.

Herein I commit to record my conversation with old man Prado, as he insisted on calling himself:

Joshua: Good day to you, Mr. Prado.

Prado: Yes, yes, good day and all. What are you here for?

J: Oh y-yes, well. I recently saw a play from a traveling theater troupe who passed through Gozar-

P: Ah yes, Isa nagged for a damn good time to see their play. Did they tell you of my journal?

J: Indeed they did! You see, I am scholar currently studying the journey of Don Luis. I come from Caelma, and-

P: You can take a look at the thing, if that's what you want.

J: O-oh, well. Truthfully, I came with the intention of buying it.

P: Oh did you now? What makes you think I am selling?

J: I recall the troupe's lead actress being quite irritated at your bargaining practices.

P: And you will get no such discounts.

J: Oh. Uh, may I ask why?

P: The way you talk irritates me. You sound as rich as you look.

J: P-pardon?!

P: It'll be ten gold coins.

Note: My silence here must have humored him greatly.

J: Why sell it so highly if none will afford it?

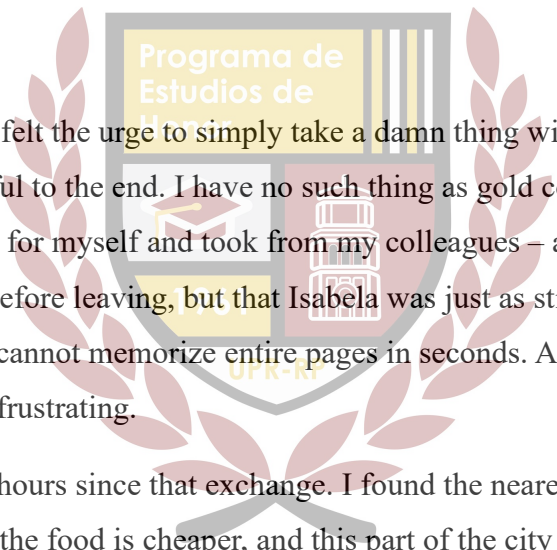
P: This here, Joshua, was it? Well, this here's a relic. Used to be a page boy to the captain that followed Esquivel the idiot. Oh, my old captain hated Esquivel for making a mockery of Gozarna. He was throwing out all of the old captain's trash, and this journal was there. I took it to sell it forward, but when I saw it's written by that great hero-

J: Don Luis, sir. D-Don Luis Alonso Pi-

P: Yeah, him. Well, it's brought folks like you trying to buy, so...

J: So...

P: Ten gold. Cough or leave.



Truly, I have never felt the urge to simply take a damn thing with so much fervor. Old Man Prado proved unhelpful to the end. I have no such thing as gold coins – indeed I am running out of the funds I collected for myself and took from my colleagues – and now I am stuck. I did take a gander at the book before leaving, but that Isabela was just as stingy as her grandfather. Good as my memory is, it cannot memorize entire pages in seconds. As far as I could tell, the journal is real. How damn frustrating.

It has been several hours since that exchange. I found the nearest inn, one Isabela recommended. It is cheap, the food is cheaper, and this part of the city is uneventful enough that I will simply hole myself in my quarters to review my next steps. I am quite spent.

– O –

My talk with Old Man Prado happened sometime in the early afternoon. By nightfall, my bitterness had turned to some stubborn resolve. I had no idea if I planned on stealing the journal myself. Irrational as it is, the thought of the inquisitors roaming this city kept me from entertaining any such thoughts. Even before I retired to my quarters, a handful of the inn's visitors spoke of them patrolling the city.

It was already late when I blew my candle out. Shortly afterwards, a knock came at the door. The innkeeper had brought with him a visitor who was searching for me. Despite my growing superstitions, I allowed it.

Here is the hurried transcription I prepared of my exchange with Isabela Prado:

Isabela: I apologize for the intrusion, um-

Joshua: Joshua de la Ría Cosme is my name.

I: Yes, of course. Apologies once more for the disturbance.

