The Myth, Marvel, and Adventure of El Dorado
Semantic Mutations of a Legend

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Dreams of gold have accompanied human history down through the ages. Gold is a beautiful and useful metal, easily shaped and immune to rust, and from the time of the ancient Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations, it has been regarded as a precious metal from which jewels and decorative as well as everyday objects have been fashioned. Even before the concept of money turned it into one of the principal forms of exchange, gold was used as a medium of barter.

Apart from being of commercial and aesthetic value, gold is also a part of the stuff of fables and legends. Legendary and mythical lands where gold abounds have crowded the imaginative geography of almost all civilizations. The Bible itself, in the *Book of Kings*, speaks of the Mines of King Solomon, the Kingdom of Ophir, and the City of Sidon, while the prophet Zechariah observes that in the City of Tyre: "silver is heaped up like dust, and gold as the mire of the streets." [Zachariah, 9.3]

From the treasures of Solomon and Ali Baba's cave to the islands where the "golden apples" grow, from the gilded kingdoms sought by the knights errant to the quest for El Dorado, gold has always been inseparable from the idea of treasure, fortune and – above all – enchantment.

And when we speak of treasure and enchantment, we also speak of booty.

Chance, Fortune, and Lust

It is no exaggeration to say that the myth of El Dorado has been the most persistent expression of this magic conception of riches

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characteristic of the Old Continent. For riches were seen as something one acquired by chance or fortune. Fortune and chance, indeed, were one and the same – the goddess who pursued her uncertain course on a winged wheel. Riches were the hidden treasure one came upon by luck or by supernatural revelation.

But gold has also been an object of covetousness: men have avidly sought, stolen, and even killed for gold. Thus, gold engenders evil. In the words of an elegy written over two thousand years ago: "Man today worships gold and neglects the gods; gold destroys faith and corrupts justice."

Man's earliest expeditions and conquests were saturated with the idea of booty and enchantment. The most famous and archetypal of such expeditions is that of Jason and the Argonauts. Jason left behind him a happy life in the Golden Age, an uncomplicated world of plenty where everyone lived to a ripe old age, so that he could seek his fortune beyond the boundaries of the world known to the Ancient Greeks – the Pontus Euxinus or Black Sea. And he did so with a precise aim in mind: to seize the "golden fleece."

The "golden fleece" has a symbolic value similar to that of later historical treasures. Its value is not simply an "economic" one, quantifiable in the same way that the value of a gold ingot can be measured by following the fluctuating stockmarket quotations on a computer screen. The "golden fleece" is also a trophy, the prize that is the reward for an enterprise fraught with difficulties and obstacles, an enterprise in which the adventure and labors involved in the conquest of the trophy are as important as the goal itself. The "golden fleece" marks the beginning of a myth: the epic adventure to seek out treasure in remote and unknown lands.

The epic accounts of these expeditions – especially in the *Journey of the Argonauts* by Apolonio de Rodas – describe it as being simultaneously a quest for booty and a voyage of initiation involving a series of trials leading to self-realization. Thus Jason had to harness wild bulls whose hooves were of bronze and whose breath was of flame; had to plant dragons' teeth in a field from which warriors sprang fully armed; and, finally, he had to employ guile to overcome the monster that guarded the fleece. His voyage was marked by a series of trials that had to be overcome before he secured his final triumph.

The dual significance of gold – as booty and enchantment – appears again in the quest f or the golden chalice in the Holy Grail stories, borrowed from German legend by medieval Christian tradition. In the best-known version of the adventures of Perceval, the *Conte del Graal*, the obstacles that have to be overcome – the barren lands, the river of Hades, the garden of Eden – represent not only successive tests of the knight's personal valor but also stages in the transformation of the essence of the golden chalice. For while the journey would lack a purpose without the golden chalice as its goal, the journey itself serves to transmute the material value of the chalice into a spiritual symbol.

These accounts of the conquest of precious trophies or of legendary lands where the streets are paved with gold were given an unexpected boost by the European discovery of America. Stories of fabulous golden treasures of gold reappear in the New World in all their mythical force.

