

Cales and Guiana: John Donne and Elizabethan Foreign Policy

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As a young man John Donne joined at least two maritime campaigns in England's long-running war with Spain, and he wrote a good deal of poetry in direct response to those experiences. His verse also reflects more generally the contemporary fascination with overseas enterprise and discovery, and has been extensively scrutinised for evidence of Donne's attitude to foreign adventure, colonisation and the new geography. This essay argues that, partly by misinterpreting the historical facts, critics have offered a somewhat muddled picture of the way he and others in his circle addressed themselves to English maritime ventures in the closing years of the sixteenth century. Moreover, Donne's use of voyage metaphor in his poetry, though subjected to elaborate analysis in recent years, has been misread in some influential discussions, so that the discursive role of his verse in Elizabethan controversies over maritime warfare and the colonial project is not always clearly understood.

At the start of Thomas Heywood's play *The Fair Maid of the West*, the scene is laid with unusual precision in Plymouth in early July 1597, dramatising the moment in England's long war with Spain when a fleet under the command of the Earl of Essex stood ready to sail on what became known as the Islands (or Azores) Voyage. The opening conversation between a gentleman, Carrol, and two captains recalls the spectacular raid on Cadiz in the previous year, when the town was sacked and burnt by Essex's troops and much Spanish shipping destroyed, a feat which, we are told,

hath put heart
Into the English; they are all on fire
To purchase from the Spaniard (I. i. 6–8)

Cadiz had been a resounding military success – the first of any note since the defeat of the Armada in 1588 – but it had not removed the ever-present threat of invasion, and after a Spanish offensive in October 1596 was foiled only by bad weather, a plan was hatched to destroy the enemy fleet being assembled in the port of Ferrol and then if possible to capture and hold a base on the Spanish coast. In Heywood's play the participants in this expedition look forward to further plunder, though the declared target here is the Spanish treasure fleet sailing from the New World ('we shall tug with them / For golden spoil'); and one of the captains offers a lavish description of the gentleman-volunteers that have been attracted to the expedition:

How Plymouth swells with gallants! How the streets
Glisten with gold! You cannot meet a man
But trick'd in scarf and feather, that it seems
As if the pride of England's gallantry
Were harbor'd here. It doth appear, methinks,
A very court of soldiers. (I. i. 11–16)

Contemporary accounts of the fleet's assembly confirm this extravagant spectacle, and although we do not know when Heywood's play was written and first staged, his vivid and precise sketch appears to fasten on topical concerns, alluding to recent campaigns with the kind of detail that recalls the tension and excitement they generated.

We may wonder, however, how such descriptions would have been greeted in the immediate wake of the Islands Voyage, which one historian not untypically describes as 'about as futile an expedition as England ever launched'.¹ Heywood's evocation of the campaign is one of many literary responses to these offensives against Spain that helped to write the story of English heroism and endurance on the high seas, and it is an intriguing one because it is ambiguously poised between contemporary observation and the romantic hindsight of later generations. Heywood was a working playwright by 1596, but he was still writing for the stage in the 1630s, at a time when the deeds of Elizabethan sailors had become the stuff of legend. *The Fair Maid of the West* is in fact a two-part play, first published in 1631, and Part 2 appears to have been written twenty years or more after its predecessor, taking up many of the same characters and reprising the

¹ W. M. Wallace, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (Princeton, NJ, 1959), p. 155.

kinds of adventures they had in Part 1. Heywood probably decided to write a sequel following his return to the popular stage in about 1624, capitalising on the nostalgia for Elizabeth's sea-dogs that had been steadily growing throughout the reign of James I; and the mythical aura that by then surrounded Essex's capture of Cadiz leaves its trace in the list of characters given in the 1631 edition, where Essex (who appears briefly in a dumb show in Part 1) is described wrongly as '*going to Cales*' (a common English version of 'Cadiz') – he was in fact *coming from* Cadiz. For later Jacobean and Caroline audiences at the revival of Part 1, the evocation of 'the pride of England's gallantry' mustering to the cause contributed to the national myth of a glorious Elizabethan past; and if some found in the Captain's description an echo of current complaints about foppish extravagance in London ('tricked in scarf and feather'), they were free to conclude that in a less decadent era the fashion-conscious were still able to constitute a 'very court of soldiers'. Indeed, it is possible to imagine that the opening lines of Part 1, rather than being a topical reference for audiences in the late 1590s, achieved their present form later as a conscious piece of historicizing for Stuart theatregoers.

Some scholars think that Part 1 was written about 1609–10, which would allow time for inconvenient memories of naval disaster to fade and the revisionist account of Elizabeth's reign to work its influence. Yet there are aspects of this passage and of Part 1 as a whole that seem neither to forget nor to whitewash the problems of Elizabethan maritime enterprise. The opening conversation juxtaposes the pursuit of 'golden spoil' with the gallants' self-display as if the first is somehow guaranteed by the second, but words like 'swell' and 'glisten' immediately qualify this assumption, and cast doubt not only on the gallants as soldiers but also on the quest for spoil as a strategic or honourable objective. Heywood's play is a romantic adventure drama, not a satire, but it offers enough sharp commentary on the behaviour and motives of the voyagers to suggest that he did not simply view the expedition through a haze of nostalgia. In the next scene the issue of motive is made explicit when the suggestively named Goodlack asks the hero Spencer why,

. . . being a gentleman of fortunes, means,
And well revenu'd, will you adventure thus
A doubtful voyage, when only such as I,

Born to no other fortunes than my sword,
Should seek abroad for pillage? (I. ii. 4–8)

Spencer replies that he is not drawn by ‘hope of gain or spoil’ but by ‘honor’ and the ‘brave society’ (lines 9–12) of the gentlemen-volunteers. Yet by the end of the scene he has killed one of his new companions in a brawl, and the need to flee the scene coincides conveniently with the departure of the fleet for the Azores. Although Spencer does not lose the audience’s sympathy, the fact that the voyage can become a haven for fugitives increases our sense of it as a ‘doubtful’ venture, and its errant course in Heywood’s romantic fiction has to be corrected by the restorative travels of the heroine Bess Bridges.

Patriotic drama had its ways of easing national embarrassments, though the early-modern stage is not always so kind to unfortunate voyages. And other writers, dealing either with the actual experience of naval engagement, like John Donne, or with the complicated legacy of Tudor arguments about maritime policy, like Fulke Greville in his memoir of Sidney, wrestled with the problems of finding direction and purpose in a national effort marked by pyrrhic victories, repeated failure and incoherent planning. Their work is part of the process whereby maritime adventure is both unforgettably inscribed in English literary culture and identified as an impediment to the emergence of a fully effective foreign policy.

The 1597 expedition got off to a bad start: on leaving Plymouth it ran into a violent storm, and most of the fleet had to return to harbour for repairs. One of the first consequences of this setback, reported Sir Arthur Gorges, was a thinning out of the pride of England’s gallantry: ‘this violent and dangerous tempest had so cooled and battered the courages of a great many of our young Gentlemen . . . as that discharging their high Plumes, and imbroydered Cassockes, they secretly retired themselves home’. Gorges is moved to reflect more widely on this development, and ‘to reprehend and taxe our Nation, for their unproper and vaine manner of going to the Warres’, pointing out that many an adventurer,

. . . will take more care, and be at more cost to provide himselfe
of a roysting Feather, and a clynckant Coat, then to bee
furnished either of fit Armes, or of necessary clothing to keepe

out wet and cold: whereby they come . . . rather like Maskers
 than Souldiers, as men apter to bring spoyles for the Enemy,
 then to conquer or win honour from him.²

Gorges differs sharply in his view of such participation from contemporary writers like Henry Roberts, who two years before had rallied the gentlemen-volunteers to the final voyage of Drake and Hawkins to the West Indies:

You Gallants bold, of *Albions* fertile soyle,
 For Countries fame, on land and seas that voyle
 . . .
 You that for wealth doth cut the Ocean,
 Honor to have, and riches store to gaine³

And while Gorges may not explicitly deny the collocation of honour and plunder that Roberts takes for granted, both he and Heywood suggest that the idea and prospect of spoil is somehow made suspect by the meretricious glitter of those pursuing it. It is worth noting here that Gorges' account of the Islands Voyage, like Heywood's play, was first printed only in the reign of Charles I – showing that while the passage of time allowed these naval adventures to be idealised, as suggested above, a tradition of critical commentary was also maintained in which both tract and drama could participate.

