

**ENGLISH CONQUISTADORS:
SPANISH CONQUEST NARRATIVES
AND RALEGH'S *DISCOVERY OF GUIANA***

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Much of Sir Walter Raleigh's *Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1595) recounts his efforts to win Indian allies through speeches distinguishing between the Spaniards and the English: the former have come for gold, Raleigh says, while the latter have come to free the Indians from Spanish oppression. The new historicist critic Louis Montrose has taken Raleigh's representation of the English as liberators at face value, claiming that Raleigh has only a "subliminal counter-awareness that English desires in the New World are fundamentally identical to Spanish ones."¹ This reading results from a narrow focus on a single national literature and culture. Montrose entirely neglects the Spanish narratives, especially Francisco Lopez de Gomara's *Historia de las Indias y conquista de Mexico*, that, as this essay will show, influenced Raleigh's rhetorical and military strategy, as well as the structure of his narrative. Comparing the *Discovery* with Spanish narratives clarifies Raleigh's rhetorical strategy in a way that a close reading like Montrose's cannot.

Montrose's misreading of Raleigh's strategy as "subliminal counter-awareness" illustrates the flaw of new historicist criticism that Frank Lentricchia points out in an essay describing Michel Foucault's influence on Stephen Greenblatt. According to Lentricchia, Foucault's anonymous "power" creates a monological vision of culture similar to the one with which Greenblatt and other new historicists claim to have broken.² Responding to this critique Montrose writes that Foucault's "power" is not as monolithic as Lentricchia claims and that not all of those critics labeled new historicists subscribe to absolute notions of power. He admits that such notions can "reinstale the Elizabethan World Picture transposed into the ironic mode" but claims that his own vision of Elizabethan culture recognizes its heterogeneity.³

Yet only a homogeneous vision of that culture could allow Montrose to ignore the omnipresent influence of Spanish conquest narratives on Raleigh's text: Raleigh repeatedly uses the narratives both to counter arguments about the failures of his expedition and to stimulate English greed. For instance, in addressing the "divers opinions conceived of the gold ore brought from Guiana," especially the opinion that "the same is of no price," Raleigh writes that if "the Spanish nation had been of like belief to these detractors," they would have failed to conquer Mexico and Peru.⁴ He goes on to stimulate English greed by describing the vast wealth that those conquests have brought to Spain,⁵ claiming that the English can expect similar wealth from Guiana. His evidence for this claim is a story that the emperor of Guiana descends "from those magnificent Princes of Peru of whose [...] riches Pedro de Cieza, Francisco Lopez (de Gomara), and others have written" (459). Once he has asserted the connection between his mythical Guianan emperor and actual Incan ones, he can cite a Spanish conquest narrative as if it describes Guiana rather than Peru: "because we may judge of the one by

the other, I thought good to insert part of the 120 chapter of Lopez in his general history of the Indies, wherein he describeth the court and magnificence of Guayanacapa, ancestor to the Emperor of Peru" (460).

Raleigh then quotes Gomara's *Historia de las Indias y conquista de Mexico*, at length, in both Spanish and his own English translation⁶:

Todo el servicio de su casa, mesa, y cozina era de oro [...]. Tenia en su recamara estatuas huecas de oro que parecian gigantes, y las figuras al proprio, y tamano de quantos animales, aves, arboles, y yervas produze la tierra, y de quantos peces cria la mar y aguas de sus reynos. [...] En fin no avia cosa en su tierra, que no la tuviesse de oro contrahecha; y aun dizen, que tenian los Ingas un vergel en una Isla cerca de la Puna, [...] que tenia la ortaliza, las flores, y arboles de oro y plata, invencion y grandeza hasta entonces nunca vista. [...] That is, All the vessels of his house, table, and kitchen were of gold and silver . [...] He had in his wardrobe hollow statues of gold which seemed giants, and the figures in proportion and bigness of all the beasts, birds, trees, and herbs, that the earth bringeth forth: and of all the fishes that the sea or waters of his kingdom breedeth. [...] Finally there was nothing in his country, whereof he had not the counterfeit in gold: Yea and they say, The Incas had a garden of pleasure in an island near Puna, [...] which had all kind of garden herbs, flowers and trees of gold and silver, and invention and magnificence till then never seen. (460-61)

