

Proceedings of the HUSSE10 Conference, 27–29 January 2011  
Literature & Culture Volume

# HUSSE10–LitCult

Edited by

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Hungarian Society for the Study of English  
Debrecen

2011

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ISBN 978-963-08-2793-5

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# PETRARCHAN LOVE OR POLITICS?

## SIR WALTER RALEGH AND THE CULT OF ELIZABETH I

ERZSÉBET STRÓBL<sup>o</sup>

“... I sue to serue  
A Saint of such Perfection,  
As all desire, but none deserue”

The cult of Queen Elizabeth is one of the important forms of cultural rhetoric in early modern England. It provides a common motif in the literature of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, lending a common denominator to vastly different works, as for example, the works of George Gascoigne and William Shakespeare. Sir Walter Raleigh’s lyric and prose works addressed to his sovereign present a unique moment of this cult. Raleigh belonged to the innermost circles of the court, and was on intimate terms with the queen. His writings both manipulate the conventions of the cult and create new imagery for the celebration of the queen.

Raleigh<sup>1</sup> came from a humble background, and his quick rise to such prominent position was due to his unique personality and exceptional skills. He was a soldier, a sailor, a businessman, a politician, an explorer, a colonizer, a military engineer, a man of scientific interests, a gifted musician, a man of letters, and a poet. Raleigh was well known for his lucky ability of self-advancement through the manipulation of these talents. Poetry and prose writing was one of those pursuits that Raleigh was quick to utilize in furthering his own position. He donned the contemporary discourse of the cult of the English queen and added a personal flavour to it. He assimilated the language of Platonic love and addressed her sovereign in lyric poetry. His own interests carried his mind overseas and thus he transformed his royal “mistress” into the Lady of the Sea, Cynthia. In his prose writing about his journey to Guiana, he positioned himself as the facilitator of the overseas cult of Queen Elizabeth, and narrated the Native Americans’ awe and loyalty to the English queen.

The following paper will examine these three aspects of Raleigh’s rhetoric about Queen Elizabeth and the manner he adopted, assimilated and transformed earlier discourses of her cult. Firstly, his courtly poems written in the Petrarchan tradition will be analyzed. These works occupy an exceptional place in the cult as they lie on the borderline between intimate utterance and public display of poetic skills. The second part of the paper will deal with the verse fragment popularly referred to as *The Ocean to Cynthia*. Its central metaphor for the queen is Cynthia, the Lady of the Sea, while Raleigh becomes the Shepherd of the Ocean. Its tone is passionate and dismal, transforming the trope of love for the royal mistress into a bitter complaint about her neglect. The third aspect of Raleigh’s use of Elizabeth’s cult appears in his *The Discovery of Guiana* (1596) which represents an interesting manipulation of the cult’s language to further the colonization project of Raleigh. In all three forms of Raleigh’s use of the cult-rhetoric the poet’s own self-dramatisation is a central element: his

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Kinga Földvary et al., eds., *HUSSE10-LitCult. Proceedings of the HUSSE 10 Conference* (Debrecen: Hungarian Society for the Study of English, 2011), 25–36.

<sup>1</sup> Raleigh’s name appears in contemporary orthography in seventy-three different ways. Sir Walter used the form *Raleigh* on all his correspondence and in his books from June 9, 1584 until his death. This is the way how his name is spelt in modern literary criticism, yet the older *Raleigh* form is often used especially in works on history. The name variations are enumerated in the Appendix of Williams Wallace, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), 319-20.

role and importance as Petrarchan lover, as the Shepherd of the Ocean and as the mediator between England and the New World.