The issue of wealth and conspicuous display also had implications for the places from which these military expeditions embarked. One of the gentlemen-volunteers who did not go home was John Donne, who spent part of this spell of enforced idleness in port writing a verse letter to his friend Christopher Brooke chronicling his experience of the tempest at sea. In another (prose) letter written in August, with the expedition still confined to harbour by contrary winds, he noted the deteriorating social relations in Plymouth since the return of the battered fleet:

² Arthur Gorges, *A Larger Relation of the Said Iland Voyage*, in *Hakluytus Posthumus, or, Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 20 vols (Glasgow, 1905–07), XX, 44–5. Gorges' rather satirical reflections are kept separate in his narrative from his earlier disclosure that many of the 'Gentlemen and Knights' were 'dangerously sicke' and some of them 'dyed thereof at Plimouth' (p. 43).

³ Henry Roberts, *The Trumpet of Fame* (London, 1595), sig. A3.

... when wee came in the burghers tooke us for the Spanish fleet for they have either hid or conveyd all their mony. . . . He that hath supt and hath 2 or 3s. is a king, for none hath a crowne; fayth, lands, jerkins, knighthoods, are reprobate pawnes and but for the much gay cloathes (which yet are much melted) I should thinke wee were in Utopia: all are so utterly coyneless.⁴

English port cities had learned to be wary of large-scale musters of this kind, which were often inadequately provisioned and put heavy pressure on the resources of local communities.⁵ Donne's remarks suggest that the city's traders were unwilling to extend credit and offered only limited pawning facilities, knowing that the gentlemen adventurers were in many cases already in debt – as Gorges complained – to 'the Merchants bookes wherin we are deep plunged, even to the morgage or sale of our Inheritance, to convert the true honor of Souldery into effeminate pompe and delicacy'.⁶

The city's dilemma registers clearly in *The Fair Maid of the West*, where tavern-workers are dispatched by their employers to get unpaid bills settled before the fleet sails. 'It is the commonest thing that can be,' says one, 'for these captains to score and to score, but when the scores are to be paid, *non est inventus* [he can't be found]', and his companion agrees that the same is 'ordinary amongst gallants nowadays' (I. iv. 2–5). Heywood creates an expressive dumb show at the start of this scene in which Essex enters with the Mayor of Plymouth and distributes bags of money to a succession of creditors; the hugely popular Earl is shown as addressing his 'noble mind' to an endemic problem in the launching of military ventures overseas. The need for some sort of public relations effort is clear from Donne's flippant comment in his August letter: 'The first act of that play which I sayd I would go over the water to see is done and yet the people

⁴ John Donne, *Selected Prose*, ed. Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1967), pp. 108–09. A letter to Robert Cecil on 21 July noted that 'As there was no expectation that the fleet would make any stay at Plymouth, the country is altogether unprovided, especially with bread' (*CSP Domestic, 1595–97*, p. 467).

⁵ See R. B. Wernham, *The Return of the Armadas* (Oxford, 1994), p. 205.

⁶ Gorges, *A Larger Relation of the Said Iland Voyage*, p. 46. Gorges praised Plymouth's capacity to supply the troops during initial preparations (p. 44), but the unexpected return of the fleet clearly put the system under strain.

hisse',⁷ but his acrid theatrical analogy puts Heywood's idealised tableau rather firmly in perspective. It suggests that Plymouth's displeasure at the fleet's prolonged stay was exacerbated by a sense that the expedition looked increasingly like a stalled effort, particularly when Essex was forced by lack of supplies and an epidemic of sickness to dismiss the greater part of his troops – a development that effectively undermined the entire campaign. Essex later claimed that he had reached into his own pocket to give the discharged soldiers severance pay, and it may be that Heywood is adapting reports of this piece of munificence to his own dramatic purposes; but the essential point is that Essex has to remedy the insufficiencies of others, whether it be the failure of the government to fund the expedition properly or the lack of financial discipline amongst the more privileged recruits.

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The Islands Voyage was to draw from John Donne two extraordinary poems, 'The Storm' and 'The Calm', that can be found at the start of his Verse Letters and which powerfully dramatise the extremities of the venture.⁸ But Donne's experience of unfortunate travel needs to be placed in a wider context, for the journey about which he wrote so vividly was not only beset by accident but hampered by structural problems in the English maritime effort, problems which came to a head in the final years of the war with Spain. This particular expedition was the result of policies and practices that had sustained much Elizabethan enterprise on the high seas and would later be celebrated as the *laissez faire* of a swashbuckling golden age, but which in the 1590s were being forcefully questioned and in the wake of the Azores venture were to provide fuel for the political crisis of the Essex rebellion in 1601. It was a debate given urgency by the prospects of maritime expansion opened up by the formation of the East India Company and a renewed colonising effort in North

⁷ Donne, *Selected Prose*, p. 108.

⁸ I discuss these poems and Donne's Cadiz epigram 'A Burnt Ship' in 'John Donne, Travel Writer', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70 (2007): 61–85 (pp. 63–71). All references to Donne's poetry are to A. J. Smith's edition. I have modified Smith's punctuation in some instances.

America; and the relationship between these projects and the time-honoured practices of heroes on the high seas posed some particularly complex questions for those trying to make policy. These questions are reflected in a good deal of imaginative writing, from strident encomiastic verses to withering theatrical satire. The struggle for maritime supremacy, during and just after the war with Spain, constituted an important challenge to England's sense of itself and its place in the world, and its more memorable moments were represented by writers in ways that brought out many of the perplexities, even absurdities, in the effort to accommodate new global facts and possibilities.

The conflict with Spain that lasted until 1604 has been comprehensively explored by historians in recent years, and the latest analysis, in Paul Hammer's study of the Earl of Essex, points to the main issues and problems that I want to address.⁹ The key events in this long, inconclusive struggle between the two powers, following Drake's raid on Panama in 1585 which effectively started the war, are the attack on Lisbon in 1589 in retaliation for the Spanish Armada, the raid on Cadiz in 1596 in which the town and much of the Spanish fleet were destroyed, and the expedition to the Azores (usually known as the Islands Voyage) in 1597. The first and third of these ventures were military and strategic disasters, and the second, the Cadiz raid, whilst delivering a devastating blow to Spanish morale and naval resources, proved at home to be one of the most controversial events of the war and one that crystallized many of the issues facing the English government as it sought a viable strategy against the world's foremost imperial power. Essex is a key figure in all this, as Hammer shows, not just because of his central role in the fighting, but also because he led a group that challenged what had become orthodox procedure on the seas. War fleets in Elizabethan times were joint-stock operations, a combination of state and private interests, which spread the burden of cost and allowed noblemen and merchants to invest in potentially profitable conflict. In other words, both groups saw war as providing multiple opportunities for privateering. The arrangement suited the government well enough, especially in view of Elizabeth I's notorious

⁹ Paul E. J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585–1597* (Cambridge, 1999).

parsimony, but it meant that when political enterprises like the post-Armada attacks on Spain were planned, there were competing interests to be served. Everyone from the Queen down to the smallest merchant was interested in plunder, but this objective did not always sit easily with strategic considerations like attacking Spanish harbours or ambitious attempts to put the Portuguese monarch back on his throne. It was these divided objectives that wrecked the Lisbon expedition of 1589; and when at the very start of Heywood's play Carrol asks the captains whether they can 'guess / The purpose of this voyage' (I. i. 2–3), he is acknowledging not only the confidentiality of military planning but the conflicting priorities and intentions that often sabotaged such planning.