Perhaps because this description, which sounds like something from Spenser or Ariosto, is so fantastic, Raleigh bolsters it with statistics about the value of the gold and silver taken from the Incan emperor Atahualpa. Again, he quotes and translates Gomara: "Hallaron cinquenta y dos mil marcos de buena playa, y un millon y trezientos y veinte y seys mil, y quintientos pesos do oro, which is: They found fifty and two thousand marks of good silver, and one million and three hundred and twenty and six thousand and five hundred pesos of gold" (461).

Admitting that these excerpts from Gomara's *Historia* "may seem strange," Raleigh asks his English readers to "consider the many millions which are daily brought out of Peru into Spain" before dismissing them (461); the European balance of power verifies the *Historia*, "for by the abundant treasure of [the Americas] the Spanish King vexeth all the princes of Europe, and is become, in a few years, from a poor King of Castille, the greatest monarch of this part of the world" (461).⁷ In a direct appeal to his monarch, Raleigh points out that Elizabeth cannot change this balance by simply raiding Philip's possessions in the Americas, as the English have done thus far: "The king of Spain is not so impoverished by taking three or four port-towns in America as we suppose."⁸ These towns simply link Philip with the sources of his wealth; if Elizabeth wants to surpass that wealth, she must find a similar source. Raleigh claims to have found that source in Guiana, "a better Indies for her majesty than the king of Spain hath any."⁹ All the gold found in the Caribbean and along the eastern coast of South America comes from Guiana (466-67), which is "the magazine of all rich metals" (455).

As physical proof of Guiana's wealth, Raleigh has only some ore samples whose value, as we have mentioned, was disputed by his critics. Though he tries to bolster this scanty evidence by describing the rich-looking land at the head of the Caroni, where "every stone that we stooped to take up promised either gold or silver by his complexion" (492), his main rhetorical strategy is to present his readers with a vision: through

plundering the mythical empire of Guiana, England will replace Spain as the power deriving the most wealth from the Americas. He foresees "in London a contractions house of more receipt for Guiana than there is now in Seville for the West Indies" (509). Raleigh hopes that this vision will appeal to Elizabeth, the nation, and ambitious individual Englishmen, who he claims can gain wealth and martial honor through conquest:

The common soldier shall here fight for gold, and pay himself, instead of pence, with plates of half-a-foot broad, whereas he breaketh his bones in other wars for provant [provender] and penury. Those commanders and chieftains that shoot at honour and abundance shall find there more rich and beautiful cities, more temples adorned with golden images, more sepulchres filled with treasure than either Cortés found in Mexico or Pizzaro in Peru. (506)

Throughout the *Discovery*, Raleigh parallels actual Spanish and anticipated English conquests, but Montrose is right that Raleigh differentiates the two nations' actions in Guiana. Raleigh does this primarily to explain why the English will succeed where the Spanish have failed: the English have won the natives' good will by behaving kindly; the Spanish have lost it by behaving cruelly. Raleigh claims that unlike the Spaniards, his expedition never enslaved or tortured the *caciques* they encountered; instead they treated them with the respect they would show European monarchs. Raleigh describes his meeting with *caciques* as meetings of state,¹⁰ in which he presents himself as an ambassador for his queen, "the great *cacique* of the north" (457). His usage implies a parity between the native rulers and Elizabeth, which makes the Spaniards' ill treatment of these men--dragging them in chains "like [dogs] from place to place" (497)--seem all the worse.