## I. Raleigh's Court Poetry

According to popular legend – reported in the 1662 biography of Thomas Fuller – one of the means of Walter Raleigh to attract the attention of Queen Elizabeth was his poetry. When Raleigh was still new at court, his ambition for the queen's favours “made him write in a glass window, obvious to the queen's eye, ‘Fain would I climb, yet fear I to fall.’ Her majesty, either espying or being shown it, did underwrite, ‘If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all.’”<sup>2</sup> This couplet touches on the essence of Raleigh's career: his daring reliance on his personal relation to his queen. The lines were dismissed as mythmaking until in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a further verse exchange between the queen and her favourite was discovered. The poem of Raleigh starts with the following lines:

Fortune hath taken away my love,  
My life's joy and my soul's heaven above.  
Fortune hath taken thee away, my princess,  
My world's joy and my fantasy's mistress. (1-4)<sup>3</sup>

The poem was written around 1589 presumably after a period of disfavour or about the anxiety of competition with the newest favourite of the queen, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. The verse is in the vein of Petrarch: the author mourning over his unrequited love and his changing fortune. The answer of Elizabeth does not respond to the seriousness of Raleigh's tone but is endearing, to an extent even diminutive:

Ah, silly Pug, wert thou so sore afraid?  
Mourn not my Wat, nor be thou so dismayed.  
It passeth fickle Fortune's power and skill  
To force my heart to think thee any ill. (1-4)<sup>4</sup>

How far is this verse exchange an instance of intimate communication between Raleigh and the queen? Could the feeling expressed by Raleigh represent a public form of reverence for the queen? Verse exchanges communicated in manuscript form were common in the Renaissance aristocratic courts, and were not considered confidential. It was below the majesty of a gentleman to enter the business of publishing, but to circulate verse compositions was highly esteemed and appreciated. Margaret Downs-Gamble, writing on this practice says: “This Renaissance strategy is ... a rhetorical and dialectical signal of two simultaneous acknowledgments: firstly, that the writer is consciously engaged in discourse with another and, secondly, that the writer is aware of witnesses to the exchange.”<sup>5</sup> Raleigh's and Elizabeth's exchange also had its audience and fashioned an image both of Elizabeth and her courtier Raleigh. George Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesie* quotes lines 9-12 from Raleigh's poem as an example of “anaphora, or the figure of report,” and lines 21-22 as “epizevxis, the underlay, or coocko-spell,” – which shows Raleigh's importance in general –

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Wallace, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> In Leah S Marcus, Janel Mueller, Mary Beth Rose, eds., *Elizabeth I, Collected Works* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 307-8.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus, *Elizabeth I*, 308-9.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Downs-Gamble, “New Pleasures Prove: Evidence of Dialectical *Disputatio* in Early Modern Manuscript Culture,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 2.2 (1996):15.

and lines 11-12 from the poem of Elizabeth as an example of “sententia, or sage sayer”<sup>6</sup> to demonstrate one of the queen’s virtues. Furthermore, the two poems appeared together as a broadside ballad, though anonymously and somewhat altered, with the title “The lover’s complaint for the Loss of His Love” and “The Lady’s Comfortable and Pleasant Answer.”<sup>7</sup> Thus Raleigh’s lyric was not a private form of expression, on the contrary, it served to favourably position its author within a court of learning and to fashion his self. Furthermore, it was an act of publicly propagating the queen’s cult as a form of service due to a beautiful and virtuous lady.

The verse exchange of Raleigh and Elizabeth negotiated the differing positions of the authors. Raleigh uses the convention of Petrarchan love poetry; in his verse he yearns for the love, attention and favours of his lady, the queen. The genre allows him to complain about his position and even about the lack of receiving favours. Elizabeth as the lady and mistress is justified to receive or reject the flattery of the wooer. Within Elizabeth’s gender flavoured court Petrarchism proved to be a useful means of communication. John Guy describes this unique setup: “Elizabeth ... allowed herself to be wooed and courted, and even to have love made to her, [observing that these] dalliances detracted but little from her fame and nothing at all from her majesty ... to succeed at court politicians had to pretend to be in love with the queen; the conduct of the game of courtship was Elizabeth’s most effective tool of policy.”<sup>8</sup> Raleigh’s poetry to Elizabeth is just one example of a common form of expression.