Note: At this point, she produced from a bag the very journal I was deprived of earlier today. I stood incredulous. She simply seemed nervous.

J: What's this? Rather, why are you-

I: It is yours to keep. We are sorry for the earlier disturbance.

J: No. This is far too sudden. I- I mean, I thank you and I will take it! Only, what brought this on?

I: I thought to tell you it was a mere change of heart. But, well, I took it from my grandfather.

J: Why?

I: He is already so old. He insists he's not but, well... He stopped being the captain's page back in his day because of a terrible fall and a bone that never properly healed. That journal is a thing he clings to – I think it reminds him of those days. Well, because I am the one who does all the business out in the markets, I heard tell of those inquisitors. Have you heard of them?

J: I've seen them.

I: And do you know what they're apparently looking for?

J: I-

I: Books. I could not say why, but they want books on the old war. If they see we own such a thing-

J: And so you give it to me?!

I: You will leave Gozarna soon, you told me as much yourself when we first spoke! Otherwise, just burn the thing but do so out of my sight. I do not want to part on such ugly terms with the thing.

J: ...I refuse to burn such a thing. I will study it. Preferably away from here. But if you care so much, perhaps you should hide it.

I: I will not have my grandfather's gift to me cause him any harm.

J: So it is yours... why does he sell it then?

I: I convinced him to. He gave me the book on a nameday of mine many years ago and I was simply enamored by it. Those tales of theirs, Don Luis and the defense of my home... it is humbling and awe-inspiring.

J: It is.

I: Oh, isn't it?! I must have read this journal a thousand times, since we cannot afford much else. It was all in the adventures and his incredible companions! Have you ever seen the sea? I long to do so, if only to imagine them sailing together and away to incredible places! ...But now it is dangerous to us. Please, take it and do what you will with it.

J: What will you do with yourself, then?

I: I will return to normal life. Nothing else to it. One can always dream, and those statues serve as good reminders...

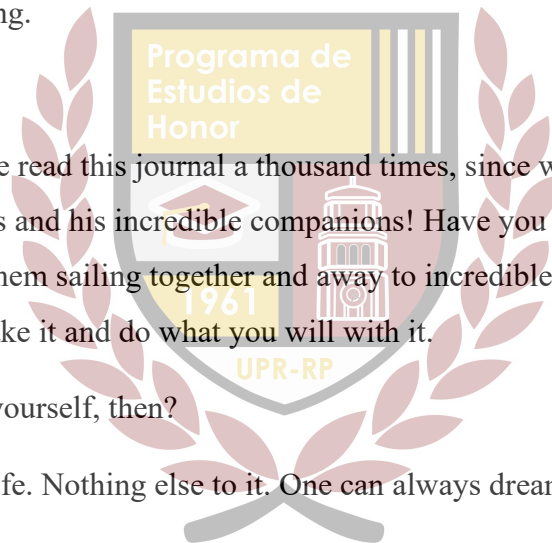
J: Stay a while. Let us talk about Don Luis. Have you read the Epic?

I: ... I haven't, not outside of tavern songs and festivals. I shouldn't pry, either.

J: Then here! Get yourself another room for tonight. Use some of my coin – consider it thanks for the journal. But do not wander streets like this at this late an hour. You already did a great thing by bringing me this. Thank you, truly.

I: I cannot accept your thanks, Joshua. That journal may just be a curse to you. But I will stay, if you insist. We should both of us go rest.

J: Ah, yes. But before you go, I should say your name now strikes me as quite fitting.



I: Is that so?

J: Yes! I have visited Santísimo recently, you see, and there I met a Casiba man who had his own tales to tell about Don Luis. You spoke of sailing, yes? Would you like to sail?

I: I would very much like to try...

J: Just so. Well, in the Epic this is not said, but I have it on good authority that the infamous pirate captain that sailed with Don Luis... her name was Isabela.