Privateering – and unlicensed piracy – had long been central to English maritime activity. One of the consequences of the Reformation split with Catholic Europe was that old agreements giving England trading access to the Canaries and Azores came under strain, and from the 1540s onward English ships, denied their former commerce in the Atlantic islands, were reported as engaging in piracy 'anywhere from the littoral of West Africa to Madeira'.¹⁰ Following the Spanish annexation of Portugal in 1580, and with the official outbreak of war with Spain in 1585, the tactics of marauding and plunder were channelled into state-approved attacks on Spanish shipping and colonial settlements, and into more or less co-ordinated schemes to intercept the Spanish treasure fleet sailing annually from the Indies. This last endeavour had very limited success, but in other respects the policy of depredation yielded notable results. It was often very profitable, and damaged and contained Spanish power in the West Indies, as well as permitting a thorough reconnaissance of foreign waters and giving English sailors a wealth of navigational experience. Privateers could also afford to equip their ships with the iron guns developed in England under the earlier Tudors that gave them an advantage over foreign vessels still using expensive bronze weapons. This meant, as N. A. M. Rodger points out, that the English tended to be 'more successful at taking colonial products from the ships of other European powers than in developing colonies of their

¹⁰ G. V. Scammell, 'The English in the Atlantic Islands, c.1450–1650', *Mariner's Mirror* 72 (1986): 295–317 (p. 300).

own';¹¹ and it is well known that the early English interest in colonies was almost entirely restricted to establishing bases, usually on the North American coastline, from which to attack the Spanish West Indies and intercept its trade vessels and treasure fleet. Superior firepower also meant that merchants who were active as privateers were able when the time came to defend themselves on dangerous routes through the Mediterranean to pursue the Levant trade, and similarly on eastern voyages under the auspices of the East India Company. When William Camden in his *Annales* smoothly elided Drake's 1587 capture of the Spanish carrack *San Felipe* (which 'much enriched' the country) with England's discovery of 'the opulent and rich commodities of the Indies, & the meanes how to trade and traffique in those Easterne parts',¹² he was not simply mythologizing recent maritime developments. Piracy was closely entwined with the start of English colonialism and long-distance trade.

Arguments in favour of permanent settlements, however, led to recognition of the limited strategic value of privateering. Many of England's great naval warriors, including Drake and Hawkins, saw that raids and interceptions merely harassed a still-powerful enemy: what was needed in their view was the capture and garrisoning of Spanish colonial strongholds like Havana or Tereceira in the Azores from which England would be able to control the sea lanes and paralyse the enemy's lines of communication. A similar case was subsequently made for seizing key sites on the Iberian mainland like Lisbon or Cadiz. Yet after ten years of war, when Essex emerged as a military leader in the mid-1590s, these arguments had not led to the establishment of a single viable foreign base. The first attempts at a Virginia colony all failed, while Drake's spectacular raids on West Indian settlements yielded only pillage and ransom, and he made no attempt to take the town of Cadiz in his successful attack on its harbour in 1587. Henry Wotton, writing in 1594 just before he was appointed as Essex's secretary, was one of many who saw English foreign policy as disastrously half-baked, and blamed this on the Queen's habitual caution and reluctance to fund foreign expeditions.

¹¹ N. A. M. Rodger, 'Guns and Sails in English Colonisation', in *The Origins of Empire*, ed. N. Canny (Oxford, 1999), pp. 86–7.

¹² William Camden, *Annales* (London, 1625), p. 222.

Offering a lukewarm ‘justification of the Queens attempts against *Spain* and *Portugal*’, and taking a very different line to Camden, he agreed that these campaigns were provoked by Spanish aggression, but added that Drake could have accomplished more ‘better furnished then he was’, and glanced ironically at Elizabeth’s practice of permitting ‘her loving Subjects to adventure some part of their wealth, and a small portion of her own Treasure’. Such successes as there had been, says Wotton, demonstrate that,

... a greater Navy well furnished with sufficient men, and good store of Victuals and Munition, might then, and may yet, put her Majesty in quiet possession of the richest and best part of the *Indies*: But it sufficeth her Highness to try the Forces of those Countries; to acquaint her Sea men and Souldiers with the way thither; to give them a taste of the *Indian* wealth; and to make her power known as well unto the Inhabitants of those remote Countries as of other nearer Regions of the world.¹³

Yet even if whole-hearted government support was lacking for permanent occupation of Spanish territory, Wotton’s words remind us that many of these expeditions were combined military efforts, involving both ‘Sea men and Souldiers’, that were designed as invasion forces; as early as 1584 an ambitious plan had been hatched to take possession of the Moluccas, though it was aborted by the outbreak of war.¹⁴ And while Elizabeth, faced with the growing threat of Spanish invasion both before and after 1588, understandably stressed the prime importance of destroying the enemy fleet in its home ports, in practice this could scarcely be achieved in any Spanish harbour without a land army to support the attack. The old arguments in favour of possessing Spanish territory were passing to army commanders like Essex, who used them to support a mounting critique of England’s maritime strategy.

Privateering was increasingly seen also as an impediment to serious colonising efforts. Writing in 1584 before the war began, Richard Hakluyt had argued that whereas ‘planting in the easte and weste Indies’ had provided legitimate occupations for poor Spaniards and Portuguese, ‘wee and the frenche are moste infamous for our

¹³ Henry Wotton, *The State of Christendom* (1594; publ. London, 1657), pp. 91–2.

¹⁴ See John Cummins, *Francis Drake: The Lives of a Hero* (London, 1995), p. 133.

outrageous, common, and daily piracies'.¹⁵ The main point Hakluyt seeks to make in the *Discourse of Western Planting* is that colonies will provide for the transportation and useful employment of petty criminals, solving the domestic problem of 'loyterers and idle vagabondes' at a stroke; but it is interesting that the first image that comes to his mind is one of marine transgression, singling out predatory vagrants on the North Atlantic and contrasting their actions with the purposive voyages of the Iberian nations. Hakluyt's line of thought implies that recruitment for voyages is fuelled by poverty and unemployment at home and has transferred the problem of vagabondage from England's roads to the decks of her ships, so that the world can see that his country has failed to solve its social problems, in the manner of Spain and Portugal, by increased maritime venturing. This is the shadow side of all those defiant celebrations of lawlessness in pamphlets about Drake and his ilk, where the domestic 'pilfering and thevinge' lamented by Hakluyt (p. 234) is transformed into glorious plunder abroad, though not always without strain. In the war years piracy was technically legitimised by the issuing of letters of reprisal (though this did not prevent frequent attacks on the ships of neutral or friendly nations), but as the economic arguments for colonialism became more detailed and sophisticated, the old case for settlements as bases for raiding the West Indies looked increasingly threadbare.

The conflict of priorities was sharply exposed in 1590, when three ships were licensed to carry out John White's long-delayed mission to supply and reinforce the little colony on Roanoke Island. White as governor had returned to Europe to organise a relief effort, but his first attempt to get supplies to Virginia in 1588 had been wasted when the ships went privateering. Once again the owners and crew of the vessels diverted the voyage to the Caribbean, and 'regarding very smally the good of their countreyemen in Virginia . . . wholly disposed themselves to seeke after purchase & spoiles, spending so much time therein, that sommer was spent before we arrived at Virginia'. These

¹⁵ Richard Hakluyt, *Discourse of Western Planting*, in *The Original Writings & Correspondence of the two Richard Hakluyts*, ed. E. G. R. Taylor, 2 vols (London, 1935), II, 233-4.

delays sealed the fate of what became known as the Lost Colony.¹⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh, who founded Roanoke and sponsored White's mission, might have remembered this betrayal of his first colonial project when he wrote in the preface to *The Discoverie of Guiana* that his new enterprise should not be confused with irresponsible 'journeys of picory' which 'run from Cape to Cape, and from place to place, for the pillage of ordinaries prizes'.¹⁷ Raleigh acknowledged that privateering was part of 'the former fortune in which I once lived' – he had established Roanoke with West Indian raiding very much in mind – but he was now keen to stress a different rationale for colonialism.

In such a climate, Essex's condemnation of privateering voyages as 'idle wanderings upon the sea'¹⁸ tapped into a prevalent diagnosis of national shortcomings, and his resonant phrase seems to recall not only Sidney's strictures on the lack of 'setled ends' in maritime activity¹⁹ but also the old stories about the English as compulsive but directionless voyagers. Moreover, although he seems never to have been interested in colonies, Essex drew on the same logic as Raleigh when he described the tactic of lying in wait for Spanish treasure ships off the Azores as 'a fitter enterprise for some decayd private man then for a state, for yt savors of guerra di corsar'.²⁰ Both men seem to be putting distance between themselves and the priorities of the previous decade. Similarly, in a pamphlet designed to answer criticism of the Lisbon expedition in 1589, Sir Anthony Wingfield argued that significant gains in the war with Spain would never be obtained so

¹⁶ Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols (Glasgow, 1903–05), VIII, 405; and see D. B. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481–1620* (New York, 1973), pp. 298–302.

¹⁷ *The Discoverie of Guiana* (London, 1596), rpt. in Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, etc.* X, 340.