In technical terms this courtly exchange meant the use of “echo-lines”<sup>9</sup> that were taken over from the other poem and were restated in another context to alter, mock or correct its original meaning. Raleigh’s lines “Dead to all joys, I only live to woe:/ So is fortune become my fantasy’s foe” (7-8) are ridiculed by Elizabeth’s “Dead to all joys and living unto woe,/ Slain quite by her that ne’er gave wise men blow” (18-19); or Raleigh’s final couplet “But love, farewell – though Fortune conquer thee,/ No fortune base nor frail shall alter me” (23-4) are refuted by “No Fortune base, thou sayest, shall alter thee?/ And may so blind a witch so conquer me?” (5-6) in Elizabeth’s answer. The verse exchange becomes an intellectual challenge and game in which both parties are ready to show off their skill.

The Petrarchan language can be detected in most of Raleigh’s other courtly poems too. In *Sir Walter Raleigh to the Queen* the courtier is a true lover of his sovereign calling her “deare Empresse of my Heart, The Meritt of true Passion,” a “Saint of such Perfection” whom he “sue[s] to serue ... as all desire, but none deserue.”<sup>10</sup> The most direct allusion to Petrarch and his poetry appears in the commendatory verse for Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*. The first line “Methought I saw the graue, where Laura lay” recalls Petrarch’s idol Laura, her “liuing fame” which “faire loue” and “fairer virtue kept.”<sup>11</sup> As the poem proceeds Laura’s image is obscured and replaced by the vision of the Fairy Queene “at whose approach the soule of Petrarke wept” (7), and “the hardest stones were seene to bleed” (11). In the poem *As you came from the holy land* the love discourse is softened into a ballad-like conversation: “As you came from the holy land/ of Walsingham/ Met you not with my true loue/ By the way as you came?/ How shall I know your trew loue/ That haue mett many one.”<sup>12</sup> The theme, the pilgrimage to the priory in Walsingham dates back to the early century, yet its resetting by Raleigh as the praise of Elizabeth is clearly Petrarchan: “She is neither white nor

<sup>6</sup> Agnes M. C. Latham, *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), 9.

<sup>7</sup> A printed version may have come out in the 1590s, but by 1640s they were certainly in print. See Marcus, *Elizabeth I*, 307 footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup> John Guy, *The Reign of Elizabeth: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Downs-Gamble, “New Pleasures Prove,” 13.

<sup>10</sup> Latham, *Poems of Raleigh*, 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Latham, *Poems of Raleigh*, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Latham, *Poems of Raleigh*, 22-23.



browne/ Butt as the heauens fayre/ There is none hathe a form so diuine ... Suche an Angelyke face,/ Who lyke a queene, lyke a nymph, did appear” (lines 9-11, 14-15).

The Petrarchan rhetoric of court poetry was woven together with further elements of Elizabeth’s cult. By the 1580s the cult assumed motifs of pagan mythology, especially images of the Diana cult of French consorts to which in England the praise of virginity was added. The following verse by Raleigh mirrors this official image in a generalized, impersonal tone:

Praise be Diana’s fair and harmless light,  
Praised be the dewes, wherewith she moues the floods;  
Praised be hir beames, the glorie of the night,  
Praised be her power, by which all powers abound.  
Praised be hir Nymphs, with whom she decks the woods,  
Praised be hir knights, in whom true honour liues, (1-6)  
A knowledge pure it is hir worth to kno,  
With Circes let them dwell that thinke not so. (17-18)<sup>13</sup>

The imagery shows Elizabeth as the Moon goddess, Diana, whose heavenly sphere is placed above the terrestrial world (“In heauen Quene she is among the spheares”). She has special powers above the ocean (“she moues the floods”), above the dewes of the Earth, and above the influence of other stars (“By hir the virtue of the starrs downe slide”). She is not subject to the passing of time (“Time wears her not, she does his chariot guide,/ Mortalitie belowe hir orbe is plaste”) thus she is *semper edem* – “always the same” – according to her motto.

