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### In Defense of the Dead

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If you believe the Indians—those naked,  
iniquitous creatures—should govern  
themselves, stumbling blindly like cattle  
through wolfish night, uncivilized in manner  
and mores the enlightened long abandoned  
and to which we shall never return even if  
desperate and miserable in a vine-strangled,  
throbbing jungle or the llano yawning endlessly—

if you sanctimoniously wring your hands  
and claim that we—the true defenders  
of the Crown—burned, raped, dismembered,  
enslaved, plundered *with no cause* but  
to enrich ourselves with private kingdoms  
though we strove, armed only with God's  
own truth and the valor to confront Satan's  
inflamed legions, to make men of these primitives—

if you weep and rend your garments and insist  
the conquistadors killed with cruel designs  
solely on subjugating those who refuse, or knew  
not they refused, to vow fidelity to King  
and Christ, to take without compensation,  
their wealth and homes, women and provisions,  
with no concern for their lives or livelihood,  
with no moral regret or avowal of misconduct—

then, you must also believe these outlandish lies,  
which wise men know are pure folly: the sun  
is *not* the center of the universe, the Earth

is *not* but six-thousand years old, the native  
is *not* a brute savage lacking a soul, this illness  
is *not* the holy disease suffered also by Christ,  
and years hence people will *not* recognize  
the right and righteousness of the Conquistadores.

—Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada;<sup>1</sup> 16 February 1579; Mariquita, Colombia

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<sup>1</sup> **Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada** (1509-1579), who was trained as a lawyer, arrived at Santa Marta colony (on the north coast of present-day Colombia) in 1535 and on 5 April 1536 set out on an expedition to explore the interior of the country. On this disastrous venture, 700 of the 800 men he set out with died and during the two years he spent among the Muisca, an agricultural civilization of over a million people in the Andes, he plundered their wealth and tortured their ruler to death to get him to tell him where there was more gold. This expedition ended when two other conquistadors—Benalcázar from Ecuador and Federmann from Venezuela—arrived in 1539. After some initial tension, they agreed to return to Spain and submit to the crown their claims to the Muisca territory.

Quesada's mistreatment of the chief Sagipa caused him to lose favor with the royal court, and it was ten years before he returned to the New World and another ten before he set out on an equally disastrous expedition to the llanos in search of El Dorado in April 1569. During the two-and-a-half-year expedition, he lost 250 of the 300 Spaniards, 1065 of 1100 horses, and 1470 of 1500 Indians. He and what was left of his expedition struggled back to Bogotá. In the last years of his life he suffered under a large debt, wrote, and read broadly. He died of leprosy in 1579 (Graham, 1967, pp. 242-43).