The difference between Spanish and English actions toward the Indians extends to their treatment of the common people. Raleigh describes various Spanish abuses, including slavery (473), and other "cruelties, spoils, and slaughters" (472), especially rape: "the Spaniards [...] took from [the Indians] both their wives and daughters daily and used them for the satisfying of their own lusts, especially such as they took in this manner by strength" (483). He contrasts this with his expedition's scrupulous behavior: "I suffered not [...] any man so much as to offer to touch any of their wives or daughters" (483). If not for the discipline he imposed, Raleigh writes, his men would have behaved much as did the Spaniards since they had both the opportunity and temptation for abuse: "we saw many hundreds [of the Indian women], and had many in our power, and of those very young and excellently favoured, which came among us without deceit, stark naked" (483). The Englishmen's behavior, "so contrary to the Spaniards (who tyrannise over them in all things)" (483), has won them allies who will help him succeed where the Spanish have failed.

Like Shakespeare's Henry V, Raleigh knows that "When lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner" (3.6.102-103) and so forbids his men from taking anything without paying for it: "I suffered not any man to take from any of the nations so much as a pine or a potato root without giving them contentment" (483). Louis Montrose maintains that this discourse on preventing stealing obscures the fact that Raleigh intends to take everything.¹¹ But Montrose confuses Raleigh's audiences: Raleigh constantly reiterates his intentions for his English audience, but hides his intentions from the Indians. Here too, Raleigh has a Spanish model, this time negative. He explains that Anthonio de Berrio failed to conquer Guiana because he allowed his

intentions to be known: "to [de Berrio's] disadvantage, the *caciques* and kings of Amapaia had given knowledge of his purpose to the Guianians, and that he sought to sack and conquer the empire for the hope of their so great abundance and quantities of gold" (469). For this reason, Raleigh hides his purposes: he knows well that the Indians "would as good cheap have joined with the Spaniards at our return as to have yielded unto us when they had proved that *we came both for one errand*, and that both sought but to sack and spoil them" (498, our emphasis).

Montrose points to this passage as a "remarkable disruption of ideological consistency," noting, correctly, that the equivalence between English and Spanish objectives contradicts Raleigh's portrayal of the English as liberators, freeing the Indians from Spanish oppression.¹² He ignores the fact that Raleigh simply uses that portrayal as a way of winning allies. Raleigh describes the success, with group after group of Indians, of his claims "that the Queen's pleasure was I should undertake the voyage for their defence and to deliver them from the tyranny of the Spaniards" (489), that "we were sent by Her Majesty to relieve them" (498). Though modern readers may be puzzled, given the circumstances, by the success of this implausible story, we can see why he might be believed. He has a receptive audience: the native leaders listening to him have just been freed from chains and torture; they are often "almost dead of famine and wasted with torments" (457). Gratitude toward their liberator would incline them to believe his story. More important, the story fits their own experience: the English *have* just freed them from Spanish oppression.

Ironically, Raleigh takes this method of winning allies from the Spaniards themselves. Gomara's *Historia*, the Spanish narrative with which Raleigh seems most familiar, describes how Cortés was able to persuade the Tlaxcalans and Huexotzincans to become his subservient allies because they had been oppressed by the Aztecs:

Gran placer tomaba Cortés en ver la discordia, las guerras y contradicción tan grande entre aquellos sus nuevos amigos y Moteczuma, que era muy a su propósito, creyendo por aquella via sojuzgar más facilmente a todos . [...] A todas estas cosa estaban muchos de Huexocinco [...] y tan amiga y unida con ella, que son una misma cosa para contra Moteczuma, que los tenía opresos también, y para las carnicerías de sus templos de México; y diéronse a Cortés para el servicio y vasallaje del emperador.