¹⁸ Unpublished letter, quoted by L. W. Henry, 'The earl of Essex as strategist and military organiser (1596–7)', *English Historical Review* 68 (1953): 363–93 (p. 366). See also Hammer, 'Myth-Making: Politics, Propaganda and the Capture of Cadiz in 1596', *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 621–42 (p. 629).

¹⁹ In his memoir of Sir Philip Sidney, Fulke Greville ascribes to Sidney the view that island peoples are 'for the most part apter to follow undertaking chance, than any setled ends in a Marchant-traffique' (*The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. J. S. Gouws, Oxford, 1986, p. 92).

²⁰ Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 257.

long as ‘we commit Idolatrie to Neptune, and will put him alone still to fight for us as he did the last yere’ (i.e., in the victory over the Armada). These are the remarks of military men, arguing the case for seizing and holding Spanish territory as an easier and more certain way of controlling the sea-lanes, and concerned that the high failure rate of war expeditions means that, as Wingfield puts it, ‘the auncient English honour is taken from our Men of Warre, and their Profession in disgrace, though never so necessarie’.²¹ Essex was furious at the decision to abandon Cadiz after its capture in 1596, and while it is doubtful whether England would have been able to sustain a permanent garrison there, his ideas about how maritime power is achieved and maintained, combining land and sea forces in a co-ordinated way, were a bold challenge to orthodox thinking and highlighted the piecemeal character of existing policy. If Essex had won the argument about holding Cadiz, as Paul Hammer points out, ‘it would have been extremely difficult for Elizabeth to abandon it and consequently the whole trend of English policy would have been changed’, with Essex emerging as the dominant voice in government.²²

Not surprisingly, Essex’s convictions were strongly opposed by rivals at court and in the naval high command, and it should be added that they were frequently sacrificed to his own volatile temperament. Even his moment of glory at Cadiz was hardly the product of planned co-operation: he had to be dissuaded by Raleigh from a disastrous plan of attack,²³ the naval commanders competed furiously for precedence in the assault on the principal Spanish galleons; and after the town was taken there was much grumbling from the sailors that the land army had monopolised its sacking. When the Queen in her turn complained that private plunder had robbed her coffers of the revenue she expected from the venture, a financial enquiry was launched which soon broadened into a more detailed investigation of the conduct of the campaign, with Essex coming under fierce attack from the naval faction. In addition to the propaganda war between the supporters of Essex and Raleigh as to which leader was the true hero of the hour,

²¹ A. Wingfield, *A True Coppie of a Discourse* (London, 1589), p. 55.

²² Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 367.

²³ Wallace, *Raleigh*, p. 130.

Paul Hammer has shown that the Cadiz expedition also ‘had a remarkable polarising effect on English politics’, sharpening rivalry between (in particular) Essex and the Cecils and creating a factionalism that further weakened co-ordinated planning.²⁴ The war of words that ensued saw a government ban on all publications about Cadiz, which was still in force three years later when an account of the voyage was ordered to be removed from the second edition of Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* (1599).

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The controversy over these Spanish ventures also leaves its mark on the imaginative writing of the period. In Act 2 of Heywood’s *Fair Maid of the West* (Part 1), when the fleet has reached the Azores and invaded the island of Fayal, the two English captains who opened the play quarrel about their respective achievements in the battle, one accusing the other of trying to ‘share that honour which was sole mine own’, and being told,

... though thou had’st the foremost place in field
 And I the second, yet my company
 Was equal in the entry of the fort.
 My sword was that day drawn as soon as thine
 (II. ii. 31–4)

This dispute indirectly recalls the historical fact that the attack on Fayal produced the one moment of serious confrontation between the leaders of the expedition, when Essex accused Raleigh of disobeying orders by invading the island, and Raleigh came close to being court-martialled. But its emphasis on military competitiveness and the niceties of honour is also reminiscent of the extraordinary jostling for prominence that marked the engagement in Cadiz harbour, and of the vainglory that produced memorable but futile gestures like Sir Richard Grenville’s self-immolation in the last sea-fight of the *Revenge* in 1591 and Essex’s pseudo-mediaeval challenge to single combat before

²⁴ Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, p. 361, and ‘Myth-Making: Politics, Propaganda and the Capture of Cadiz’.

the gates of Lisbon two years earlier, with ‘a red scarf upon his left arm and on his casque a great plume of feathers of sundry colours’.²⁵

When the leaders of the Islands Voyage put together an apologia for their failed mission, the argument between Raleigh and Essex was not mentioned, but it is described in detail in Arthur Gorges’ account, which emphasises the attempt by Essex’s followers to persuade the Earl that Raleigh sought ‘to steale honor, & reputation from him, and to set his owne forwardnesse to the view of the world; which intimation of theirs, was an exception that they know our Generall was . . . a man that did affect nothing in the world so much as Fame, and to be reputed matchlesse for magnanimitie, and undertaking, and could hardly indure any that should obscure his glory in that kinde’.²⁶ Gorges clearly takes Raleigh’s side, but his account reflects a general view of the rivalries permeating the high command. It is notable in Heywood’s play how conflict amongst both military leaders and the gentlemen-volunteers ramifies to the rest of society, so that by the end of Act III it falls to Bess, the ‘girl worth gold’ of the play’s sub-title, to launch the voyage that, as Jean Howard puts it, ‘transforms the members of a factionalized, strife-ridden community into a harmonious band of brothers. The ship on which Bess sets sail for Fayal in Act IV is the stage on which this fantasy of national harmony is acted out.’ To the extent that the heroine is a figure for Queen Elizabeth, the fantasy is about finding a royal solution to the problem of faction and a stalled war effort; but Bess’s West Country origins and her entrepreneurial skills, as Howard points out, discourage a complete identification with the monarch and give us a figure ‘who can fuse the energies of the artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants of a commercialising nation with the chivalric gallantry of the traditional aristocracy’.²⁷

²⁵ Ralph Lane, letter written on 2 June 1589, in *The Expedition of Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake to Spain and Portugal, 1589*, ed. R. B. Wernham (Aldershot, 1988), p. 187.

²⁶ Gorges, *A Larger Relation of the Said Iland Voyage*, p. 92. The leaders’ report is given in the same volume of *Purchas his Pilgrimes*, pp. 24–33.

²⁷ Jean E. Howard, ‘An English Lass Amid the Moors’, in *Women, ‘Race’, and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London, 1994), pp. 106, 109.

As we have already seen, John Donne turned a somewhat colder eye on the West Country merchants during his stay in Plymouth, though in its own way his poetry engages as strongly as Heywood's play with the social implications of the Islands Voyage and has rather more to say about the politics of the venture. By the time Donne joined this expedition he was a seasoned campaigner, for he had been a member of the Cadiz expedition the year before and had written at least three epigrams about it. These poems have been extensively scrutinised for evidence of Donne's attitudes to war and expansionist ambitions, and a somewhat muddled picture has emerged of the way he and others in his circle thought about English maritime ventures in the closing years of the century. Donne's most sustained responses to naval experience are to be found in the linked poems 'The Storm' and 'The Calm', reflecting the ordeals of the 1597 voyage,²⁸ but the Cadiz epigrams and other verses probably dating from the early to mid-1590s have tended to focus discussion because they disclose apparently contradictory views of overseas enterprise, which critics have sought to explicate in terms of Donne's political allegiances and his tactical use of specific poetic genres. On the one hand, there are the sentiments voiced in the elegy 'Love's War', where after glancing at the fractious politics of several European countries the speaker adds:

And Midas' joys our Spanish journeys give,
We touch all gold, but find no food to live.

...

To mew me in a ship is to enthrall
Me in a prison that were like to fall

...

Long voyages are long consumptions,
And ships are carts for executions.

(Elegy 20, lines 17–26)

A rather different note is struck in the epigram 'Cales and Guiana', in which Donne appears to endorse the hope widespread amongst the gentlemen-volunteers that the Cadiz venture would be followed by a

²⁸ See my essay 'John Donne, Travel Writer' on Donne's poetic engagement with war reportage and travel experience more generally.

more substantial mission to colonise Guiana, following the publication of Raleigh's *Discoverie of Guiana* in 1596:

If you from spoil of th'old world's farthest end
To the new world your kindled valours bend,
What brave examples then do prove it true
That one thing's end doth still begin a new.

