

# Substituting Fantasy for Achievement

## Walter Ralegh's Failure as Discoverer and its Vindication

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SIR Walter Rawleigh was one, that (it seems) Fortune had pickt out of purpose, of whom to make an example, or to use as her Tennis-Ball, thereby to shew what she could doe; for she tost him up of nothing, and too and fro to greatnesse, and from thence down to little more than to that wherein she found him.<sup>1</sup>

This is the beginning of Robert Naunton's (1563-1635) account of the life of Sir Walter Ralegh included in his *Fragmenta Regalia*, which was published posthumously in 1641. It pictures the life of one of the most flamboyant characters in Elizabethan England, whom the queen, here allegorized as Goddess Fortuna, tossed up like a tennis ball, which she let reach its highest point only to dart it to the ground. The full title of the work *Fragmenta Regalia or Observations on the Late Queen Elizabeth, her Times and Favorites* alludes to the most decisive principle shaping the social dynamics of Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603): the allocation of power, honour and riches according to the queen's caprice. And Walter Ralegh was for a decisive span of his life Elizabeth's foremost favourite, probably only rivaled by the Earls of Leicester and Essex, respectively. Naunton's above allegory of Ralegh's meteoric rise, his apogee and his downfall, exemplifies the feeble position that courtiers held. Some of them might very well end up on the scaffold, of which the Earl of Essex presents the most prominent example. Others might 'only' be degraded, as was the case with Ralegh. The reasons for such like falls from grace ranged from alleged treason (Essex) to such trifles as having married without the Queen's consent (Leicester and Ralegh). This essay will concentrate on Ralegh's disgrace and its aftermath.

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<sup>1</sup> | Naunton (1641), 30.

It will read his travelogue *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Em-  
pyre of Guiana* (1596) as his discursive attempt to turn defeat into victory,  
hoping to regain the Queen's favour and amend his failure as a courtier.

## 1. THE UPSTART

When the Earl of Oxford, one of the most public figures in Elizabethan England, called Walter Ralegh "the Jack, and upstart"<sup>2</sup> he alluded to Ralegh's prominence within the queen's inner circle in spite of his comparatively humble upbringing. And indeed, although born to Walter Ralegh and Katherine Champernowne into the south western country gentry in 1552, "the younger Walter Ralegh derived no particular advantage from his descent. Though of respectable stock, he was the product of a third marriage and a second, the youngest of four sons to his father and five sons to his mother."<sup>3</sup> It is easy to see that in an age when primogeniture was the foremost principle according to which titles, land and wealth were bequeathed to the next generation Ralegh must have cut a poor figure. His near contemporary Thomas Fuller puts explicit emphasis on this circumstance: "[Ralegh] was born ... of an Ancient Family, but decaied in Estate, and the youngest brother thereof."<sup>4</sup> Here is an anecdote recorded by John Aubrey referring to Ralegh's destitution as a young Oxford student:

In his youth for several yeares [...] he was under streights for want of money. I remember that Mr. Thomas Child of Worcestershire told me that Sir Walter borrowed a gowne of him when he was at Oxford (they were both of the same College), which he never restored, nor money for it.<sup>5</sup>

Ralegh, as a young student at Oxford, could not afford the obligatory gown. So he borrowed one which he neither returned nor paid for. But even if Ralegh had been first in line and had inherited his father's comparatively modest fortune, his birth right could not have been compared to that of his great competitors for the queen's favour, namely the Earls of Oxford,

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2 | Ibid.

3 | Nicholls/Williams (2011), 7.

4 | Fuller (1662), 261.

5 | Aubrey (1949), 316.

Essex and, above all, Leicester. Looking at it from that angle it is the more astounding that the country gentleman from the provinces, who, as Aubrey ensures us, retained his Devon brogue throughout his life<sup>6</sup>, rose to be the queen's favourite in the 1580s accumulating honours and riches of an almost unprecedented scale. Here are only a few of the positions he held:<sup>7</sup> Lord Warden of the Stannaries and High Steward of the Duchy of Cornwall, Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall and Vice-Admiral of the West, and, what is probably the peak of his career, Captain of the Guard, being in charge of the queen's protection in an age when possible assassins lurked around every corner. Raleigh was knighted on 6 January 1585 and in addition to the right to call himself Sir Walter from then on Elizabeth gave him lands and patents which turned him into one of the most affluent men of the realm. So what was it that attracted the queen to the young gentleman from the rural English West? Of course Raleigh had distinguished himself as an officer in Ireland having been instrumental to the suppression of an Irish rebellion in 1581 together with Lord Grey.<sup>8</sup> But military success alone is not enough; it also has to be communicated to those in charge. And Raleigh seems to have excelled at exactly this point. Naunton suggests that his rhetorical skills were far superior to those of Grey and that consequently it was up to him to plead their case to the Queen and her Lords at the council table.