The American Astronauts

Indeed, the emergence of an American version of the myth of Jason and the Argonauts is almost simultaneous with the discovery of the New World. The quest for "new fleeces" is apparent in the myth of El Dorado as well as that of all the golden cities that flourish in the geography of the American imagination, from Cibola and the Seven Cities, situated in present-day Arizona, to the City of the Caesars, in the remote southern latitudes of Patagonia, taking in Manoa, Paititi, Trapalanda, Lin Lin or the "fleece of Colcos" mentioned in Columbus Even in mid-twentieth-century accounts of the adventures of Francisco de Orellana and Fray Gaspar de Carvajal, we find the discoverers of the Amazon referred to as the "Argonauts of the jungle."

By the same token, the golden realms of classical antiquity reappear in the New World under different names. Thus, the biblical kingdom of Ophir is the land that the Portuguese navigator Alburquerque thought he had discovered when he spoke of the "Kingdom of Monomotopall – to which King Solomon had sent his ships in search of gold. Sebastian Cabot sought the same land – under the name of the "Realm of the White King" – on the banks of the River Plate.

The city of Cipango – where, according to Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville, streets and houses were fashioned "entirely of gold, like great paving stones two or three finger-breadths' thick" – was alluded to by Christopher Columbus when he wrote to the Pope in 1502 that "this island is Tharsis, it is Cethia, it is ophir and ophaz and Cipango, and we have called it Espaiiolail."

The case of Christopher Columbus is worth examining in detail. His journeys exemplify the ambiguous fusion of religious mysticism and Judeo-Christian millenarianism with the ambition to conquer lands overflowing with gold and silver – an ambivalent attitude characteristic of many other enterprises in the conquest of the Americas. For while he was seeking gold, Columbus also declared that his quest could serve to liberate the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem from Arab dominion. In his first letter to the King and Queen of Spain he wrote: "Gold is most excellent; from gold one can make treasure, and whoever has treasure can do what he wishes in this world, and can even ensure that souls go to Paradise."

For Columbus, gold, while a symbol of "worldly power," should also serve to reconstruct the old temple of Zion in Jerusalem. This idea – recurrent in the writings of Columbus – is taken up by later chroniclers. Lopez de Gomara notes in the dedication to the King of Spain of his *General History of the Indes* :

> It was God's wish that the Indians should be discovered in your time and to your subjects so that you might convert them to your holy law, as many wise Christians say. The conquest of the Indians began once that of the Moors was completed, so that there might always be wars waged by the Spanish against the infidels.

In this extension of the Reconquest to the Americas, gold held a double significance – as sacred symbol and base metal, as prize and salvation, an initiatory quest and a savage plunder, the cross and the sword.

The enterprise of Christopher Columbus is shot through with this ambivalence. The discoverer of America wrote in a copy of the *Imago Mundi* of the precious stones and treasures of the mythical islands of Antiquity that he hoped to find in the West Indies. At the same time, his diary and his accounts of his journeys tell of his growing conviction that he was on a spiritual mission involving the discovery of an Earthly Paradise in the New World. This

messianic dimension to the discovery and conquest of America is what Ernst Bloch called the "ambiguous mixture of the search for gold as a metal and of the Golden Age as a lost paradise." The quest for El Dorado, then, is part of a search for "geographical utopias."

Thus, a geography of legendary countries said to contain vast treasures and riches – El Dorado, El Paititi and the country of the Omaguas – emerges alongside the discovery and conquest of America bearing the ubiquitous stamp of the myth of gold. The lure and enchantment of gold, in fact, provided the motive force behind the most extravagant ventures that accelerated the discovery and conquest of the remotest parts of America. The land of Pira (*sic*) of which Pizarro and Almagro heard tell, the Meta mountain range in Guyana, Lake Parime and the Guatavita lagoon, were all the pretext for expeditions that could lead to the capture of an empire, as occurred with the conquest of the Incas by Francisco Pizarro, but could also culminate in the megalomaniac delirium of a Lope de Aguirre in the Amazon forest, or the discovery by German explorers of the vast expanses of eastern Venezuela.

As Gabriel Gárcia Marquez said in his speech to the Swedish Academy on receiving the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature:

> El Dorado, our imaginary and much sought-after country, appeared on numerous maps over many years, changing its location and shape according to the fancy of the map-makers. It became familiar in its minutest details, from the dazzling attire of its sovereign, the only king to be both naked and adorned in the greatest luxury, down to the materials with which the city was built, the toys of its children and the shape and name of the lake by which it was situated. Those who sought it most avidly and tenaciously were not only the imaginative sons of the Mediterranean but also the men of the North.