Both declarations respond powerfully to major foreign policy initiatives, but what is their relationship to each other? The issue is complicated by the differing rhetorical strategies at work in the two poems. Persuasion is the purpose of both, but whereas the epigram seems to be addressed in the poet's own voice to the leaders of the Cadiz expedition (and perhaps also to the gentlemen-venturers), in 'Love's War' Donne is exercising an ancient trope of love conceived as warfare, and creates a persona who uses the negative invocation of pointless wars and long voyages as a seduction tactic, persuading his mistress to a more fruitful private combat:

Here let me war; in *these* arms let me lie;
Here let me parley, batter, bleed and die.
(lines 29–30; emphasis added)

In this hyperbolic assault, do we assume that the speaker also exaggerates the privations of the maritime world to get what he wants? Or are the 'carts for executions' too graphic a reminder of the appalling casualty rates reported by campaigns like the 1589 Lisbon expedition, when more than half the soldiers and seamen died of shipboard diseases? There is a keen edge to these images of privation and futile adventure that prompts us to look for their source in Donne's recent experience or beliefs, but they remain difficult to reconcile with his later willingness to participate in two naval expeditions and to go on advocating English voyages to the Americas.

The political references in 'Love's War' tentatively place its composition in 1594–5, by which date it is unlikely that Donne had any personal experience of voyages as 'long consumptions'; and the negative allusions may indicate rather that he had formed a view of 'Spanish journeys' as the chronicle of an enervating and inconclusive war. Thomas Hester has argued that in this and other Elegies Donne is using the genre satirically, reviving 'the Ovidian love elegy as a witty vehicle of "ironic allusiveness" and political criticism fully in the

subversive spirit and the playfully elusive manner of his . . . Roman predecessor'.²⁹ On this analysis, Donne is consciously writing against the 'epic' conception of poetry (broadly identified with Sidney and Spenser) serving the Protestant war effort, and opts ironically for a private world of love rather than the mismanaged public sphere:

. . . shall not I do then
More glorious service, staying to make men?
(lines 45–6)

Readings of this kind take it for granted that when Donne creates voyage metaphors the vehicle is really the tenor or real subject, with the erotic occasion in several poems acting as pretext for a radical critique of overseas enterprise. Thus R. V. Young argues that when sexual conquest is compared to the appropriation of American gold in the elegy 'Love's Progress', the 'idealized picture of imperialist motives [is] mocked by the coarse cynicism of Donne's poem'.³⁰ Alternatively, of course, it might be that a crude and exploitative attitude to voyaging is intended to reveal the speaker's cynical view of love. The latter betrays his limited sensibility from the start, both as lover and as potential venturer:

Whoever loves, if he do not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
To sea for nothing but to make him sick.
(Elegy 18, lines 1–3)

The 'right true end', needless to say, targets not the 'virtues' of the lady but her 'centric part', just as many voyagers to the New World seek only to ransack its mines of gold and silver. There was plenty of testimony to the mercenary actions of colonists and venturers, and it supplied Donne with ready metaphors for bad behaviour in the bedroom. But these stories of New World excesses did not necessarily impel him towards allegory, with sexual drives operating as a code for the colonial project, in the way some critics have argued. I shall return

²⁹ M. Thomas Hester, "Over Reconing" the "Undertones": A Preface to "Some Elegies" by John Donne', . In *Renaissance Papers 2000*, ed. T. H. Howard-Hill and Philip Rollinson (Durham, NC, 2001), p. 137.

³⁰ R. V. Young, "'O my America, my new-found land": Pornography and Imperial Politics in Donne's *Elegies*", *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 35–48 (p. 42).

to this issue later in looking more closely at Donne's engagement with colonisation.

For now, we are left with the problem of how to interpret 'Cales and Guiana'. In another essay, Hester effectively reconciles the epigram to his reading of the Elegies by seeing it as elaborately ironic, revealing the new enterprise of Guiana as doomed to repeat the rapacious follies of its predecessor, the attack on Cadiz: 'one thing's end doth still begin a new'—or 'anew', as Hester suggests.³¹ The reading depends heavily on taking the pejorative sense of the words 'spoil' and 'brave', which as we saw was readily available in Heywood's portrait of soldier-gallants but seems less certainly applicable here. If Donne addressed the poem to Raleigh and Essex, did he remember that 'spoil' was a point of contention at Cadiz and that the plunder was a disorderly private affair with very little of it reaching the Crown? Or did he suppose that whatever happened at Cadiz would be justified if it led to a more productive venture in the New World? This is very much the impression given by Donne's verse letter to Rowland Woodward ('If, as mine is, thy life'), almost certainly written at Plymouth in July/August 1597, in which he reports that 'Guiana's harvest is nipped in the spring, / I fear' (lines 18–19), but expresses the hope that

Perchance, these Spanish business being done,
Which as the earth between the moon and sun
Eclipse the light which Guiana would give,
Our discontinued hopes we shall retrieve . . . (lines 23–6)

There is no great enthusiasm here for the 'Spanish business', but Donne is unmistakably distinguishing between the war (and by extension 'Spanish journeys' of raid and plunder) and a larger mission that is symbolised by 'Guiana'. This distinction is obscured by those that argue Donne's hostility to both Raleigh and Essex (and thus to all overseas enterprise) and interpret his descriptions of sea travel and uses of voyage metaphor as if they all have the same purchase on reality. To correct the picture, his responses to Cadiz need to be examined more closely, before addressing the question of what 'Guiana' signified to him and his contemporaries, especially in light of

³¹ Hester, 'Donne's Epigrams', in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. C. J. Summers and T.-L. Peabworth (Columbia, Missouri, 1986): 80–91 (p. 88).

the disputes about policy and the search amongst those leading the expeditions for an alternative to ‘idle wanderings upon the sea’.

* * *

Donne left behind no explanation of his decision to enrol in the Cadiz expedition, but his comments about joining the Islands Voyage a year later probably applied to the first outing: ‘how it will end I know not’, he remarked in the letter from Plymouth quoted above, adding a tag from Horace, ‘ast ego vicissim risero’.³² Behind the flippancy lay doubt and perhaps a certain embarrassment about his reasons for going, as he confesses in ‘The Storm’:

Whether a rotten state, and hope of gain,
Or to disuse me from the queasy pain
Of being beloved and loving, or the thirst
Of honour or fair death, out pushed me first,
I lose my end (lines 39–43)

These admissions are revealing on several counts. They remind us that motivation for getting involved in such ventures could stem from a tangle of impulses – even the commanders of expeditions were usually determined to ‘adventure to be rich’, as Essex put it on one occasion, whether or not this conflicted with larger strategic designs. The mixing of purposes also means it is unrealistic to expect careful discrimination from most participants between the different kinds of ventures proposed, or even that they would hold steadfastly to a particular opinion about an aspect of policy or the leaders that made it. We have seen already (in Gorges’ account) how quickly many of the gentlemen-venturers at Plymouth lost heart in the voyage and went home; and while Donne’s response matters precisely because he is more thoughtful and attentive than most in his observation of events, its value lies not in fixed attitudes but in the lively play of mind over a frequently bewildering and terrifying set of experiences. I think it is possible, and important, to find in Donne’s poetry some coherent though provisional conclusions about the events of the later 1590s; but a number of recent attempts to do so have sought too hard for a fully

³² ‘At least I will have had a laugh’, quoted by Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1995), p. 205.

worked-out political stance on his part, and to reach this have either engaged in over-ingenious analyses or misread the historical data.

This is not to deny that recent criticism has signally advanced our understanding of Donne's relationship to the Elizabethan establishment, replacing the conservative place-seeker who sacrifices his Catholic faith to his social ambitions – essentially the portrait offered by Bald and Carey³³ – with a figure who has a more complicated and oppositional attitude to the Court and its politico-religious projects. The young man who signed up for the Cadiz voyage had probably spent most of his teenage years on the Continent in flight from religious persecution, and on his return, as he struggled to make a career in London during the 1590s, Donne continued to associate with non-conformists of various kinds and to maintain a critical distance from the growing Tudor absolutism.³⁴ Donne's stance during these years is encapsulated by his famous lines in the Third Satire about the challenge of seeking 'true religion':

. . . doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right is not to stray;
To sleep or run wrong is. On a huge hill,
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go . . . (lines 77–81)

As David Norbrook says, this is the voice 'of a critical intellectual who has set aside all traditional religious prejudices and institutional loyalties', and who whilst claiming the right to 'stand inquiring' also knows that 'it is really truth that stands still while the inquirer must be constantly on the move', and 'not in a simple linear way'.³⁵ The kind of courage required for this search is of a different order, Donne suggests earlier in the poem, from that demanded by mere physical adventure; yet the latter is vividly evoked:

. . . dar'st thou lay
Thee in ships' wooden sepulchres, a prey

³³ R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford, 1970); John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (Oxford, 1981).