[Raleigh] had much better in the telling of his tale [...] for from thence he came to be known, and to have access to the Queen, and the Lords [...]. He had gotten the Queens eare at a trice, and she began to be taken with his elocution, and loved to hear his reasons to her demands.<sup>9</sup>

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**6** | "... notwithstanding his so great Mastership in Style and his conversation with the learnedest and politest persons, yet he spake broad Devonshire to his dying day." (Aubrey (1949), 318)

**7** | Cf. Nicholls/Williams (2011), 26ff.

**8** | Cf. Nicholls/Williams (2011), 18f.

**9** | Naunton (1641), 31. Aubrey recounts the same tale: "He went into Ireland, where he served in the Warres, and shewed much courage and conduct, but he would be perpetually differing with (I thinke) Gray, then Lord Deputy, so that at last the Hearing was to be at council table before the Queen, which was what he desired; where he told his Tale so well, and with so good a Grace and Presence,

Still, military success alone and the eloquent telling of it hardly explain the infatuation Elizabeth seems to have felt for the young man. Many other decorated war heroes did not achieve the intimacy that Raleigh and the Queen developed. Aubrey clearly suggests that Raleigh's physical appearance played its part:

[T]he Queen beheld him with admiration, as if a beautiful young Giant had stalked in with the service.<sup>10</sup>

Besides his outward handsome appearance, Naunton stresses Raleigh's natural poise and sophistication which retains all the properties of the Renaissance gentleman:

He had in the outward man, a good presence, in a handsome and well compacted person, a strong natural wit, and a better judgement, with a bold and plausible tongue, whereby he could set out his parts to the best advantage; and to these he had the adjuncts of some generall Learning, which by diligence he enforced to a great augmentation, and perfection; for he was an indefatigable Reader, whether by Sea or Land.<sup>11</sup>

In short, Raleigh was good looking, intelligent, rhetorically skilled, well read and erudite, and, what is more, he was able to use these proficiencies to his own advantage, namely to rise in the queen's esteem, benefitting from the "perks" that come with being one of her favourites. There is nothing to be added to Nicholls and Williams' shrewd analysis of the dynamics of courtly advancement under Queen Elizabeth:

It is, however, evident that a favourite's progress can assume a momentum of its own, once the fact of favour becomes apparent to others at Court. It is also clear that favour often follows a process of very careful political calculation. That was certainly the case with Raleigh. Access led to familiarity, familiarity led to an ob-

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that the Queen tooke especiall notice of him, and presently preferred him." (Aubrey (1949), 316)

**10** | Aubrey (1949), 317.

**11** | Naunton (1641), 31.

jective assessment of ability, and this assessment weighed the man's capacity to undertake particular or ceremonial tasks.<sup>12</sup>

However, this is only one side of the coin. What did Elizabeth expect in return? This is the question we have to tackle before we turn to Raleigh's eventual fall from grace and the strategies he employed to regain his blissful seat.

## 2. THE LOVER

The social dynamics at Queen Elizabeth's court were, of course, unique. There was this tension between the queen's two roles, between her being an absolute monarch and a woman in one person, a tension which best finds its expression in Elizabeth's famous 1588 address to her troops at Tilbury: "I know I have the body but of weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and the stomach of a king."<sup>13</sup> Even if the speech is apocryphal, it gives us some idea of how the discourse on the queen was structured. She possesses two bodies, a body natural and a body politic, and a courtier discursively had to come to terms with these two bodies at once.<sup>14</sup> He did so by employing two discourses ready at hand, as Frye explains:

[The discourses of Petrarchism and Neoplatonism] are of particular interest not only because Elizabeth used them, but also because courtiers used them in their attempts to penetrate her isolation, to address and persuade her. ... Petrarchism provided a ready means of expression for courtiers addressing a queen whose distance was quite real.<sup>15</sup>

Only in the discourse of Petrarchism, which is manifest in the hundreds of sonnets written during Elizabeth's reign, were traditional power-relations between the genders inverted. The sonnets and poems of similar

**12** | Nicholls/Williams (2011), 23.

**13** | Rice (1951), 96.

**14** | Edmund Spenser in a letter to Raleigh directly draws on the two bodies of the queen: "For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royal queen or empress, the other of a most virtuous and beautiful lady." (Wills (1840), 294)

**15** | Frye (1993), 108.

form are invariably directed towards a chaste unattainable woman who is presented to be in every respect superior to her male suitor. This superiority is expressed in categories of space and time. The lady is not from this world, – and this is where Neoplatonism comes in – her origin is celestial, she is an angel who cannot be harmed by anything sublunar. And, what is more, age usually personified as Time, cannot harm her. Her life and even more importantly her beauty is eternal. Here are two stanzas from Raleigh's *The Phoenix Nest* (1593) directly addressed to Elizabeth herself.

In heuen Queene she is among the spheares,  
 In ay she Mistres like makes all things pure,  
 Eternitie in hir oft change she neares,  
 She beautie is, by hir the faire endure.

Time weares hir not, she doth his chariot guide,  
 Mortalitie belowe hir orbe is plaste,  
 By hir the virtue of the stars downe slide,  
 In hir is vertues perfect image cast.

(Raleigh: *Poems* 11)

The lover delimitating himself from the distant ethereal creature stylises himself as her obedient humble servant whose entire well-being depends on her favour. However, the prerequisite for the Petrarchan discourse to be applicable is that the adored woman is a *virgo immaculata* in its true sense.<sup>16</sup> And this is where Elizabeth's self-stylisation comes in. Not only did she put emphasis on her unmarried virginal state in many verbal utterances, her iconographic representations up to old age depict her with all the traditional attributes of the youthful immaculate virgin, as Frye's excellent reading of the rainbow portrait has shown.<sup>17</sup> Those representations, verbal or iconographic, were mirrored by those they were addressed to, as Marotti explains:

In Elizabethan England, a female monarch, whose unmarried state preserved her symbolic *and real* value in both domestic and international transactions, espe-

**16** | In Raleigh's *The Phoenix Nest* Elizabeth like in so many other poems is referred to as Diana, the goddess of chastity.