Cortés took great pleasure in seeing this discord, the wars and the great rift between his new friends [the Tlaxcalans] and Montezuma, which was all to his own favor, thinking that in this way it would be easier to subject all of them . [...] Many Huexotzincans were in the same situation [...] who were friendly and unified with them [the Tlaxcalans] against Montezuma, who had oppressed them and used them for the massacres in his Mexican [Aztec] temples. Therefore, they offered themselves to Cortés as vassals of the emperor [Charles V].¹³

In the *Discovery*, Raleigh shows his awareness of this episode when he writes that "by the dissension between Huascar and Atabalipa Pizarro conquered Peru, and by the hatred that the Tlaxcallians bore to Montezuma Cortés was victorious over Mexico; without which both the one and the other had failed of their enterprise, and of the great honour and riches which they attained unto" (470). With this model in mind, Raleigh searches for Indian nations that are enemies to both the Spaniards and the Epuremei, the people of mythical Guiana. He claims to have found just such nations on the borders of Guiana. At the Caroni, he has "taken knowledge of all the nations upon the head and

branches of this river, and [...] found out [...] many several people which were enemies to the Epuremei and the new conquerers [the Spaniards]" (495). In a long conversation with a native ruler, he learns of "three mighty nations, [...] called Cassipagotos, Eparegotos, and Arawagotos, and that all those either against the Spaniards or the Epuremei would join with us (491).

Just as allies like the Tlaxcalans and Huexotzincans helped Cortés conquer Mexico with a tiny force of four hundred Spanish soldiers, so Raleigh's allies will help him conquer Guiana with "but a small army" of Englishmen (509). He has the Spanish precedent in Mexico for thinking this. From narratives like Gomara's, he knows that when Cortés first entered Mexico he had one thousand Tlaxcalan warriors with him, and that it was these warriors that allowed him to survive the *Noche Triste*. When Cortés returned and conquered the Aztecs, he was leading an army that included more than ten thousand Tlaxcalans; his own forces were insignificant in comparison.¹⁴ Raleigh uses this precedent to show that the conquest of Guiana will be economical, requiring little financial commitment from the crown. It may even help solve domestic problems caused by unemployed military men and ambitious younger brethren since "her Majesty may in this enterprise employ all those soldiers and gentlemen that are younger brethren, and all captains and chieftains that want employment, and the charge will be only the first setting out in victualling and arming them" (509). In return for this small investment, Elizabeth will become richer and more powerful than her rival: "whatsoever prince shall possess [Guiana], that prince shall be lord of more gold, and of a more beautiful empire, and of more cities and people, than [...] the King of Spain" (458-60).

No reader without an agenda can miss these constant, explicit comparisons of Spanish and English conquests. Readers familiar with the Spanish narratives might also notice that the *structure* of the *Discovery* closely resembles that of the Spanish narratives as well. The *dramatis personae* have changed--Aztecs become Spaniards; Montezuma becomes Raleigh's Spanish rival, de Berrio; Cortés becomes Raleigh; Charles V becomes Elizabeth--but episode after episode in the *Discovery* closely resembles episodes in Bernal Díaz or Gomara.

Raleigh replaces those writers' descriptions of Aztec massacres and sacrifices with the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty. By the time of the *Discovery*'s publication that legend had become well known in England through translations of Las Casas and Girolamo Benzoni and through Theodore de Bry's gruesome engravings.¹⁵ Raleigh adds to it by detailing the behavior of his Spanish rival, saying that every night on Trinidad, Indians came to see him

with most lamentable complaints of his [de Berrio's] cruelty: how he had divided the island and given to every soldier a part; that he made the ancient *caciques* which were lords of the country to be their slaves; that he kept them in chains, and dropped their naked bodies with burning bacon, and such other torments, which I found afterwards to be true. For in the city, after I entered the same, there were 5 of the lords or little kings [...] in one chain almost dead of famine and wasted with torments. (456-57)

Just as Aztec cruelty made the Tlaxcalans and Huexotzincans ready to accept Charles's rule, so Spanish "tyranny and oppression" (457) have made the Trinidadians and Orinocans ready to accept Elizabeth's. Group after group offer themselves as her vassals; one is so enthusiastic that when Raleigh "showed them Her Majesty's picture, [...] they so admired and honoured as it had been easy to have brought them idolatrous thereof"

(457). Raleigh reports similar results everywhere, so that now "Her Majesty is very famous and admirable, whom they now call Ezrabeta Cassipuna Acarewana, which is as much as 'Elizabeth, the great princess or greatest commander'" (457). Her fame will soon extend even to places Raleigh hasn't reached, to the mythical kingdom of the Amazons: "where the south border of Guiana reacheth to the dominion and empire of the Amazons, those women shall hereby hear the name of a virgin which is not only able to defend her own territories and her neighbours, but also to invade and conquer so great empires and so far removed" (510).

