

## Blasiolo 1

The Shaping of Sir Walter Raleigh's Colonial Ideology in *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*

Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* gives Raleigh's account of his own voyage to Guiana, which serves to advise and advertise Guiana as a colonial territory to the nobility back in England. However, Raleigh's narration is unreliable at best, as much of his information about Guiana was secondhand. The nature of his unreliable narration serves to clarify Raleigh's reasoning behind his description of the land, the rhetorical techniques he uses, and the intent of the *Discovery* itself. From the onset of the *Discovery*, Raleigh states his intention of restoring his credibility; however, his account does the opposite, as it portrays a fictionalized Guiana. Raleigh uses rhetorical techniques and careful language to disguise his deceit, as his role as messenger of Guiana's truth affords him credibility and authority on a subject of which he knows little. Though Raleigh hardly experienced the real Guiana, he was familiar with colonization. Thus, the *Discovery* reveals Raleigh's own general colonial ideology which he applies to the text by portraying a generalized and constructed reality. Throughout the text, Raleigh constructs a sense of English identity for himself, which coupled with his role as a servant of the crown transmutes his own ideology onto the ideology of the text, thus becoming the ideology of English colonialism itself. By constructing himself as the arbiter of truth for a fictionalized Guiana, Raleigh's sense of self and self-perception creates and permeates the Guiana he portrays.

The truth of Raleigh's voyage to Guiana contrasts the vivacity of his portrayal of the land, which highlights the rhetorical techniques he uses to create a forged reality. Raleigh portrays Guiana as a gold rich empire full of pastoral landscapes and docile, childlike natives which is so far unconquered by the Spanish or any other colonial power. However, the reality of

late 16<sup>th</sup> century Guiana may have been different from how Raleigh advertised. Raleigh never penetrated beyond the country's borders (Fuller 45); thus, much of his knowledge of the land would have come from afar or from hearsay. Though Raleigh had Guiana described to him by trusted actors such as his right-hand man Lawrence Keymis, at times even Keymis' information was secondhand (Fuller 45). Fuller notes that part of Raleigh's mission in Guiana would have been that of discovery, which conceptualized in the early modern English mind as the revealing of something previously hidden and the making of that thing accessible and understood (45). However, Raleigh could not discover the Guiana he never explored; instead, he creates a literary Guiana in which he places the burden of proof upon language, rather than firsthand experience or physical matter. In his search to discover Guianan referents, Raleigh shifts the text's focus whenever it veers too closely to concreteness, thus permanently obscuring the things he originally set out to find beneath a veneer of pastoral perfection (Fuller 51). By using the abstract to obscure the concrete, Raleigh creates a text in which language both constructs and disguises reality.

Raleigh's use of language to create reality is not limited to his search for referents, but also his placing of Guiana in space. Throughout the text, Raleigh uses established facts to lend credence to his elaborations. Raleigh especially uses geographic precision to anchor Guiana's borders in relation to other discovered and confirmed territories. In the early modern period, advances in cartography allowed for greater precision in mapmaking; thus, Raleigh's fictional claims could be supported by something precise and accurate. By invoking cartography, Raleigh draws upon something especially powerful in the early modern mind, as advanced geography invoked a greater sense of both imaginative and administrative control to the English reader (Smith 126). In utilizing the English attitude towards cartography, Raleigh portrays a colonial

ideology in which those who create the maps have the power, thus exploiting his power over the map of Guiana to mold it to his account. While Raleigh could not discover the physical territory of Guiana in the sense of making it revealed and accessible, placing the land in terms of mapping fixes his portrayal of Guiana to a point in space (Smith 128). In a way, Raleigh's need to use geography to confirm his account indicates his own failings, as concrete discovery would not require the use of such a rhetorical device. However, Raleigh uses the technique effectively, as he conflates cartographic superiority with English identity. Raleigh does this by referencing other non-English explorers' failures to find Guiana, as well as the native peoples' own lacking knowledge of the area (Smith 145). Raleigh implies these failings stem from non-English cartographic inferiority; thus, by discovering and mapping his own Guiana, Raleigh links discovery and conquest with English identity through mapping.

Though Raleigh's colonial ideology displays a desire for conquest, the manner of that conquest is idyllic and peaceful, which contradicts the often-violent nature of conquest itself. Raleigh's use of rhetoric continually constructs his sense of self as inherently English; however, the concept of self requires an other to survive. Thus, understanding who Raleigh views as other can explain both his intentions and his actions. Throughout the *Discovery*, Raleigh feminizes and infantilizes the native peoples of Guiana. At times, Raleigh bestows English characteristics upon certain tribes in comparison to their less-English counterparts. By feminizing the natives, Raleigh also chivalrizes them, providing an opportunity for English dignity to triumph (Holmes 9). Raleigh clearly portrays the natives as other by nature of not being English, rather than placing them as the opposite of self, the true other in the binary of self and other. In direct contrast to English dignity are the Spanish, whose colonial exploits are no stranger to the text. In the colonial world, English identity must be the opposite of Spanish (Holmes 5). Since Spanish

colonial projects in the Americas had largely been defined by violence and subjugation, Raleigh's English conquest had to be benevolent and without violence (Holmes 7). In order to distinguish from the violent Spanish other, Raleigh constructs a peaceful, patriarchal English colonial ideology.