Moreover, the quest was not all fantasy. The riches of Montezuma, the treasures of Atahualpa, the silver deposits of Mexico and Peru, the mountain of Potosi, all gave these dreams a certain basis in fact.

All Europe was astounded by the gifts made by Montezuma to Cortes: the jewels and golden objects; the huge gold and silver wheels, as large as those of a cart, which caused Albrecht Darer to exclaim: "Never in my life did I see anything that moved me as much as these objects!" The treasure of Atahualpa likewise amazed the world, prompting pages of detailed and admiring description: life-size statues molded in gold, models of animals,

birds, fish, and trees as well as everyday objects – all cast in the precious metal.

Because gold had been found in Mexico and Peru, it followed that much more was waiting to be discovered in mines whose whereabouts were unknown, in treasures hoarded over centuries by peoples living in as yet unexplored lands. In this way the myth of the ultimate kingdom of gold, El Dorado came into being. This myth, though it appeared to be an invention, came to have its own reality; for "in the creation of the New World nothing is more real than El Dorado."

But what exactly is the myth of El Dorado? What is this land so avidly sought ?

Enterprise for Visionaries

El Dorado was a quest for visionaries, a veritable obsession among the European adventurers who for more than a century scoured much of the north of South America in search of this fabled land. Pursuing often contradictory information, signs, and rumors of all kinds, they explored inhospitable forests, suffocating plains, and freezing mountain plateaux. They wandered for days and months, enduring every kind of privation, killing and pillaging, suffering and wreaking suffering (with the soul between their teeth").

El Dorado is a many-sided myth. sometimes it refers to a man, a chief sprinkled with gold dust performing a ceremony in the Guatavita lagoon; sometimes to a city – Manoa – or a region – the "land of the Omaguas" – or a lake such as Parime. This fabulous gold is an elusive prize that dissolves in the meandering lines of maps and stories that range from the west of Columbia to the east of Venezuela, from the Amazon basin of Ecuador to the forests of eastern Bolivia, the foothills of the Sierra de Plata to the sources of the River Plate. The myth that shaped the quest – as well as the costly expeditions devoted to it – was not a simple one but assumed various forms.

A Colombian legend relates that whenever a new chief of the Mosca tribe came to power, a complex ceremony would take place. The naked body of the chief was daubed with a sticky turpentine mixture and coated with gold dust until he became like a living statue. He was then transported on a raft, surrounded by the head men of the tribe, to the middle of the Guatavita lagoon

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(in Columbia) where, to the accompaniment of shouts and the playing of native instruments, golden objects were thrown to the bottom of the lake and the chief himself plunged into its waters. It was this ceremony, of which the Spanish had heard echoes, that gave rise to the name El Dorado – or the Gilded One. Belalcázar, one of those who tried to track down the legendary lake, gave the name El Dorado to the famous "gilded one" – on the model of the names commonly given to the Spanish kings, such as the Wise, the Warrior ["Campeador"], the Brave, and the Cruel.

El Dorado became a veritable myth. And like all myths it gave rise to variants. In 1543, a few years after the original legend began to circulate, people were already talking about a chief who always went about naked, covered with gold dust, because any other attire, even golden armor, would be lacking in dignity.

Such a custom presupposed that every night the chief washed off the gold dust from the preceding day and renewed the operation the next morning, a habit that in the imagination of Gonzalo Pizarro added up to the existence of an absolute fortune. As the historian Fernandez de Oviedo remarked, one could have become effortlessly rich simply by having the good fortune to sweep up every night the gold dust remaining from the previous day, although he added on a skeptical note that, if such a custom existed, the gold mines in the region must be very wealthy indeed. . . .

Another variation on the original legend resembles the plot of a short story. A Mosca chief is said to have discovered that his beautiful wife was deceiving him. In his fury he condemned the lover to death by impaling and ordered that his adulterous wife should eat the lover's penis. The woman fled in despair with her daughter in her arms and drowned herself in the lake. It is said that thereafter Chief Guatavita covered himself in gold and presided from a raft over ceremonies in memory of his wife in which golden objects were cast into the middle of the lake.