**17** | Cf. Frye (1993), 107-109.

cially encouraged the use of an amorous vocabulary by her courtiers to express ambition and its vicissitudes.<sup>18</sup>

Frye strikes the same note:

[T]he allegory of a youthful virgin represents Elizabeth's political vigor while allowing those who served her to continue expressing their desire for her favor as a desire for her person.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, this "desire" is not only expressed in poems, of which Raleigh's *The Phoenix Nest* is an adequate example. It is found in many other types of text. Here is a letter to Elizabeth by the Earl of Essex, which could just as well have been composed by Raleigh himself:

Most dear Lady, --My absence would be too unpleasant if I did not entertain myself with thinking of all those perfections which mine eyes enjoyed so lately to behold; and to make me mediate with more comfort, I will never cease to importune your Majesty, that I may, by some handwriting from your sacred self, be assured that I do not decrease in your Majesty's favour. I care for no cross of fortune, so long as I find your Majesty careth for me; neither can anything make me happy when I do not hold a first place in your favour. If any man will venture his life to persuade your Majesty of his faith, I will lose mine to prove your constancy. I wish your Majesty to be the greatest and happiest Prince, the kindest and constantest Mistress that ever was; and I will be ever your Majesty's most humble, affectionate, and devoted servant,

Dover, 16th October R. Essex<sup>20</sup>

This letter abounds with the topoi of Petrarchist poetry. Elizabeth is perfection personified, she is, to put it in neo-platonist terms, the eternal form of which all other women are imperfect copies. She is sacred, being the angelic figure that so many sonnet writers address in encomiastic terms and in whom they have absolute faith. The author's entire well-being depends on her favour, and nothing can happen to him as long as he is assured of his addressee's good will. At the same time the appellation as "constantest

**18** | Marotti (1982), 398.

**19** | Frye (1993), 101.

**20** | Devereux (1853), 246.

“Mistress” has clear sexual implications, referring to the chastity of the monarch. And although the end formula of the “most humble, affectionate, and devoted servant” is ultimately indebted to Horatian modesty topoi so popular in Renaissance times, we may take them as direct expressions of the courtier’s inferior state, a state which does not leave any room for direct supplication being entirely dependent on the Lady’s caprice. Here is the couplet of Sonnet 61 of Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*, which illustrates the tension between the quasi amorous relationship on the one and the hierarchical distance on the other hand, so constitutive of the Petrarchan mode:

Such heavenly forms ought rather worshipped be,  
Than dare be loved by men of mean degree.<sup>21</sup>

The lady’s/queen’s heavenly neo-platonic form leaves only room for religious veneration. Earthly love is too base a feeling to be entertained for such a celestial being by a sublunar creature such as the male lover.

To sum it up, Petrarchism provides the blueprint for the discourse an Elizabethan courtier had to appropriate in his dealings with the queen. The use of Petrarchan formula stresses Elizabeth’s femininity, thus sexualizing her. Most of all, the constant emphasis on her virginal state, i.e. the emphasis on the queen’s refraining from sexual intercourse, constructs her *ex negativo* as a sexual being, whose body the courtier desires without being able to take possession of it. The queen herself encouraged the use of the Petrarchist discourse with regard to her person, thus exploiting “the gender-specific virtue she has so long and so successfully employed as a means of self-empowerment.”<sup>22</sup>

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**21** | Spenser (1993), 611.

**22** | Montrose (1993), 184.

### 3. THE DISGRACED

Petrarchism provides the discursive environment we have to picture Walter Raleigh in in the 1580s; an environment in which he stylizes himself as the Petrarchan lover of an unattainable mistress who, at the same time, requisitions such veneration. However, as far as the particular relationship between Raleigh and Elizabeth is concerned I would like to go one step further than seeing the Petrarchan discourse as merely symbolic, surmising that the queen's feelings for Raleigh were more than just role playing. Maybe this would explain her harsh reaction to Raleigh's betrayal of trust.

In November 1591 Raleigh secretly married the pregnant Elizabeth Throkmorton, one of the queen's Ladies in Waiting.<sup>23</sup> When in August 1592 Elizabeth found out about the betrayal of her two favourites who had formed a matrimonial alliance without her consent she delivered them both to the Tower.<sup>24</sup> Although they were released in the course of a year Raleigh was never forgiven and 1592 marks the turning point of his fortune. Of course it was to be expected that the queen would not be pleased with his stealthy marriage; the Raleighs seem to have been aware of this fact or they would not have tried to keep it a secret for that long. But compared with her reactions to similar offences of others the queen's attitude towards Raleigh seems out of place. As Nicholls and Williams recount:

Marriage control by the *materfamilias* counted for a great deal at the Elizabethan court. Leicester, after his marriage to Lettice Knollys in 1578, and Essex, following his marriage to Frances Sidney in 1590, had both flirted with the Tower. Both had enraged the Queen and both had been forgiven.<sup>25</sup>

We may only speculate about the reasons for Elizabeth's harsh treatment of Raleigh if compared to that of her other courtiers who committed the same "offence". Of course Nicholls and Williams' reasoning that "Leicester, Oxford and Essex enjoyed an independent status that helped them

**23** | Fuller (1993), 233 refers to a lecture by Arthur Marotti in which he noted "the politicization of sexual activity at the court, and the displacement of male sexual advances onto the maids of honor who surrounded the queen".