³⁴ Flynn, *Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, p. 196, and chapters 8–10.

³⁵ David Norbrook, 'The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters: Donne's Politics', in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. E. D. Harvey and K. E. Maus (Chicago, 1990), pp. 3–36 (p. 10).

To leaders' rage, to storms, to shot, to dearth?
 Dar'st thou dive seas and dungeons of the earth?
 Hast thou courageous fire to thaw the ice
 Of frozen north discoveries? (lines 17–22)

Clearly these things, or some of them, are part of the strenuous *vita activa* he has chosen, and the voyages he joined forced upon him a set of moral paradoxes that could not be divorced from the political and doctrinal issues of the day.

Donne's imaginative and physical participation in Tudor maritime enterprise is a revealing register of his feelings about the establishment to which he was trying to reconcile himself. His position was close to that of a man like Father Thomas Wright, a Jesuit priest who is thought to have converted Ben Jonson to Catholicism in the late 1590s and was a persuasive advocate of Catholic loyalty to the English crown, rejecting Spanish designs as a secular bid for supremacy and urging religious toleration as the path to domestic stability and containment of the Puritan threat. Wright returned to England in 1595 to promote this cause and brought with him vital information about Spanish preparations for war. He turned for protection to Essex, who in the early 1590s had begun to move toward supporting toleration for loyal, anti-Spanish Catholics and espoused the kind of pan-European thinking that Philip Sidney had favoured before him – the desire to be a shaping influence in 'Christendom'³⁶ – and which was no doubt congenial to Donne. Wright was also the author of a treatise on the passions which often seems close to Donne's concerns, as in this passage:

Most men feele in themselves a certayne Inconstancy, whereby they become wonderfull various, and fickle in theyr owne estates, exercises and manner of living: for if we discourse universally about the nature of man, we shall finde him continually, as it were in a cyrcle, that is, winding about pleasures, or flying paynes, and after a small while returning to them agayne.³⁷

This phrases Donne's 'winding' search for truth in more negative terms, but it expresses the restlessness and need for steady

³⁶ Hammer, *Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, pp. 174–8.

³⁷ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (London, 1604), p. 335.

commitment that may have lain behind his joining up, and hints at the psychological volatility that made him probe the extremities of feeling to which the voyages exposed him.

Donne the volunteer was a complicated character, then, able to share with friends like Wotton the excitement of voyaging and perhaps keen to nurture his own patriotic sentiments after the tug of loyalties caused by his faith, yet inevitably conscious of being part of a war expedition against a country he had visited and with which he and his relatives had religious affiliations. Socially, too, he felt sufficient distance from the dandies at Plymouth to be able to satirise them even though he was to all intents and purposes one of their number. Most important, Donne possessed a sceptical and independent mind, and a taste for paradox that quickly found its way into incisive poetry. This is apparent even in the most encomiastic of the Cadiz epigrams, a poem commemorating Sir John Wingfield, the only casualty amongst the officers leading the assault, who was buried by Essex in the ruined city that became his memorial:

Beyond th' old Pillars many have travelled
Towards the sun's cradle, and his throne and bed.
A fitter pillar our Earl did bestow
In that late island; for he well did know
Farther than Wingfield no man dares to go.

Some of the attempts to read satire into this epigram are unconvincing, but Thomas Hester is surely right to see it as an appropriation of the Spanish emperor Charles V's motto *Plus Ultra* (literally, 'More Beyond'), which defied the ancient limitation (*Ne ultra*) on travel beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Donne's poem alludes to the proximity of Cadiz to Gibraltar, rubbing in the humiliation of defeat at the geographical point that Spain's empire claimed to have transcended. We might also note, however, that the tribute to Wingfield's courage chimes with 'Cales and Guiana' in suggesting that the greater challenge lies ahead. Although the poem proposes that Wingfield provides a finer example than those who have invaded the New World (including, presumably, those English who have tried and failed), the implication remains that lack of resolution is the problem, since 'no man dares to go' beyond the bounds of Europe and challenge Spain's title to the Americas. As far as advocates of colonisation were

concerned, such a point could hardly help being made in any attempt to use the Pillars of Hercules as an emblem of victory. The great psalter that Essex brought back from Cadiz and presented to King's College Cambridge had special Latin verses appended to the opening page praising the donor in similar terms, celebrating,

That famed Peninsular raid, which under the command of a
hero – Greater than Hercules he – came right to Hercules'
Pillars!³⁸

It is not necessary to see Donne's poem as a criticism of Essex³⁹ to suppose that, as in the lines just quoted, the question of where such heroic accomplishment might lead is being pointedly avoided.

We can now return to the idea of 'Guiana' that clearly beguiled Donne and a good number of his contemporaries. As noted earlier, while in Plymouth harbour Donne expressed to Woodward his regret that 'Guiana's harvest is nipped in the spring' ('If, as mine is, thy life', line 18), a remark that has generally been interpreted as responding to fresh news about the intended destination of the voyage in hand. R. C. Bald suggests that the poem 'seems to reflect the disappointment felt in the fleet when it was learned that they were to be denied their hope of planting the English flag at the mouth of the Amazon',⁴⁰ and more recent criticism has generally repeated this, with the result that a misleading impression has been created both of the voyage circumstances and of the motives and ideas of the leading players. The historical facts have been misconstrued, and this error has been compounded by a persistent tendency in critical commentary to conflate raids on Spanish settlements on the South American coastline with the dream of planting an English colony in Guiana. When Dennis Flynn, the most recent commentator on this issue, states that 'a decision had been taken by the Privy Council to rule out extending the Spanish war to embrace the Guiana project Raleigh and Essex went to

³⁸ Quoted by Hammer, 'Myth-making: Politics, Propaganda and the Capture of Cadiz', p. 638, from the translation in *The Diary of Baron Waldstein: A Traveller in Elizabethan England*, ed. G. W. Groos (London, 1981), p. 106.

³⁹ Flynn, 'Donne, Henry Wotton, and the Earl of Essex', *John Donne Journal* 14 (1995): 185–218 (pp. 197–204).

⁴⁰ Bald, 'Donne's Early Verse Letters', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 15 (1952): 283–9 (p. 287).

court and pleaded for',⁴¹ the possibilities for confusion are manifest, though Flynn himself does not suggest that a colonizing venture was on the cards in the midst of war planning. The fact that Raleigh was simultaneously involved in both the war effort and the first attempts at colonisation, from the first Virginia settlements in the 1580s to the Guiana voyages of reconnaissance in 1595–7, has helped the notion of a 'Guiana project' to occupy and stand for the wilder fringe of the Islands expedition; and this in turn has encouraged critics to run together Donne's responses to the war and to American colonisation in misleading fashion.

Space does not permit a full rehearsal of the historical arguments, but many of the essential points were made in an essay by L. W. Henry fifty years ago, at much the same time as Bald offered his misleading but influential remarks. The basic purpose of the 1597 voyage was to destroy the Spanish fleet and its army gathering in the port of Ferrol. Once this was accomplished, Essex was to use his discretion in attacking any other base on the Spanish coast; and the 'Queen's Instructions' of 15 June subsequently extended his brief to 'consider how you may intercept [the Spanish] carracks from India, by making your course towards the Azores Islands or elsewhere'.⁴² The attempt on the treasure fleet was a popular proposal with the seamen, but Essex was initially committed to the Ferrol raid, hoping to repeat his success at Cadiz. Following the storm, however, and the long delays at Plymouth that forced him to lay off large numbers of troops, the talk was increasingly of a purely naval expedition. Raleigh formally proposed this in a letter to the government, pointing out that the treasure fleet had not sailed from Havana for two years and that 'the Spanishe kinge would be in effect utterly broken if this duple returne weare surprised',⁴³ and some of Essex's written remarks suggest that he may have come round to this way of thinking. The two leaders rode to court to discuss the situation, and probably argued that the reduction in troop numbers made the attack on Ferrol unfeasible and that the treasure fleet should be the expedition's main target. The Queen, however, insisted that the Ferrol raid be carried through, and

⁴¹ Flynn, 'Donne, Henry Wotton, and the Earl of Essex', p. 207.