When the lake was finally discovered, every possible means was tried to dredge up the legendary treasure. In 1580, Antonio de Sepúlveda obtained permission to drain the lake. After constructing a complicated engineering device, he proceeded – despite the doubts of skeptics – to recover from it gold objects and plate. Each draining operation brought with it new surprises.

The legend had turned out to be true: there were treasures at the bottom of the lagoon. However, the cost of the operation, together with the high price paid for the exploitation rights, made the Herculean task of draining the lake prohibitively expensive. Tired and ill, Sepulveda gave up the quest and went off to die in a hospital. Shortly after his death, torrential rain filled up the lagoon and the drainage works collapsed. Nobody dared to renew the attempt, although there was no lack of schemes envisaged. Even Alexander von Humboldt on his journey through Colombia at the beginning of the nineteenth century pursued his journey as far as Guatavita.

The Semantic Mutations of the Legend

By a semantic mutation, El Dorado – the "gilded one" of the original legend – was turned into the name of a region, a legendary country containing cities of great wealth. sir Walter Raleigh in *The discovery of the large, rich and beautiful empire of Guiana, with a relation of the Great and Golden Citie of Manoa, which the Spaniards call El Dorado* (1596) goes as far as to say that the region of El Dorado, which he situates in Guiana, has a large population and great cities with temples and treasure. Its capital is Manoa and its emperor descended from the Incas who fled from the Spanish after their expulsion from Peru, taking with them whole populations and much treasure. In the empire of Guiana there is more gold than in any other part of Peru as well as great cities rivaling those of the Inca empire even in its heyday. It is governed by the same laws and has exactly the same form and practice of government as in Peru; the Emperor and his subjects belong to the same religion.

Walter Raleigh informed Queen Elizabeth of England that

> the Spaniards who have visited Manoa, the imperial city of Guiana, have assured me that its size, its riches and its excellent site are superior to those of any other city on earth, at least among those known to the Spanish nation. It is situated on a salt-water lake two hundred leagues long, similar to the Caspian Seal.

This lake also appears on the "New Map of the Gold-Rich Country of Guyana" by Jocundus Hondius. Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa said of the lake in his *Compendium and description of the West Indies* that it was the site of: "A city or town more than three leagues wide, called Manoa, which has great treasures of gold and

silver and other precious things," affirming with conviction that "There is a street of over two leagues in length, where gold- and silversmiths work the precious metals according to their custom."

In other cases, El Dorado is the name of a golden mountain. Brother Juan de Santa Gertrudio relates that between Barbacoa and Panama is a mountain known as El Dorado. According to legend it contained a vein of gold compressed with such force that it exploded like a volcano and began to liquefy and spray gold all around. The entire mountain was said to be covered with the melted gold.

The Legend of the Lake

The truth is that ever since the conquest of Mexico it was suspected that the waters of the American lakes and lagoons contained hidden treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones. This stemmed from the belief that the gold and gems of Montezuma had been cast to the bottom of the lake on which Tenochtitlán was built.

This same myth – the lake with hidden treasures – in the expeditions of the German Ambrosio Alfinger along the shores of Lake Maracaibo; in the legend of the golden alligators sought by Juan Rodriguez Freyle in the Teusacá Lagoon; in the expedition of Martos to the Guasca Lagoon; and in the fatal attempt by Carriaga – well into the nineteenth century – to recover the hidden treasure from the Siecha Lagoon. The lakes make their appearance again in the Bolivian altiplano in a treasure quest focused on the Islands of the Sun and Moon in Lake Titicaca or on the Amazonian foothills of the Peruvian Andes, where the mysterious kingdom of the Paititi was said to be located.

The way in which different versions of the same myth proliferated on the American continent is truly amazing. Simultaneously in remote places unconnected by any form of communication there rose up a whole series of fabulous cities: El Dorado, Parima, Enim, the Gran Moxo, the Gran Para, the Gran Paytita, the Gran Quivir, and the City of the Caesars.

But what is even more astonishing is that the search for these mythical cities and lagoons mobilized vast human and material resources in a frenzy of activity extending throughout the sixteenth century and involving not only the Spanish Crown but

Germans and Englishmen as well, not to speak of the interest of the French Chancellory and of the Dutch, whose diplomatic reports were at the origin of the colonization of Guyana. This gave rise to border disputes between the various parties in the belief that they territories contained these ubiquitous golden kingdom. Some idea of the intense activity in this period can be gauged from the map of the eastern extremity of the continent: the three Guyanas, English, French and Dutch, together with Spanish Guyana (today Venezuela), coincide with what was finally believed to be the location of El Dorado.