Raleigh must impress the region's natives with Elizabeth's power because as yet they have seen only Philip's. Their natural concern is that by contracting an alliance with the English, they will become victims of Spanish retribution. To allay these concerns, Raleigh inflates his queen's power--"the great *cacique* of the north [...] [has] more *caciqui* [kings] under her than there [are] trees" in Trinidad" (457)--and promises that Elizabeth will protect them. He knows that the Indians will bear most of the burden of any war with the Spaniards; without the English, they will bear the entire burden. From Raleigh's perspective, this is all to the good; he brags that the Indians "will all die, even to the last man, against the Spaniards in hope of our succour and return" (498), knowing that this return depends on convincing his queen and others that the Guiana project can succeed. Naturally, Raleigh does not reveal this contingency to his new allies. In this, as in the rest of his dealings with the Indians, his attitude is accurately described as Machiavellian: "How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his word and live with integrity rather than by craftiness, everyone understands; yet [...] those princes have accomplished most who paid little heed to keeping their promises, but who knew how craftily to manipulate the minds of men."¹⁶

This is not the Raleigh Montrose gives us: he presents us instead with a man deluded by his own rhetoric. Raleigh's real delusions are more obvious, resulting from his faith in Spanish stories about El Dorado that he heard first-hand in England from the Spanish captain Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa¹⁷ and in Trinidad from Anthonio de Berrio. Raleigh had also read these stories in the narrative of Juan Martinez, the only European supposed to have reached Guiana's capital city of Manoa, which Martinez "christened [...] by the name of El Dorado" (463). Martinez claimed to have lived in the Emperor's palace in Manoa/El Dorado for seven months; when he left, the emperor gave his "as much gold as he could carry," but, naturally, he was robbed of almost all of it (463). He thus had little proof of his story, and, because he was led blindfolded to Manoa and "not allowed into the country anywhere" (463), he could not even say just where the fabulous city was. We might think his story would be viewed with suspicion, but Raleigh tells us that the narrative was "the greatest encouragement [...] to Berrio as to others that [...] attempted the discovery and conquest" of Manoa (462). Raleigh is himself plainly encouraged by it and expects the same from his readers.

His confidence may result from the manner in which he acquired Martinez's narrative. Because he read a copy that belonged to the captured Berrio, he regarded the narrative as information that the Spaniards would rather have kept hidden. For Raleigh, the secret nature of the narrative probably verified its contents, which are fantastic:

at the times of their solemn feasts when the Emperor carouseth with his captains, tributaries, and governors, the manner is thus. All those that pledge him are first stripped naked and their bodies anointed all over with a kind of white balsam [...] of which there is great plenty and yet very dear amongst them, and it is of all other the

most precious . [...] When they are anointed all over, certain servants of the Emperor, having prepared gold made into fine powder, blow it through hollow canes upon their naked bodies, until they be all shining from the foot to the head; and in this sort they sit drinking by twenties and hundreds [...]. Upon this sight, and for the abundance of gold which he saw in the city, [...] [Martinez] called it El Dorado. (463)¹⁸

Raleigh says that Martinez's story is "confirmed by a letter written into Spain which was intercepted, which Master Robert Dudley told me he had seen" (463).