Within the poem, Raleigh positions himself and the court as part of this perfect image. Elizabeth’s majesty is enhanced by the virtue of her court, “hir Nymphs, with whom she decks the woods” and “hir knights, in whom true honour liues.” The importance of the courtiers as the interpreters of the eulogy of the queen is underlined in the last couplet (“A knowledge pure it is hir worth to kno,/ With Circes let them dwell that thinke not so”). Yet this statement allows the possibility of an alternative view on the queen’s majesty, and furthermore, introduces a dark and ominous tone with mentioning of Circe to whose realm those are assigned who do not share the belief in “Diana’s” virtues. Circe, the enchantress, in the context of the Diana imagery reminds the listener that Diana was often seen in mythology as a “triformis” goddess: she was Cynthia, the moon in heaven, Diana, the chaste huntress on Earth, and Hecate, the enchantress in the underworld. Thus, the images of Diana/Elizabeth and Circe were brought into close relationship. The imagery’s correct interpretation relied entirely on the “fair nymphs” and “honourable knights” of Elizabeth’s court. In other words, the queen was reminded that effectiveness of the cult discourse depended on the court that was actively involved in interpreting and accepting its figures of speech.

Raleigh mobilized the other metaphorical devices of Elizabeth’s contemporary praise too, among them the references to classical mythology. In one of the last poems he wrote to the queen, he enumerates the various allegorical goddesses personifying her:

Now we have present made  
To Cynthia, Phoebe Flora.  
Diana, and Aurora.  
Bewty that cannot vade.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Latham, *Poems of Raleigh*, 10-11. It was first printed anonymously in *The Phoenix Nest* (1593).

<sup>14</sup> The poem is not included in Latham’s collection, it appears in Walter Oakeshott *The Queen and the Poet* (London: Farber and Farber, 1960) 205-206.

The first line presumably alludes to the fact that the poem accompanied an entertainment in the honour of the queen, where the various names “Cynthia, Phoebe, Flora, Diana, and Aurora” referred to the different allegorical figures in which Elizabeth was mirrored. Among these commendatory epithets the name Cynthia stands first. Although the name was commonly applied to the queen from the early 1590s onwards,<sup>15</sup> Raleigh was one of the first poets to embrace the complex metaphorical possibilities inherent in this epithet. He donned the poetical persona of the Shepherd of the Ocean above which Cynthia ruled as the moon, perhaps referring to the nickname with which the queen often addressed him, Wat or Water. In Raleigh’s poetry the Cynthia device occupied a central role. From the circa 1300 lines of poetry that can be safely attributed to him excluding his metrical translations, nearly half, that is 564 lines, belong to the Cynthia poems. Let us now examine this body of verse.

## II. *The Ocean to Cynthia*

The verse that belongs to the Cynthia group always posed a problem for literary scholars. On the one hand, it is fragmentary, part of a bigger body of lost poems and as such cannot be comprehensively studied. On the other hand its dark mood poses questions about its place in the official rhetoric of the court and in Raleigh’s personal career. C. S. Lewis describes *The Ocean to Cynthia* as “the monotony, the insanity, and the rich, dark colours of an obsessive despair.”<sup>16</sup> Latham, the editor of Raleigh’s poetry, admires the metrical fluency, the bold similes and turbulence of the work,<sup>17</sup> yet claims that “the meaning in several places is very dark and I cannot claim that I am more enlightened than another.”<sup>18</sup> Greenblatt calls the attention to the constantly shifting images of the queen and the voice of the author, and the sense of disorientation and bewilderment that the reader faces. He points out that the poem in this form is unfinished and was apparently abandoned as Raleigh must have “realized that what he had written could only enrage the queen still further.”<sup>19</sup> In spite of the difficulties of the interpretation of the fragments, all critics agree that the extant verses are just part of a bigger, lost corpus of Cynthia poems, that they are unfinished, and that they are in this form not meant for the eyes of the queen. Can we then treat them as part of the phenomenon we call the cult of Elizabeth Tudor?

The answer is certainly positive. The poem springs from the various conventions of the queen’s cult, even if it is a personal expression of it articulated at a dark and hopeless moment of the author. Yet one cannot agree with E.C. Wilson’s opinion, who sees the poem as the “elaborate idealization of the queen” and the “best specimen extant of the intricate fusion of varied forms and sentiments into amorous eulogy of her.”<sup>20</sup> The fragments of the Cynthia poems do possess a pessimism and frustration that surpass the category of “amorous eulogy” and “elaborate idealization” and border on criticism.