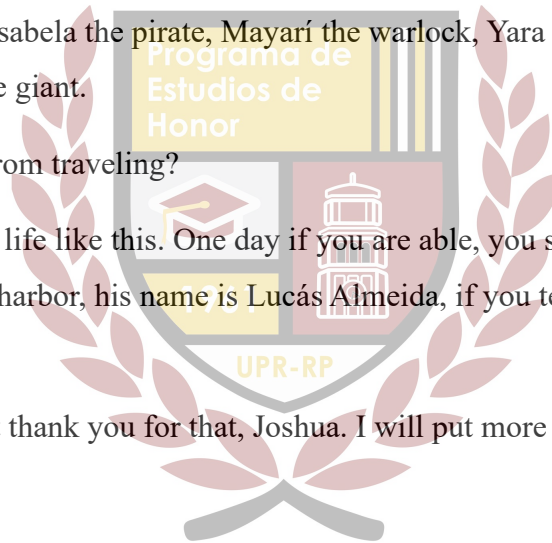
I: Oh! ... Truly?

J: Oh yes! There are statues in Santísimo dedicated to all of them. They pale in comparison to the ones in Gozarna, but they are nonetheless gorgeous – Casiba people made them. Well, all those statues bear their names: Isabela the pirate, Mayarí the warlock, Yara the sellsword, Irene the living statue, and Cobo the giant.

I: And you know all this from traveling?

J: One learns much with a life like this. One day if you are able, you should see Santísimo. There is a man who lives by the harbor, his name is Lucas Almeida, if you tell him I sent you, he will treat you to stories.

I: ... Perhaps one day. But thank you for that, Joshua. I will put more stock in my name from now on.



– O –

Note: What follows is a report I have acquired through less than acceptable means. This note, intended to forewarn and explain the following page, was written months after my departure from Gozarna, and indeed at the end of my journeys here in Leonilla. I have become a criminal, despite my best intentions, and as I ride for Santísimo with my rescuers away from the dungeons within which I was held, I feel the need to place this report here. Let it permit you, the reader, the opportunity to see the forces at play here – especially where I did not.

5th of June of the year 1058

The Day of Saint Helena

14th Inquisitorial Sacrament of our Heavenly See

Report written from Gozarna's First Garrison

On the matter of "Old Man Prado"

In accordance with royal mandate, and in conjunction with the Holy See, four men of our order journeyed to the city of Gozarna. We sought a rumored man who had acquired and attempted to sell literature related to the figure of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro. We questioned several locals throughout the city, beginning with local governors and city guard leaders. All we learned was that "Old Man Prado" was a retired soldier who apparently obtained sensitive materials from their time in the garrison. The current captain of the guard should very well face consequences for this negligence. However, the words of the peasantry did a much better job to show us to our goal.

The so-called "Old Man Prado" proved much less stubborn than we anticipated. We arrived as night fell and made our way inside his home. For such an old man, we were surprised he lived alone. That may have contributed to his cooperative mood. As per our methods, I took up the charge of interrogations while my companions searched the premises. "Old Man Prado" confirmed the following, although only when pressed: he was a garrison soldier in Gozarna, he came across and took possession of sensitive materials apparently attributed to Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, he attempted to sell the materials, and he is a lone man with no relations. No proof was found to the contrary. The materials were not found, either. When asked, he reported no successful purchases of the materials. No profits were found in his home which corresponded to the sale.

At this point, "Old Man Prado" openly accused a traveling scholar whom he had met just that afternoon of stealing the materials. He could provide no proof, save that these materials were a prized possession he would not give up without charge. We see no reason to deny that much.

The scholar, which he identified as one Joshua de la Ría Cosme, had come to his home to discuss the purchase of the materials, but negotiations fell through. In his age, it would have been simple for this Joshua to make away with the materials. This matter would have remained unexplored had it not been for an encounter I myself had with this Joshua.