But Raleigh needed no verification of the story: he believed it for the same reasons that the Spaniards did--because he wanted to believe it. He also wanted to believe that his strategy for conquering Guiana would succeed and so may have fooled himself into thinking that he had won Indian allies by portraying the English as liberators. Whether or not that portrayal succeeded with the Indians, it no doubt flattered English readers. This created a contradiction in Raleigh's text. Though tempted to do so for rhetorical purposes, Raleigh could not logically portray the English as both unselfish liberators and cunning Machiavellians, as both freeing the Indians from Spanish oppression and modeling themselves on Spanish actions elsewhere in the Americas. The contradiction helps Louis Montrose imagine a Raleigh who was unaware that the English desire for conquest was identical to the Spanish. Raleigh was well aware of that identity, as this essay has shown; and though in describing his speeches to the Indians, Raleigh may have dwelled on his portrait of the English as liberators to flatter his readers, he was far more concerned with showing that the conquest of Guiana would succeed. To do that, he needed to portray the English not as liberators, but as conquistadors.¹⁹

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Notes

¹Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations* 33 (Winter 1991): 24.

²Frank Lentricchia, "Foucault's Legacy--A New Historicism?" *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeger (New York: Routledge, 1989), 237.

³Louis Montrose, "New Historicisms," *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 392-41

⁴Walter Raleigh, *A Voyage for the Discovery of Guiana*, in *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh, Kt.*, 8 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1839), 8:385, 388. Citations of Raleigh's dedicatory epistle and letter to the reader are taken from this edition. References to the text of the *Discovery* itself refer to *Hakluyt's Voyages*, ed. Richard David (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 454-510.

⁵The quantity of silver that Spain took from the Americas was indeed staggering. Between 1503 and 1660, at least seven million pounds of silver were taken from the Americas, tripling the European supply (Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982], 139).

⁶When Raleigh wrote the *Discovery*, Gomara's history had appeared in numerous editions, including a 1578 English translation by Thomas Nicholas (Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952], 295).

⁷Raleigh's analysis of the source of the Philip's power is accurate. In the 1590s, the king took twenty to twenty-five percent of all the silver brought from America, and this bullion provided security for

enormous loans. See O. H. K. Spate, *The Spanish Lake* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 198.

⁸Raleigh, *Works*, 8:382.

⁹*Ibid.*, 8:383.

¹⁰An engraving by the de Brys depicts Raleigh's first meeting with Topiawari (Michael Alexander, ed., *Discovering the New World* [New York: Harper & Row, 1976], 174-75). The de Brys depict the English as being in an obvious position of power: while English soldiers stand with their weapons ready, Topiawari gestures toward a group of Indians bringing gifts of food. Some of the details in this often reproduced engraving do not match Raleigh's text: Topiawari does not look 110 years old (488), and he is talking to Raleigh without the help of the translator Raleigh says was present (489).

¹¹Montrose, "Work of Gender," 22.

¹²*Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹³Francisco Lopez de Gomara, *Historia de la Conquista de Mexico*, Tomo I, (Editorial, Pedro Robredo, Mexico, D.F., 1943), 188-89; our translation.

¹⁴According to Bernal Díaz, the Tlaxcalans originally offered the Spanish "ten thousand warriors." Cortes took fewer because he did not want to frighten other potential allies (Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. J. M. Cohen [London: Penguin Books, 1963], 188, 311-12).

¹⁵For the development of the Black Legend in Protestant countries, see Lynn Glaser, *America on Paper: The First Hundred Years* (Philadelphia: Associated Antiquaries, 1989), 214-27. De Bry's illustrations for Benzoni's narrative are reproduced in Alexander, 122-51.

¹⁶Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 49. For the influence on Raleigh of Macchiavelli's theories about alliances, see Pierre Lefranc, *Sir Walter Raleigh écrivain, l'oeuvre et les idées* (Québec: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), 239-40.

¹⁷Sarmiento's description of their encounter can be found in his *Viajes al Estrecho de Magallanes* (Madrid: AlianzaEditorial, 1988) 300-302.

¹⁸An engraving by the de Brys depicts the scene (Alexander 173). Some scholars believe, the story has a basis in an actual ritual that was performed by Lake Guatavita, near present-day Bogota (Penrose 112-13).

¹⁹We would like to thank David Bevington, Roger Kaye, Michael Murrin, and Richard Strier for their help with this article.