The existing fragments were discovered at Hatfield House among the Cecil Papers, and were first printed in 1870. They encompass four different works: “If Synthia be a Qveene, a princes, and svpreame”, “My boddy in the walls captived”, “The 11<sup>th</sup>: and last booke of the Ocean to Scinthia”, and “The end of the bookes, of the Oceans love to Scinthia, and the beginnige of the 12 Boock, entreatinge of Sorrow”, of which the third, *The Ocean to*

<sup>15</sup> A few examples are John Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588), Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590), and George Chapman’s *The Shadow of Night* (1594).

<sup>16</sup> C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 520.

<sup>17</sup> Latham, *Poems of Raleigh*, 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 127.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), 79.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 304 and 312.

*Cynthia*, is the longest and most interesting. Though it contains no date, it is most likely that it was written after Raleigh's disgrace for marrying one of Elizabeth's maids-of-honour, Elizabeth Throgmorton, for which he was confined to the Tower for several months. The poem appears under the heading the "11th and last book"<sup>21</sup> thus the surviving part may be the last and most bitter part of a larger group of poems.

*The Ocean to Cynthia* has no formal structure, the lines are like "fludds of sorrow and whole seas of wo" (140) raging and running at large against the "highest mountaynes wher thos Sedars grew" (483). These "tempestius waves" (270) of complaint consist of long and forceful sentences, which gather force slowly, build up tension by accumulating parallel images, and rise high only to ebb away and drown "in deapths of misery" (142). The continuous beating of "the trobled ocean" (484) illustrates the immense depth, and breadth of the affection of the poet and underlines its never changing constancy which "is not of tyme, or bound to date" (301) and which "would not, or could not be quencht, with suddayne shoures" (303). The imagery of water prevails throughout the poem but is never as energetic as in the slightly threatening and sexually burdened lines:

And as a streame by stronge hand bounded in  
From natures course, wher it did svmetyme runn,  
By some small rent or loose part douth begin  
To finde escape, till it a way hath woone,

Doth then all vnawares in sunder teare  
The forsed bounds and raginge, runn at large,  
In th' auncient channels as they wounted weare,  
Such is of weemens love the carefull charge,

Helde, amd mayntayende with multitude of woes,  
Of longe arections such the suddayne fall. (221-30)

Next to the images of water Raleigh built on the conventions of pastoral poetry, recalling especially the gloomy lines of Spenser's *December Eclogue*. A pastoral setting forms the frame of the poem. The first image is of a lonely shepherd who "all in the shade yeven in the faire soon dayes/ Vnder thos healthless trees ...sytt[s] alone" (25-6) without the "feeding flockes" or the "sheapherds cumpunye/ That might renew ... [his] dollorus consyte" (29-30). The final lines of the poem return to the Arcadian landscape: "Unfold thy flockes, and leue them to the fields/ To feed on hylls, or dales, wher likes them best,/ Of what the summer, or the springe tyme yields,/ For love, and tyme, hath geven thee leue to rest" (497-500). This pastoral air suits the praise of the beauty and virtues of the mistress: "Oh, worthiest spirit... eyes transpersant ... princely form ... heaven on earth transparent, the seat of ioyes, mass of mirakells ... eyes (the store of ioyes) ... regal lookes" (from lines 39-51).

Closely upon the praise the sound of despair is sounded. It is not a humble undertone, it is a harsh outcry against the inconstancy of the affections of the beloved. While in the Petrarchan discourse it is usual to complain about the cruelty of the mistress who does not return the feeling of love, Raleigh's sentences represent a "change of passion/ From wo to wrath, from wrath returne to wo," (158-59) which far exceeds the limits of accusation allowed by the convention. It is not the lack of love which he regrets, but the inconstancy, the deceit and the dishonesty of the mistress:

<sup>21</sup> Latham, C. S. Wilson, Philippa Berry, Tashma-Baum, and Louise Montrose call it the 11th, while Greenblatt, Stillman refer to the 21th book. The former argue that there is only a flourish on the number 1 in the manuscript and that it is more probable that Raleigh thought about the classical grouping of twelve books when he wrote the poem (e. g. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* was also planned to be twelve books).