**24** | Cf. Nicholls/Williams (2011), 79.

**25** | *Ibid.*

to recover from misfortunes at Court”<sup>26</sup> easier than Ralegh is sound and stresses once again that Ralegh’s position as a “Jack, and upstart”, which was much more precarious than that of titled members of the old aristocracy. At the same time, however, it is difficult to imagine that the Petrarchan role playing that Elizabeth and Ralegh had been involved in did not have any repercussion on real life. The following anecdote, recorded by Thomas Fuller in 1662 hints at the fact that verbal self-stylization may very well have been embedded in real life even including repartees with the Queen.

[C]oming to Court, [Ralegh] found some hopes of the Queens favour reflecting upon him. This made him write in a glasse Window obvious to the Queens eye,

*Fain would I climb, yet fear I to fall,*

Her Majesty either espying, or being shown it, did under-write,

*If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all.*<sup>27</sup>

The ratiocination that the Queen had some tender feeling for Ralegh, that there was a certain degree of life is copying art involved on her side – what Greenblatt calls “the interplay of life and art”<sup>28</sup> – would explain why Ralegh’s clandestine marriage with Elizabeth Throkmorton was never forgiven, and why Ralegh’s numerous attempts to regain the queen’s favour were largely unsuccessful.<sup>29</sup> These attempts were first of all verbal. When incarcerated in the Tower of London, he wrote a letter to Robert Cecil to give vent to his dejection. Of course the implied addressee of the letter is the queen.

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**26** | Nicholls/Williams (2011), 86.

**27** | Fuller (1662), 161.

**28** | Greenblatt (1973), 99.

**29** | Montrose at least grants that the possibility that jealousy may be one factor in the queen’s dismissal of Ralegh: “Perhaps it cannot be decided, finally, whether to attribute the queen’s anger toward Ralegh ... to the sexual jealousy of a mistress, betrayed by her lover.” (Montrose (1993), 185)

I, that was wont to behold her riding like Alexander, hunting like Diana, walking like Venus, the gentle wind blowing her fair hair about her pure cheeks, like a nymph, sometime sitting in the shade like a goddess, sometime singing like an angel, sometime playing like Orpheus; behold the sorrow of this world! once amiss hath bereaved me of all.<sup>30</sup>

All the images Raleigh employs play on the queen's chastity and her celestial being. But such supplications struck no note with Elizabeth anymore. Apparently the old Petrarchan and neo-platonic images, so successful during the time of theatrical courtship, had lost their effect and it would have been surprising if they had not. It is widely assumed that one reason for Elizabeth's constant refusal to get married was that it would deprive her of one of her most important means to exercise power over her courtiers, i.e. her being in charge of the discourse of male submission. A married woman would not have qualified anymore for a Petrarchan lady, and, consequently, the Petrarchan discourse her minions so grovellingly adhered to would be absurd. However, we may assume that similar dynamics were at play as far as the active role of the courtier was concerned. Raleigh, the married man, did not qualify anymore for an imaginative lover. The mellifluous and honey-tongued "suitor" had lost his right to express his reverence in the language of love. But where words fail there is only one possible option: words must give way to action. And this for an Elizabethan noble man could only mean war or exploration. Raleigh opted for the latter, "[t]o seek new worlds, for golde, for prayse, for glory"<sup>31</sup> as he himself expressed it in his long elegiac poem "Ocean to Scinthia" (l. 61).

#### 4. THE DERIDED

On February 6, 1595 Raleigh with a small fleet departed for Guiana with two objectives in mind: the one being "the return of profit to ourselves", i.e. the discovery of large amounts of gold, the other being to prevent "trades of the Spanish nation".<sup>32</sup> Of course both objectives are mutually dependent. There is no doubt that this enterprise materialized as a reac-

**30** | [www.bartleby.com/209/202.html](http://www.bartleby.com/209/202.html).

**31** | Raleigh: *Poems* 27.

**32** | Raleigh (1596), 15

tion to Raleigh's failure to regain his former position within the queen's inner circle. As Greenblatt argues:

The Guiana voyage was indeed a theatrical gesture calculated to dazzle the queen and win a return of her favour, but it was also the fulfillment of a personal vision.<sup>33</sup>

And Raleigh failed. When he came home there was neither gold, nor praise nor glory. The voyage proved a disaster on all of these accounts. Not only did he lose a considerable number of men in the unavoidable skirmishes with the Spanish, he neither could keep his promise to find the legendary city of Manoa ruled by the gold-dust-sprinkled King El Dorado, nor could he locate any easily accessible gold mines.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, he did not bring home any amount of gold worth mentioning and found himself the object of public ridicule so that, if anything, the voyage was counterproductive in his endeavor to rekindle the Queen's interest in his person. Greenblatt sums up the contemporary reactions to Raleigh's enterprise most concisely:

[U]pon his return, [the queen] shared with the court, the powerful merchants of the City, and the general public a wry skepticism about his enthusiastic reports. Raleigh's enemies spread rumors that he had not been to Guiana at all, but had hidden in Devon or Cornwall until his ships came home again. Others whispered that, failing to discover any gold in Guiana, he had purchased the specimen ore he brought back on the Barbary Coast. In response to the doubts and the rumors, in an attempt to vindicate himself, Raleigh turned, as he had in the past, to writing.<sup>35</sup>

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**33** | Greenblatt (1973), 104. In his dedicatory epistle to Lord Howard and Robert Cecil prefixed to his *Discovery of Guiana* Raleigh points out that “[his] errors were great”, and that the journey was meant to fix those. He hoped that he “might recover ... the least tast of the greatest plenty formerly possessed” and to “appease so powrefull a displeasure”. (Raleigh (1596), 5)