These ventures were accompanied by extravagant decrees, such as that which dubbed Pedro de Orsua "Governor and Captain-General of El Dorado," or that by which Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo named part of the American Continent "Golden Castille." Antonio Berrio, for his part, called on the King of Spain to grant him the title of Marquis of the New World in exchange for discovering El Dorado.

The "Great Privations" of the Adventure

Nevertheless, the difficulties experienced by most of these expeditions were formidable.

The case of Gonzalo Pizarro, the brother of Francisco Pizarro, Conqueror of Peru, illustrates this point. In 1541 Gonzalo set off with several thousand Indians, hundreds of armed soldiers, horses, herds of pigs, llamas, dogs and equipment to conquer the legendary country of Canela of which rumors had reached Quito and Cuzco. For the next eighteen months they wandered blindly through the forest, all the Indians died, and the animals were eaten as they dropped with exhaustion. The chronicler of the conquest of Peru, Pedro Cieza de L6on, speaks of the "vast expanses of hunger" traversed by those who accompanied Pizarro in the search for El Dorado and tells how they ate horses, dogs, and even shoe, saddle, and stirrup leather "boiled in water and then baked in embers." Cieza praises the ability of the Spaniards to withstand great privations. What is astonishing is that at the end of this long trek Pizarro found himself more or less at his point of departure. With no path to guide him, he had ended up describing a huge circle in the forest. The few survivors returned almost naked, their uniforms rotting, their swords eaten away by rust, and their unshod feet covered with sores and wounds.

Something similar happened to the expedition of Nicolas Federmann, who set off from the Venezuelan coast in search of El Dorado on behalf of the German Welser Bank. For some three years he wandered lost in the forest, including nearly a year spent looking for the path leading to the plateau of the Andes, at the altitude of present-day Bogatá. When he finally found the pass of Suma Paz he had to clamber up cliffs and gullies, hauling the horses after him by rope. When everybody had given the members of his expedition up for lost, they emerged emaciated, clothed in rough animal skins, and with beards and hair – which they had left uncut to protect themselves from the sun – half way down their shoulders.

The expedition of the German Philip von Hutten was reduced to eating snails, frogs, lizards, vipers, worms, grass, roots and other unnourishing fare. Some, "going against nature" as the chroniclers of the disastrous expedition relate, also ate human flesh. It is told how they found a "Christian" cooking a "cut of child meat" garnished with grasses.

A similar thing happened to Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, the founder of the city of Santa Fe de Bogatá. His soldiers, decimated by fevers, plagues, mosquitoes, poisonous snakes, crocodiles, and vampire bats made their way over marshes laying footplanks before them as they went. The Spaniards died like flies – according to the chronicler of the expedition Brother Pedro de Aguado – while the Indian packbearers dropped exhausted and were eaten by jaguars or crocodiles. After four months Quesada had only two hundred soldiers left out of the seven hundred with which he had set off. Food had to be rationed. Any animals they were lucky enough to catch had to be eaten at once before they rotted. Their horses disappeared, and cases of cannibalism were reported. After eight months, when death seemed inevitable, they finally reached the plateau in the region of Cundinamarca. There they founded Santa Fe de Bogotá, which was to be the capital of Colombia – another city, like so many in America, whose origin was related to the quest for El Dorado.

It is interesting to note that in this world of hunger and privation, whose ultimate aim was the kingdom of El Dorado, gold – on those rare occasions when it was found – lost all its value in circumstances where eating was the most important thing. In the

account of von Hutten's expedition, we read how pieces of horse-meat from animals that had died "by arrow and the plague" were sold in the camps for four hundred or more pesos of gold per pound of flesh. And the chronicler admits somewhat shamefully that "I myself joined some other Christians in buying a dog for a hundred pesos. Deers' feet, soaked in water and cooked, were eaten."