⁴² *CSP Domestic, 1595–97*, p. 440.

⁴³ Edward Edwards, *The Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 2 vols (London, 1868), II, 191.

agreed to a modified plan involving the use of fireships to destroy the Spanish fleet. In the event, when the expedition finally resumed, contrary winds forced the abandonment of this scheme, and a false report that part of the Ferrol armada had sailed to the Azores to meet and escort the treasure fleet gave the expedition's leaders the excuse they needed to make this exclusively an 'Islands voyage' and concentrate on plunder at sea. As Henry points out, this decision 'not only changed the character of the expedition but left it devoid of anything resembling a plan' (p. 386), and after that nothing went right. The Spanish treasure fleet was missed by three hours following a blunder by Essex, and poor backup by the allied ships foiled Raleigh's nearly successful attempt to capture a rich East Indian carrack. Utterly frustrated, the expedition turned for home. Needless to say, the revised strategy of Essex and his colleagues, such as it was, did not include a transatlantic raid or any scheme to colonise the New World, and it is hard to believe that anyone could have thought otherwise.

Why then did Donne express regret over Guiana in Plymouth harbour? One clue may lie in the fact that on 2 July Raleigh's ship *Wat* turned up there, returning from a seven-month voyage to Guiana, and was greeted (Bald suggests with 'great excitement') by the fleet assembling against Spain. This was the third expedition Raleigh had mounted in search of Eldorado, but it had been no more successful than its predecessors. For a moment these two very different ventures, the war against Spain and the colonial reconnaissance, came into contact and no doubt stimulated a good deal of discussion amongst the gentlemen-volunteers. It is quite possible that the return of the *Wat* empty-handed, and the imminent threat from Spain, led Donne and others to conclude that the government would ban further American voyages (as it had when faced with the Armada in 1588). In 'Cales and Guiana' the previous year Donne had suggested that 'one thing's end' must 'begin a new', and he may well have realised that ending the Spanish threat against England was a necessary preliminary to new colonial projects. At any rate, Donne's lines to Rowland Woodward leave no doubt as to the nature of his interest in Guiana:

Guiana's harvest is nipped in the spring,
 I fear; and with us (methinks) Fate deals so
 As with the Jews' guide God did: he did show
 Him the rich land, but barred his entry in.

Oh, slowness is our punishment and sin.
 ('If, as mine is, thy life', lines 18–22)

The sentiment is strikingly close to that of Raleigh's letter to Robert Cecil on 10 November 1595: 'it is no dreame which I have reported of Guiana . . . I know that the like fortune was never offered to any Christian prince. I know it wilbe presently followed both by the Spanishe and French; and if it be foreslowed by us, I conclude that wee ar curst of God.'⁴⁴

This is a project that, however much it accommodated privateering sidelines and was calculated to 'annoy' the King of Spain, was never conceived as part of a war expedition or a mere looting mission. Raleigh had to attract investment for the project and get the support of influential figures in government, and this meant emphasising the political and strategic benefits; he may have found that the most persuasive case for a Guiana voyage was to present it as part of a general strategy to test Spanish resources and stretch their defences. But in Raleigh's own mind, and in that of propagandists like George Chapman, Guiana was an inspiration, an idea that transcended the cruel and despoiling imperialism of the Spaniards and offered the English a renewed opportunity of discovering a golden world, a place of arcadian innocence that was also a source of fabulous wealth – one that grants the discoverer (in the words of Chapman's poem 'De Guiana') 'theft-free treasuries' in a *Conquest* without blood'.⁴⁵ Raleigh concluded his *Discoverie of Guiana* with the story, which he claimed to have from a Spanish informant, that after the conquest of the Incas,

there was found among prophesies in Peru . . . in their chiefest temples, amongst divers others which foreshewed the losse of the said Empire, that from Inglatierra those Ingas should be againe in time to come restored, and delivered from the servitude of the said Conquerours.⁴⁶

And it is clear that this vision, which mingled dreams of wealth and justice and Protestant conversion, was shared to a varying extent by

⁴⁴ Edwards, *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, II, 109.

⁴⁵ 'De Guiana, Carmen Epicum', lines 167, 15, in *The Poems of George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (London, 1941), pp. 353–7.

⁴⁶ Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, etc. X, 431.

many in the years after the failure of the first Virginia colonies and during the later stages of a dreary and inconclusive war.

Raleigh's *Discoverie* went through three editions in 1596, and in the same year Lawrence Keymis published an account of the second voyage, with a prefatory epistle to the 'Favourers of the Voyage for Guiana' that made clear what the salient connection between 'Cales and Guiana' really was. Keymis pointed out that the Spanish were doing their best to pre-empt Raleigh by 'sending so manie ships . . . to people this country'; and that in the month of the Cadiz raid had planned to send 'a new supplie of whole familes to the number of six hundred persons, bound for *Guiana*, but that it pleased God, that by meanes of that . . . sea-fight, and sacking of *Cades*, the ships, wherein they should have been conveyed, were converted into ashes'. The raid alerted Donne and his friends, then, to a temporary advantage and opportunity. Keymis argued that if England failed to grasp the moment she would repeat the mistake made when Henry VII failed to support Columbus, and implied that the latter had appeared at the English court like a real-life Raphael Hythloday and found the 'wise men' unwilling 'to be carried with the perswasion and hope of a new found *Utopia*' because Columbus 'was . . . an alien, and manie wayes subject to suspicion'.⁴⁷ John Donne, as Tom Cain points out, 'inherited a much stronger family commitment to the New World' than most of his literary contemporaries, through his kinship with Thomas More and the Rastells;⁴⁸ and until the founding of Jamestown in 1607 concentrated his hopes once more upon Virginia, it appears to have been Guiana that provided a focus for his considerable moral investment in the colonial idea.

For the sceptical, admittedly, Guiana was just another 'doubtful' voyage, for when Raleigh returned virtually empty-handed and was shunned by the Queen, he was accused of having hidden in Cornwall for the duration and fabricated the entire story of Eldorado; after he wrote up the voyage, with Mandevillean stories of headless men and Amazons and freak biological discoveries, he was ridiculed as another purveyor of tall tales. Keymis seems to be trying to inject some

⁴⁷ Lawrence Keymis, *A Relation of the Second Voyage to Guiana* (London, 1596), sig. A4.

⁴⁸ Tom Cain, 'John Donne and the Ideology of Colonization', *English Literary Renaissance* 31 (2001): 440–76 (p. 440).

realism and urgency when he declares that the English ‘onlie to entertaine idle time, sit listening for Guiana news, and instantlie forget it, as if it were naught els, but a pleasing dreame of golden fancie’ (sig. A). One official assayer of the gold ore in Raleigh’s samples reported that ‘the same is of no price’,⁴⁹ in a discouraging echo of Frobisher’s rocks from the North-West Passage. Donne must have had his own doubts about long-term prospects, and when he expressed the hope to Rowland Woodward that the Guiana project would be revived, he felt obliged to add:

But if (as all th’ all must) hopes smoke away,
Is not almighty virtue an India?
(‘If, as mine is, thy life’, lines 27–8)

Moreover, in reserving the idea that the world’s true riches are to be found within the self, Donne is perhaps less ready than George Chapman to invest his faith in a new breed of colonial invaders, whom Chapman describes thus:

. . . you *Patrician* spirites that refine
Your flesh to fire, and issue like a flame
On braue endeauours, knowing that in them
The tract of heauen in morne-like glorie opens,
That know you cannot be the Kinges of earth,
. . .
You that are blest with sence of all things noble
In this attempt your compleat woorthes redouble.
(‘De Guiana’, lines 86–90, 115–16)

The gentlemen-adventurers of earlier campaigns had been recruited in very similar terms, and been found wanting. Even Chapman wrestles in his poem to preserve Raleigh’s elevated vision, ‘the Noblesse of thy high intent’, from all the inevitable debasements that might mean ‘it cannot into act proceed’ (lines 131–2), for he knows that,

Natures that stick in golden-graueld springs,
In mucke-pits cannot scape their swallowings.
(lines 144–5)

⁴⁹ Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations*, etc. X, 343.