**34** | For detailed accounts of Raleigh's search for gold and his failure cf. Lorimer (1982) and Lorimer (2007).

**35** | Greenblatt (1973), 104.

Thus we may read Raleigh's 1596 *The Discovery of the Large, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*<sup>36</sup> as his attempt to vindicate himself of these charges, which he directly comments upon in the address to the reader the *Discovery* is prefaced with.<sup>37</sup> The travelogue is meant to prove that its author really was in Guiana. It is meant to prove that Guiana abounds in gold, although he has failed to bring home any amount of precious metal worth mentioning. It is meant to excite the queen's interest to invest in further expeditions to South America spearheaded by Raleigh himself. It is meant to justify the fact that in monetary and military terms the voyage was a complete failure. Above all, it is meant to rekindle the queen's fervor for her former favourite who is "contented to lose her highness fauour and good opinion foreuer" if the Guiana business will not prove a complete success in times to come, i.e. if reality will not stand up to "whatsoever is in this discourse promised or declared"<sup>38</sup>. Consequently, the remainder of this essay will not be concerned with what really happened in Guiana. Instead we will turn to Raleigh's discursive treatment of his failure in the *Discovery*.

## 5. THE DEFENDER

The first rumor Raleigh had to eliminate was that he had never been to Guiana but had hidden for the time his fleet was abroad in Cornwell or Devon. In order to do this he reverted to the obvious. The *Discovery* abounds in topographical and anthropological detail that only someone who was really there can have knowledge of. The full title of the travelogue already suggests that its author is an expert on his subject: *The Discoverie of the Large, and Bewtiful Empyre of Gviana, with a relation of the great and*

**36** | Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana* exists in a manuscript and a print version which considerably differ. Joyce Lorimer has done a magnificent job in publishing both versions synoptically in 2006. Particularly her extensive *Introduction* to the beautiful volume is a treasure trove I am much indebted to. In this essay, however, I will exclusively rely on the version Raleigh published, since we may be sure that this is the one meant to vindicate his apparent failure and, consequently, the one we should turn to analyzing his discursive strategies.

**37** | Raleigh (1596), 12-14.

**38** | Raleigh (1596), 16.

*Golden Cite of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) And of the Provinces of Emeria, Arromaia, and other Countries, with their riuers, adiyning.*<sup>39</sup> The country is beautiful, it contains provinces which the author refers to by their indigenous names, and in spite of all rumors to the contrary El Dorado exists. Here is a randomly chosen passage abounding with detail that only the observant visitor can have knowledge of:

This Iland is called by the people therof *Cairi*, and in it are diuers nations: those about *Parico* are called *Iao*, those at *Punto Carao* are of the *Arwacas*, and betweene *Carao* and *Curiapan* they are called *Saluaios*, betweene *Carao* and *punto Calera* are the *Nepoios*, and those about the Spanish Citie tearme themselues *Carinepagotos*.<sup>40</sup>

Not only do passages such as these reveal the author's intimate knowledge of the land, its peoples and the places they inhabit. Indigenous denominations, although sometimes mediated through Spanish, strengthen the local colour. Personal names of Indian chiefs, being called for instance "Wannawanare, Caroaori, Maquarima, Tarroopanama & Aterima"<sup>41</sup> bear no exception. Greenblatt's analysis certainly holds true:

These strange words do more than heighten the authenticity of the account. With their unfamiliar sounds and cadences they stimulate the reader's imagination, suggesting rich and strange and grandiose.<sup>42</sup>

Even Elizabeth's name is translated into the indigenous language. According to Ralegh, who has circulated the Queen's picture among the Indians, they call her "*Ezrabeta Cassipuna Aquerewana*, which is as much as *Elizabeth*, the great princesse or greatest commaunder."<sup>43</sup>

But the use of Spanish and indigenous languages is only the most obvious means Ralegh employs in order to suggest authenticity of his experience. In addition, there are detailed accounts of English raids on Spanish settlements, of negotiations with Indian chiefs, and, what may be most

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**39** | Ralegh (1596), 1.

**40** | Ralegh (1596), 23

**41** | Ralegh (1596), 29.

**42** | Greenblatt (1973), 107.

**43** | Ralegh (1596), 31.

strange for us today, descriptions of creatures and people having their origin in the mists of myth and legend modern man has long discredited as being mere figments of the imagination. Here is Raleigh's report concerning the "warlike women", commonly known as Amazones.<sup>44</sup>

It was farther told me, that if in the wars they tooke any prisoners that they vsed to accompany with those also at what time soever, but in the end for certain they put them to death: for they are said to be very cruell and bloodthirsty, especially to such as offer to inuade their territories.<sup>45</sup>

This is exactly what his readers would expect. In pre-industrial times when even those that lived a few hundred miles away were surely perceived as being very strange indeed, people that lived virtually on the other side of the world were imagined to be entirely alien races. No doubt the widespread legends about cannibals, also mentioned by Raleigh<sup>46</sup>, were due to a large extent to this kind of reasoning. The "other" has to make you shudder. Thus, paradoxically, the most alien the tribes were that seafarers allegedly encountered, the more authentic their reports appeared to be. This may be the reason why Raleigh devoted a long passage to the tribe of the Ewaipanoma of which this is the beginning:

[The *Ewaipanoma*] are reported to haue their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, & that a long train of haire groweth backward betwen their shoulders.<sup>47</sup>