In the case of the conquest of Peru, the officers became millionaires, while the regular soldiers were rich as lords. Yet the vast quantities of gold produced enormous and unexpected inflation. A bottle of wine sold for seventy pesos of gold, a sword for fifty, while a pair of shoes cost forty, a cape one hundred, a saddle ten thousand (equal to a million dollars today), and a horse several thousand pesos. Despite these prices, a vendor could not always be found, such was the scarcity of goods for sale and the abundance of gold. A measure of how high this inflation had soared was that in Castille ten pesos of gold was enough to buy several hectares of land, while in Peru the same amount of money could not even buy a ream of writing paper.

The privations experienced during many of these expeditions seem to have been even more acute than the initiation rites in classical mythology. This is why Lope de Aguirre, "crazy" Aguirre, the "tyrant," observed – in between oaths against God and insults to the King of Spain – "There is nothing here on this river except despair, especially for those of us who come from Spain."

As V.S. Naipaul was to write in *The Loss of El Dorado*, El Dorado began as a search for gold but became something more – a romantic story of the New World, a dream of Shangri-la, the world whole and inviolable. And yet this world *had* existed, but the Spanish only profaned it. Out of a sense of frustration that served to stimulate their imaginations even more, these same Spaniards yearned to repeat the adventure, although the story had now become so blurred it had crossed the bounds of reality, and its shimmer had turned into a torment.

For, by a curious irony of fate, when in 1527 the Spanish first heard of the native legend of the Gilded One, pre-Hispanic history had already been erased. Indeed, when the Spanish reached V61ez in New Granada, the Guatavitas Indians – who were seemingly the origin of the gilded man legend had already been exterminated

by the Muysca Indians of Bogotá. The Kingdom of El Dorado already belonged to the past when it entered the collective imagination of the Spanish, and thus was a paradise lost before it could be found.

In short, it was a utopia.

What then remained at the end of the sixteenth century of that fantastical vision?

The Knight of El Dorado in the Valley of the Shadow

Many chroniclers – such as Brother Pedro Simon – openly proclaimed the quest to be nonsensical, saying "They are all pursuing El Dorado with no more light to guide them than a few obscure tales that are without solid foundation, for all that their goal is invariably situated in the heart and entrails of terra firma." For him, the "so-called Gilded One" was a fraud and a lie; it could even be seen as the cause of the "mangy and pestilential country Spain had become."

Martin de Urus had been far-seeing enough in 1573 to identify the most harmful consequence of this quest: the time and effort wasted by the expeditions, which "instead of populating" the new kingdoms, squandered their resources in pursuit of this myth:

> The blame lies with these adventurers, who instead of populating this new kingdom destroyed it by going off to seek the lagoon of the Gilded One or a new Atabaliba, thereby wasting their time and the resources available for developing this land.

on occasion, a curse seemed to surround the hunted treasure like a protective halo. This was the view of Gonzalo Jim6nez de Quesada, who himself buried such gems and gold nuggets that he found in order that "nobody would touch them," believing that "the person who did so would drop dead." Others openly referred to the "greed that led the gold-seekers to this kingdom and the poverty and the disenchantment that was their reward," and spoke of the "pestilential stench of gold."

But the most amazing case is that of Antonio Berrio. After exploring the forest regions in eastern Venezuela in search of Manoa, the Golden City said to have been founded by the Incas when they fled the Spaniards, Berrio wrote in his *Memories of the*

Discovery of El Dorado that, having reached that land of golden treasure the natives wished to show him, he declined to view it "so as not to display greed." In other words, having arrived at his goal, our weary hero decided not to cast his eyes on the gold so as not to "appear greedy."

The question must then be asked, as Father José Gumilla had put it: "Why so many dangerous voyages?" "Why all this striving ?" "What is the purpose of these levies, marches and unbearable journeys?" He himself supplied the not inconsequential answer: "We seek the famous treasure-trove of El Dorado; so let none be surprised at our resolve and determination, for that which is of great value necessarily has a high price."

A refinement to that answer is suggested by Edgar Allan Poe in his poem "El Dorado": the "gallant knight" who "had journeyed long . . . in search of El Dorado" was on the point of renouncing his search when he meets a fellow soul – "a pilgrim shadow" – who spurs him to pursue his quest:

Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"
The Shade replied
– "If you seek for El Dorado."

In other words – Poe seems to tell us – the quest is the goal and the goal is the quest. The search for El Dorado is the longing for an unattainable distant star. It is a dream of infinity.

Translated from the Spanish by J. Corbett

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