Chapman's rather fevered struggle with the ethics of colonisation is foreign to Donne's style, but the latter's own particular search for an acceptable definition of such ventures, one that was to lead to the deeply considered statement of his sermon to the Virginia Company in 1622, must have been sharpened by the claims, petitions and arguments over Guiana from 1595 onwards. Raleigh's commitment to establishing a colony revived the hopes of those who had supported the Virginia project in the 1580s, and it gave a focus to the debates about the status of alien territory and indigenous peoples that were reaching England via the 'Black Legend' of Spanish atrocities in the New World. Donne as the exponent of witty erotic verse might well have found something rather solemn about Chapman's elaborate myth of imperial contract, in which Guiana,

Stands on her tip-toes at faire *England* looking,
Kissing her hand, bowing her mightie breast,
And every signe of all submission making,
To be her sister, and the daughter both
Of our most sacred Maide (lines 20–4)

Raleigh's way of rendering this prospect of colonial submission, however, in the celebrated apostrophe to the territory he claims for the Queen, may be thought closer to Donne's preferred mode:

To conclude, Guiana is a countrey that hath yet her
maydenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the
earth hath not bene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle
spent by manurance, the graves have not bene opened for
golde, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld
downe out of their temples. It hath never bene entered by any
armie of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any
Christian Prince.⁵⁰

Donne probably read these words at much the same time as he regretted the loss of Guiana's 'harvest' and wrote his own famous encomion to the 'new-found land', in the shape of 'his Mistress Going to Bed':

Licence my roving hands, and let them go
Before, behind, between, above, below.

⁵⁰ Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations*, etc. X, 428.

O my America, my new-found land,
 My kingdom, safest when with one man manned,
 My mine of stones, my empery,
 How blessed am I in this discovering thee!
 (Elegy 19, lines 25–30)

The resemblance in poetic figure is inescapable, but how should it be interpreted?

The interpretation of Donne's Elegies as exercises in political satire, briefly mentioned earlier in this essay, has a clear answer to this. In Elegy 19, claims Thomas Hester, Donne exploits 'the rich analogies of sexual and imperial conquest in order to embed a veiled attack on the Raleigh enterprises in the late 1590s'.⁵¹ Hester's assertion is a useful corrective to the widespread idea that in comparing his mistress to America so enthusiastically, Donne must be giving his blessing to the colonial exploitation of the New World; in his reading, the poem is spared the academic fate of becoming yet another 'guilty text'. Rather, by positing a speaker not to be identified with the poet, we can exempt Donne from complicity with the lover's allegedly sexist and imperialist attitudes and discern his own critical perspective on both. But this more sophisticated reading leaves intact – in fact strengthens – the assumption that Donne has really written an allegory where the mistress is a veil for the poem's proper subject, which is a colonised America. And this assumption is highly questionable, especially given that only six of the poem's forty-eight lines invoke the new world metaphor.⁵² It is possible to argue, and many have, that the speaker's lust for possession and mastery throughout 'colonizes' the woman, a process that is epitomised and confirmed in the lines in question, but this is to acknowledge that 'America' remains a metaphor, a generalised figure for something else, even though one often feels that the known facts of early imperialism are being used by

⁵¹ Hester, "Over Reconing" the "Undertones", p. 141.

⁵² In another essay, 'Donne's (Re)Annunciation of the Virgin(ia Colony) in "Elegy XIX"', *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 49–64, Hester sees the poem as a 'radical critique' of English imperial designs on Virginia (p. 50), and supports the argument with an ingenious analysis of the poem's putative parody of Marian legends and Spenserian and Neoplatonic values. This is possible in the context of the 1590s Ovidian poetic cult, finding both artistic models and political ideas to challenge and subvert, but it remains very speculative.

these critics to construct their view of the lover's assault. In a post-colonial age it is much easier to sustain the allegorical tendency in negative contexts, so that in poems where Donne projects a cynical or bigoted attitude to sex, or a sense of futile striving or pointless danger, and phrases it in terms of voyages of exploration or conquest, this is readily taken as a figure of imperialism. Elegy 19, however, is neither coarse nor cynical; it is playful, humorous and intimate; and it may be partly in recognition of this that the satirical reading finds the guilty text (Raleigh's perhaps) *within* Donne's poem and subjected to the latter's questioning gaze. This discovery can I think be used to make a more precisely focused claim about Donne's use of the new world metaphor.

R. V. Young argues that in this and other Elegies Donne is ridiculing the highly sexual language found in the Guiana narratives of Raleigh and Lawrence Keymis; and this seems to me a plausible claim if we consider that Donne's concern might be more with the language of poetry (and of wooing) than with English transgressions overseas. The trope of New World as desirable woman was a fashionable one; almost a cliché, surely, in the eyes of an innovative young poet who saw the Ovidian form as an opportunity to tilt at the propaganda of nationalistic epic and romance. Raleigh's use of the metaphor is particularly provocative since it depends upon the perceived distinction between benevolent English intentions and the rapacious tactics of Spain, yet his careful itemising of Guiana's virginity seems destined to erode that distinction and bring about everything that it negatively but very specifically defines. It is a prime example of what George Puttenham in his *Arte of English Poesie* says about the equivocal power of metaphor: 'As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speech'⁵³ – in this case, a figure working rhetorically to facilitate the actual violation of what it celebrates.

Donne knew all about the heady power of such figures and their capacity to mislead – to the point where the signifier becomes the signified or at least imposes its own discursive terms upon the subject it describes, so that virginity (a metaphor) is applied to a material

⁵³ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), Book III, chap. 7 (p. 118).

context where its ‘natural’ loss comes to justify the ‘rape’ of a culture. Perhaps this is an example of what Puttenham meant when he said that metaphor is ‘the inversion of sense by transport’. My argument might seem to support Young’s further claim that Donne in some of the Elegies deliberately engineers a confusion of signifier and signified, leaving us uncertain as to whether the speaker is ‘a cynical adulterer or a rapacious *conquistador*’.⁵⁴ But this claim misinterprets the strategy of allowing the speaker’s use of metaphor to expose his intentions and sensibility. One who talks about how he, ‘sailing towards her India, in that way / Shall at her fair Atlantic navel stay’ (Elegy 18, lines 65–6) leaves us in no doubt that sexual adventure is the tenor while the voyage metaphor remains an amusing and fashionable vehicle. The comic or satirical focus is firmly on the manners and sexual opinions of the speaker, but the language of travel that comes to his lips demonstrates the expanding reach of European greed and folly and the potential contamination of the new horizons he carelessly invokes. This is not a critique of the done deeds of conquistadors so much as an anticipation, in the manner of satirists like Joseph Hall, of how English venturers may repeat their actions and be further corrupted in the process. The problem begins at home, where ‘vice doth . . . habitually dwell’, as Donne emphasises in a verse-letter to Henry Wotton, and those who ‘stand armed with silly honesty’ have no chance because ‘Like Indian ’gainst Spanish hosts they be’ (lines 3, 13, 15).

It is against this backdrop of European imperfections that Donne reclaims America as a figure of pristine existence and reciprocal contact by making her for a moment the vehicle of a decorous and lively love-making. Where Raleigh’s invocation of innocence is compromised by the violations it claims to shun, Donne implies that the optimism and potential associated with the New World are imaginative resources too precious to be used in careless petitions for investment or in appeals to the more mercenary instincts of adventurers. His control of tone and image ensures that his metaphor neither darkens our impression of the lover’s actions nor is darkened by them.

⁵⁴ Young, ‘Pornography and Imperial Politics’, pp. 44–5.

In short, Young and Hester are probably right to detect in Elegy 19 an engagement with the 'Raleigh enterprises', but I suggest that rather than attacking the colonial endeavour as such, Donne is using it metaphorically in such a way that its imaginative promise is sustained. This involves an artistic choice, conscious or instinctive, about how the trope of New World as desirable woman should be deployed. The intimate and playful scene evoked in the poem has much in common with the private worlds of some of the *Songs and Sonnets* – the 'pretty rooms' which William Empson saw as embodying a strong utopian impulse, and which David Norbrook, endorsing Empson's line, takes as a sign of Donne's alienation from the Protestant establishment and 'an implosion of epic aspirations'.⁵⁵ It is important to add, however, that in celebrating the pleasures of a private union Elegy 19 also affirms something of the larger utopian New World dream of his ancestor Thomas More. Donne needed an exuberant context of positive eroticism to enable this affirmation, since in the closing years of the century there were few practical reasons for optimism about English ventures in the Atlantic region.

⁵⁵ William Empson, 'Donne and the Rhetorical Tradition', *Kenyon Review* 11 (1949): 571–87; Norbrook, 'The Monarchy of Wit', p. 13.

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