We may smile today that reports about headless men were given any credibility. However, we should not forget that many of Swift's contemporaries more than a century after Raleigh believed the stories about mean little dwarfs no bigger than a hand, giants as high as houses, speaking

**44** | Of course most contemporary scholars would connect tales about Amazons with the ancient world. Lorimer enlightens us on this misconception: "The transplantation of Amazons to the New World occurred as early as Columbus's first voyage to the New World, and was firmly established by Orellana's alleged sighting of them on the 'rio de las Amazones' in 1540." (Lorimer (2006), ixxiii)

**45** | Raleigh (1596), 65.

**46** | Cf. Raleigh (1596), 159.

**47** | Raleigh (1596), 157.

horses and flying islands. Desdemona falls in love with Othello because of his stories about cannibals and creatures like Ralegh's Ewaipanoma, "[t]he Anthropophagi, and men whose heads/Do grow beneath their shoulders".<sup>48</sup> She must have believed such accounts to be true. But what about Ralegh? He neither encountered the "cruell and bloodthirsty" women nor the headless men personally, but in order to lend veracity to his report he reverts to the strategy that the whole *Discovery* abounds in. As far as the Amazons are concerned, he owes his strange intelligence to "the most ancient and best traueld of the *Orenoqueponi*"<sup>49</sup>, thus relying on the best authority there can be, the indigenous people who told him about their exotic land face to face. Even more authorities are required to corroborate the existence of the Ewaipanoma. Rallegah's informants include "the son of *Topiawari*", who averted that he had seen them with his own eyes, "Maundeuile" whose many reports were once frowned upon, but are now proved to be true, and "a spanyard dwelling not farre from thence ... who being esteemed a most honest man of his word ... told me that he had seen manie of them"<sup>50</sup>

The substitution of personal experience which Ralegh did not make himself by reports of people who have made these experiences is the foremost strategy he employed in the *Discovery* to draw attention away from his own failure. And this is particularly the case as far as his greatest failure is concerned, his not having discovered the great city of Manoa and, consequently, his not having brought home any amount of gold worth mentioning. Reports by people he has encountered, Spanish and indigenous, leave no doubt that Manoa exists, and that Guiana is rich in gold. All the Queen has to do in order to become the richest and most powerful empress in the world is to reinstate him and finance subsequent expeditions no doubt led by Ralegh himself. The following passage is representative of his constructing his own credibility.

And as I haue beene assured by such *Spanyardes* as have seene *Manoa* the emperiall Citie of *Guiana*, which the *Spanyardes* cal *el Dorado*, that for the greatnes,

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**48** | Shakespeare, *Othello* 1.3.,145-146.

**49** | Ralegh (1596), 63.

**50** | Ralegh (1596), 159.

for the riches, and for the excellent seate, it farre exceedeth any of the world as is knownen to the Spanish nation.<sup>51</sup>

There are Spaniards, Ralegh claims to have encountered, who have seen Manoa with their own eyes. However, Lorimer, comparing the above print version with the corresponding manuscript comes to the conclusion that Ralegh twists the truth. With regard to the claim that his informants have “seen” the golden city she comments: “An uncorrected exaggeration which crept into the rewritten portion of the text. None of Ralegh’s Spanish informants mentioned elsewhere in the text claimed to have seen Manoa themselves”<sup>52</sup>. This “exaggeration” is most certainly a device consciously employed to raise his credibility. With regard to Ralegh’s endeavour to authenticate his narrative by relying on Spanish informants Montrose uncovers a subversive irony:

This epistemological and ideological destabilization arises from Ralegh’s repeated need to ground his own credibility upon the credibility of the very people whom he wishes to discredit.<sup>53</sup>

Still, the most extensive account of Manoa is by Juan Martinez “who was the first that discouered *Manoa*” (43). But of course Ralegh has not encountered this man himself, but knows about him from his written report. However Martinez did not write the report himself, but “deliuered ... the relation of his trauels” on his death bed to a friar. But even this report Ralegh has not seen himself, but knows about it from the Spanish commander in chief Bereo, who allegedly possessed a copy of it.<sup>54</sup> Martinez is said to have lived seven months in Manoa, so we should assume that he would have been able to reveal its precise location. However, Ralegh

**51** | Ralegh (1596), 37.

**52** | Ralegh (1596), 37, fn 3.

**53** | Montrose (1993), 192.

**54** | Similarly, Ralegh recounts the common myth that “certain seruants of the Emperor hauing prepared golde made into fine powder blow it thorow hollow canes upon their naked bodies, vntill they be al shining from foote to the head” (Ralegh (1596), 51). Robert Dudley, certainly one of the most eminent men in Elizabethan England, owes this story to a letter written to Spain which was intercepted. Needless to say that Dudley is not in possession of this letter.

ensures us that he could not for “hee was also brought thither all the waie blindfield, led by the Inidians” (47). This chain of events becomes even more abstruse when we learn that although this Martinez was released by the Indians after half a year and sent back with a lot of gold that the “borderers which are called *Orenoqueponi* robbed him and his *Guianians* of all the treasure” (47). Sometimes the concatenation of accidents is too unfortunate, most of all Martinez’ ultimate fate which Ralegh succinctly sums up as “remaining a long tyme for passage into *Spayne* he died” (49), so that he could not be personally consulted anymore.