As the author of the text and primary agent of its truth, Raleigh imbues his own sense of self into its ideology; thus, the text reflects Raleigh's sense of self, and conversely, his sense of self is defined by the text. Specifically, the text advertises Raleigh's identity as English; however, it also describes what it means to be English to Raleigh. In the preface to the text, Raleigh makes it clear that he is sworn to the English nobility. However, the nobility serves as a proxy for the English people; thus, Raleigh's allegiance includes, but transcends the nobility, and the monarch herself. Raleigh claims that whoever claims Guiana "shall be greatest" (Raleigh 468), which implies English glory through conquest. However, he also cautions that "if the King of Spain enjoy it, he shall become irresistible." (Raleigh 468). In advocating for the conquest of Guiana, Raleigh lobbies the crown to not only enrich itself, but also to avoid destruction at the hands of the Spanish, which would affect all the English people. Thus, Raleigh constructs himself as loyal to more than just himself or the crown, but to the nation of England itself.

The benefits Raleigh implies would accompany conquering Guiana are both tangible and intangible, as he constructs Guiana as a paradise of both commodity and leisure. Raleigh speaks directly to the crown by guaranteeing that more gold would fill English coffers from trading Guianan resources than "there is now in Seville for the West Indies." (Raleigh 467). In doing so, Raleigh reinforces the English self in contrast to the Spanish other, while simultaneously making his Guiana more tangible by comparing it to the West Indies, a real, describable place with quantifiable profits. For the English people, Raleigh describes a pastoral landscape in which the

inhabitants reap pleasure through “those common delights of hunting, hawking, fishing, fowling, and the rest,” (Raleigh 465). Raleigh reminds the reader of his English self by describing distinctly English tastes catered to by a landscape which is perfectly palatable to an English audience. Raleigh famously describes Guiana as “a country that hath yet her maidenhead,” (Raleigh 466), which has never been “conquered or possessed by a Christian prince” (Raleigh 466). In describing Guiana as a maiden, Raleigh chivalrizes the country, portraying it as waiting for conquest by a gentle Christian (English) prince, rather than rape by the Catholic Spaniards. Raleigh projects his own English identity to formulate the text into a recipe that entices English desires for conquest while reminding the audience of the difference between English and Spanish colonial ideologies.

While Raleigh largely exploits the collective English identity to make his text real, his own relationship with Queen Elizabeth also manifests in the text. Raleigh claims to have undergone the voyage “even in the winter of my [his] life” (Raleigh 463), which refers to his fall from grace in the eyes of the Queen. In writing the *Discovery*, Raleigh is aware of his deception, as he vacillates as to whether he should have done more in Guiana so as not to fictionalize his voyage, or if he even should have foregone the trip, rather than risk fabricating a report. Raleigh wishes he “had known some other way to win,” (Raleigh 463), which would allow him to appease the Queen without lying to her. However, Raleigh does not know another way, thus he constructs a Guiana which would please the Queen. Fuller argues that the feminized, peacefully conquered Guiana of the *Discovery* substitutes Guiana for Elizabeth Throckmorton, whose deflowering at Raleigh’s hands led the Queen to disavow him (Fuller 57). Thus, the ideology of benevolent, nonviolent conquest which Raleigh presents is a manifestation of his sense of self in relation to Elizabeth.

In constructing an imaginative version of Guiana, Raleigh also constructs his perception of self, which is imbued in the text and manifested in the colonial ideology he portrays. Raleigh's portrayal of self and Guiana is relative, as his sense of self defines Guiana, which simultaneously defines him. The pastoral paradise he creates and his desire for the English to hold it annotates his allegiance to the English nation, which he constructs as self in light of the Spanish other. In doing so, Raleigh defines Englishness as the absence of Spanish brutality and the presence of English civility, though the two nations compete to complete similar goals. Simultaneously, Raleigh portrays himself as loyal to English nobility, especially to the crown. However, Raleigh's deception in constructing a fictional Guiana displays a quantifiable disloyalty to the nobility. If one views the *Discovery* as symbolic of Raleigh's continency to the Queen through Guiana as a metaphor for Elizabeth Throckmorton, the deceptive nature of the text reinforces Raleigh's sense of self as one willing to mislead his sovereign. Ultimately, the ideology of the text cannot be separated from Raleigh's personal ideology, as both are constructed from his sense of self.

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