The aforementioned encounter occurred at the gates of Gozarna. A man had convinced a city guard to open the sealed chambers under each statue of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro and his five companions. I found the man inside the chamber of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, apparently admiring the original statue. I ended the engagement with a stern but not severe admonishment of both this man – the eponymous Joshua de la Ría Cosme – and the guard. Truly, the garrison of Gozarna leaves much to be desired at any stage in their hierarchy. Now that this Joshua reoccurs in the context of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro, and in the context of two possible crimes besides, we have decided to pursue this target. Our only lead was the inn at which he slept that night. We visited the place the following morning, but Joshua had already departed. He was described by the innkeeper as a pale and well-spoken man. As well, the innkeeper explained that Joshua intends to retrace the path of Don Luis Alonso Pizarro and record this hero's legacy. This matter cannot remain unexplored. If he truly possesses both this objective and the sought after materials, then he must be considered a threat. We shall pursue, capture, and question him. As for "Old Man Prado", he has been left with a warning: the possession and attempted distribution of materials such as those are a violation of the royal mandate against officially sanctioned literature. Should we capture Joshua, study the stolen materials, and find them in violation of the above stated mandate, then he will answer to us. Before any judgement can be made on him, however, we shall hurry to resolve the matter of Joshua de la Ría Cosme.

Hereby committed to record by my hand,

Alexander Carrillón, Second Tear,

14th Inquisitorial Sacrament of our Heavenly See

Works Cited

- Abegunde, Clement Tayo. "African History and Poetic Decoloniality: The Poetries of Kamau Brathwaite and Kofi Anyidoho in Perspective." *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 36, no. 1, Jan. 2025, pp. 60–83. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=27e55b7b-81aa-31e9-9a79-b2b733b4a751.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. 1959. Penguin Books, 2017.
- Alagraa, Bedour. "Lessons from Brathwaite: Breaking the Pentameter, Deepening Black Study." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, vol. 30, no. 2, Apr. 2022, pp. 163–78. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=b28e238b-8f00-3bf3-a505-2a3b8dfc626a.
- Brathwaite, Kamau. *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. New Beacon Books, 1984.
- Danielewski, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*. Pantheon Books, 2000.
- Day, David. *An Encyclopedia of Tolkien: the History and Mythology that Inspired Tolkien's World*. Canterbury Classics, 2019.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, Pluto Classics, 1986.
- Fawcett, Heather. *Encyclopaedia of Faeries*. Del Rey, 2023.
- Indiana, Rita. *Tentacle. And Other Stories*, 2018.
- James, Marlon. *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*. Riverhead Books, 2019.
- James, Marlon. *Moon Witch, Spider King*. Riverhead Books, 2022.
- Kanehito Yamada, writer. *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*. Season 1. Directed by Keiichirō Saitō. Aired September 29th, 2023, in Nippon TV, Madhouse Inc., 2023.
- Kaufman, Amie, Jay Kristoff. *The Illuminae Files*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2015.
- López Nieves, Luis. *El corazón de Voltaire*. 3rd ed., Grupo Editorial Norma, 2006.
- Mitchell, Dave. *Cloud Atlas*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004.
- Pané, Ramón. *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios*, edited by José Juan Arrom. 3rd edition, Siglo Veintiuno editores, 1988.

Rilke, Reiner. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Translated by M.D. Herter Norton. 1st ed. New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 1934.

Román, Alexandra. *Obsesión: Ascensión Divina I*. Independently published, 2021.

Sims, Jonathan, narrator. *The Magnus Archives*, Rusty Quill, 2015-2025, <https://rustyquill.com/show/the-magnus-archives>.

S. Levine, Roger, et al, editors. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 9th ed., vol. A. W.W. Norton & Company, 2022.

Colón, Cristobal. *Letter of Discovery*. S. Levine, et al., pp. 58-66.

de las Casas, Bartolomé. *An Account, Much Abbreviated, of the Destruction of the Indies*. S. Levine, et al., pp. 66-70.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. 1954-1955. Second Mariner Books ed. HarperCollinsPublishers. 2020.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*. 1977. edited by Christopher Tolkien. 2nd ed. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001.

Yeats, W.B. *Mythologies*. 1888. First Clydesdale Press ed., 2022.