To sum it up, the El Dorado myth is due to the ravings of a dying man, whose narrations of his abode in Manoa were written down by his confessor of which one of Ralegh’s captives allegedly possessed a copy which Ralegh has never seen. How desperate in his attempt to authenticate his claim that Manoa existed must Ralegh have been. He even goes as far as to quote written Spanish reports concerning the richness of the Emperor of Guiana in the original Spanish, which he afterwards translates. Of course, the use of the original language is meant to lend further authenticity to his report.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, Ralegh seems to be aware of the fact that statements like “the vessels of his house, table, and kitchin were of Gold and Siluer ... may seem straunge”, yet he finds proof of these reports in the fact that the “Spanish King vexeth all the Princes of Europe” as far as his wealth is concerned.<sup>56</sup>

## 6. THE HUMANITARIAN

Another strategy Ralegh employs in order to prove the usefulness of the Guianian enterprise is ostensibly humanitarian. The indigenous people whose pristine innocence he never fails to point out<sup>57</sup> are tormented by their Spanish oppressors, and it is the duty of every god-fearing English protestants to set an end to this regime of rape and torture.

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**55** | Ralegh (1596), 39.

**56** | Ralegh (1596), 41.

**57** | Even when a *Cassiqui* is burried with a golden treasure, Ralegh, respecting their religion, does not open the grave (cf. Ralegh (1596), 203).

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... euery night there came some with most lamentable complaints of [Bereo's] cruelty, how he had deuided the lland & giuen to euery soldier a part, that he made the ancient Casiqui which were Lordes of the country to be their slaues, that he kept them in chains, & dropped their naked bodies with burning bacon, & such other tomentes, which I found afterwards to be true.<sup>58</sup>

There are other reports about the slave trade in the course of which “the Spaniards make great profit”. They buy young girls and sell them to the West Indies for twice the amount of money they paid for them.<sup>59</sup> But worst of all is the Spanish propensity to ravish indigenous women.

... the Spaniards, who indeed (as they confessed) tooke from them their wiues, and daughters daily, and vsed them for the satisfying of their owne lusts.<sup>60</sup>

Of course alleged sexual transgressions have always been prominent in the catalogue of deviances enumerated in order to disparage enemies. However, as far as Ralegh's account is concerned, we should keep in mind whom the text is meant to impress: the queen, who in spite of her body politic is still a “weak and feeble woman”. Consequently, Ralegh does not tire to point out English blamelessness as far as the treatment of indigenous women is concerned. None of his men “euer knew any of their women”, although opportunity was not lacking, having encountered “very young [women], and excellently faured which came among vs without deceit, starke naked.”<sup>61</sup> The conclusion to be drawn from this list of Spanish cruelty ranging from torture and slavery to sexual transgression can only be that it is the moral duty of the English to free the poor Indians from the Spanish yoke. Thus Ralegh points out to Indian chiefs “that the Queenes pleasure was, I should vndertake the voyage for their defence, and to deliuer them from the tyrannie of the Spaniards.”<sup>62</sup> He is only the Queen's instrument, like a good Petrarchan lover entirely depending on her “pleasure”. And his self-stylisation as the obedient humble servant of a celestial

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**58** | Ralegh (1596), 29.

**59** | Ralegh (1596), 85.

**60** | Ralegh (1596), 119.

**61** | Ralegh (1596), 121.

**62** | Ralegh (1596), 141.

beauty is omnipresent in the *Discovery*. Here is a passage from the very beginning:

I made [the Indians] vnderstand that I was the seruant of a Queene, who was the great *Casique* of the north, and a virgin, and had more *Casiqui* vnder her then there were trees in their lland: that she was an enemy to the *Castellani* in respect of their tyrannie and oppression, and that she deliuered all such nations about her, as were by them oppressed. ... I shewed them her maiesties picture which they so admired and honored, as it had beene easie to haue brought them Idolatrous thereof.<sup>63</sup>

The characterization of the queen as an enemy of the Spanish and a most powerful ruler who will deliver everyone from their tyranny is most straight forward and refers to Elizabeth's body politic. But the fact that Raleigh stresses her virginity appears to be somewhat out of line today, as does the emphasis on her beauty, manifesting itself in "her maiesties picture". However, if we consider the queen's body natural, which is that of a woman adored in Petrarchist fashion, these two royal properties, virginity and beauty, have a clear function. Even the Indians idolize the beautiful virgin queen as an Elizabethan courtier would, or, to put it bluntly, they become perfect subjects, adoring the goddess of the north in an idolatrous fashion. Thus the queen's political body yields military power, while her gendered body is subject to adoration. And Raleigh's gendering does not stop here.

## 7. THE CONQUEROR

In one of the most prominent passages of the *Discovery* even the land itself becomes the queen's virgin alter ego.

To conclude, *Guiana* is a Countrey that hath yet her Maydenhead, neuer sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne, nor the virtue and salt of the soyle spent by manuarance, the graues haue not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld down out of their

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63 | Raleigh (1596), 31.

temples. It hath neuer been entred by any armie of strength, and neuer conquered or possessed by any Christian Prince.<sup>64</sup>

Every image of this passage applies to a virgin, a woman, to put it bluntly, that has not been penetrated.<sup>65</sup> The virgin land has not been torn, the graves have not been opened and the mines have not been broken. The land has never been entered, conquered or possessed.<sup>66</sup> That there is a direct link between the land and the queen's matrimonial state becomes even more obvious in the remark about Guiana never having been "conquered or possessed by any Christian Prince". No western potentate has ever conquered the prelapsarian elysium, and no prince has ever succeeded in marrying, i.e. sexually subjugating, Elizabeth in spite of the august number of suitors, among them Prince Philip of Spain, Prince Frederick of Denmark, King Charles of France and the Archduke Charles of Austria. We may also assume that the parallelism between the South American country and Elizabeth works so well because the name Guiana itself sounds like a female Christian name and may therefore be much easier personified than other denominations.

However, there is one description of the land of Guiana to which this statement is even better applied.

I neuer saw a more beawtfull country, nor more liuely prospectes, hils so raised here and there ouer the vallies, the riuier winding into diuers braunches, the plaines adioyning without bush or stubble, all faire greene grasse, the ground of hard sand easy to march one, eyther for horse or foote, the deare crossing in euery path, the brids towards the euening singing on euery tree with a thousand seueral tunes,

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**64** | Raleigh (1596), 211.

**65** | Raleigh's companion Lawrence Keymis in his 1596 *A Relation of the Second Voyage to Guiana* (for Keymis it was the second journey) is even more straight-forward in sexualizing the land by turning from metaphor to simile: " ... whereas here whole shires of fruitful grounds, lying now waste for want of people, do prostitute themselves onto us, like a faire and beautifull woman, in the pride and floure of desired yeeres." (quoted from Montrose (1993),194)

**66** | In addition to these metaphors connoting the absence of any process of de-flowering, many of the images belong to the stock inventory of Shakespearean sexual puns. May be it is not too far-fetched to invoke Hamlet's "country matters", or the frequent use of "possess" in Shakespearean sexual context.

cranes & herons of white, crimson, and carnation pearching on the riuers side, the ayre fresh with a gentle easterlie wind, and euery stone that we stooped to take up, promised eyther gold or siluer by his complexion.<sup>67</sup>

This passage is most ideal to show “the affinity between the *discovery* and the *blazon*.<sup>68</sup> The land is particularized like a woman in the traditional *descriptiones pulchritudinis* as the sum of its parts. But this correspondence is not only in form but also in content. Every Elizabethan with some smattering of contemporary literature would have directly related these images to those metaphorically applied to the female body: hills and valleys, winding rivers, plains without bush or stubble, fair green grass etc. Maybe it is best to let literature speak for itself. When the female protagonist of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* tries sexually to arouse her youthful lover she uses the same images Ralegh does to describe her naked perfect body:

‘Fondling,’ she saith, ‘since I have hemm’d thee here  
 Within the circuit of this ivory pale,  
 I’ll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer;  
 Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale:  
 Graze on my lips; and if those hills be dry,  
 Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.

Within this limit is relief enough,  
 Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain,  
 Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough,  
 To shelter thee from tempest and from rain  
 Then be my deer, since I am such a park;  
 No dog shall rouse thee, though a thousand bark.’

The parallel diction between Ralegh’s description of the elysian land of Guiana and Venus’ description of her own sexualized body should be enough to establish the sexualization of the South American land. But what function does it have in Ralegh’s ultimate endeavour to amend his failure and to be reinstated in the queen’s favour? On a purely discursive level the Petrarchan sexualization of the Queen has, as we have seen,

**67** | Ralegh (1596), 151-152.

**68** | Montrose (1993), 189.

failed to strike a note with Elizabeth after his marriage. Thus he diverts the discourse to another subject, the immaculate land of Guiana, whose pristine state is so much like the queen that the land virtually becomes her *alter ego*. Having established that, Raleigh's seizure of Guiana is on an ontological level his taking possession of *Ezrabeta Cassipuna Aquerewana*. The land is metonymically substituted for the queen and Raleigh is the one who will eventually enter, conquer and possess it, treading where no Christian prince has ever tread.<sup>69</sup> However, not only does the pristine land represent the queen, Raleigh becomes the one who will succeed where Prince Philip of Spain, Prince Frederick of Denmark, King Charles of France and the Archduke Charles of Austria have failed. He will be the one to conquer the queen's body. Consequently, Raleigh substitutes the protocolonialist discourse of discovery, which expresses the subjugation of the New World so often in terms of the masculine discoverer penetrating a land gendered as feminine<sup>70</sup>, for the Petrarchan discourse of the courtier's desire for a sexualized virgin queen.

## 8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Walter Raleigh's travelogue *The Discoverie of Guiana* may be read as his effort to come to terms with his failure on at least two levels. First of all on a surface level the voyage itself proved a failure on all accounts. He did not succeed in finding the legendary city of Manoa with its golden potentate El Dorado and, consequently, did not succeed in bringing home any amount of precious metal worth mentioning. His strategy to turn this obvious defeat into victory is to "prove" that Manoa exists without any doubt and that gold is to be had in abundance by relying on those witnesses whose authorities may hardly be questioned, i.e. the Spanish and the indigenous people. However, the twists and turns in his narrative and the absurd concatenations of events described deconstruct his intended purpose and emphasize more the fact that he treads on thin ice and that his arguments are rather tenuous.

Most of all however, on a deeper level Raleigh's Guianian enterprise failed in his endeavour to regain the queen's favour. The *Discovery*, written

**69** | Cf. Raleigh (1596), 211.

**70** | Cf. Montrose (1993), 178-179.

at time when it was obvious that the voyage had been counterproductive in achieving this ultimate goal, draws parallels between the queen's virginal, immaculate body and the land *per se*. Ralegh sexualizes the land as much as the queen in her capacity as a woman is sexualized by her courtiers, of which Petrarchism provides the adequate rhetorics. The English monarch and the South-American country almost fuse into one and by possessing the land Ralegh also possesses the queen or, to be more precise, will possess her, if she grants him further penetration into the land. Needless to say that this strategy failed as well.

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