Vnlasting passion, sounne outworne consayte  
 Wheron I built, and onn so dureless trust!  
 My minde had wounds, I dare not say desaiete,  
 Weare I resolved her promis was not Just. (295-298)

While there is nothing to complain about the lack of affection in a person, the poet feels justified for his anger as the change of affection was unjustly brought about by an incident in which his own defence was dismissed: “Her hard hart ... her estranged minde/ ...have forgotten all thy past deservinge,/ Holding in minde butt only thyne offence/... And thincks all vayne that pleadeth thy defence” (369, 372-3, 375). The mistress’s cruelty is painted with unusual brutality:

Thes be the Tirants that in fetters tye  
 Their wounded vassals, yet nor kill nor cure,  
 But glory in their lastinge misery  
 That as her bewties would our woes should dure (196-99)

Raleigh’s chosen image of the tyrant is a risky one. It addresses a monarch with a title which could be in another context high treason. This is the first point where the rhetoric of Raleigh steps out of the boundaries of official eulogy and assimilates elements of the negative representations of Elizabeth. Raleigh carries the audacity of his language further by pointing out to a monarch who had the “heart and stomach of a king” (*Tilbury Speech*, 1588)<sup>22</sup> that her weakness arose from her feminine nature:

Yet will shee bee a woman for a fashion  
 So douth shee pleas her vertues to deface. ...  
 So hath perfection, which begatt her minde,  
 Added therto a change of fantasye  
 And left her the affections of her kynde  
 Yet free from every yevill but crueltye. (201-4, 209-212)

The customary blazon of the mistress is used sarcastically to emphasize the vice instead of the virtue of the lady:

A prisoner in her brest I could not bee,  
 Shee did vntye the gentell chaynes of love ...  
  
 This did that natures wonder, Vertues choyse,  
 The only paragonn of tymes begettinge  
 Devin in wordes, angellicall in voyse;  
 That spring of ioyes, that floure of loves own setting (334-35, 344-347)

For Raleigh the application of the cult discourse turns “an Idell labor”(357) with which “twleue years intire ...[he] wasted” (120). As the poem slips from the polite love discourse into bitter complaint Raleigh poses the question that is ever since asked in connection with his poetry. Was his love just a false, deceitful, premeditated flattery? The context of the lines rejects the accusation, but the mental linking of the cult’s eulogy and the language of flattery is unlucky and untactful:

My love was falce, my labours weare desayte.  
 Nor less then such they ar esteemed to bee,

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<sup>22</sup> Marcus, *Elizabeth I*, 326.

A fraude bought att the prize of many woes,  
 A guile, whereof the profits vnto me –  
 Could it be thought premeditate for thos? (465-69)

The poem slowly turns into a boundless expression of self-pity above “the broken monuments of ... great desires” (14). How material these monuments were can only be assumed from lines “But all onn yearth as from the colde stromes bendinge/ Shrinck from my thoughts in hyghheauens and below” (35-36) and “from fruitfull trees I gather withered leues” (21).

Within the poem both the political and private bodies of Queen Elizabeth appear. The private, endearing image is expressed by the name of Belpheobe or Cynthia meaning “a most virtuous and beautifull Lady” (16), a definition provided by Spenser in his “Letter of the Author” of his *The Faerie Queene*. But while Spenser stresses the magnificence of the public image with the choice of the name *Gloriana*, Raleigh envisions a more threatening image of her as a lion:

Thos streames seeme standinge puddles which, before,  
 Wee saw our bewties in, so weare they cleere.  
 Bellphebes course is now obserude no more (269-71) ...  
 A Queen shee was to mee, no more Belphebe,  
 A lion then, no more a milke white Dove (327-28)

Instead of the favourite that could address her queen as Belpheobe Raleigh moved into the position of a simple subject. If Raleigh’s conceit was to persuade the queen to assume her old image of the “milke white Dove” by expressing his boundless sorrow, he probably went too far.

*The Ocean to Cynthia* which had started with the intention to express “in simpell wordes ... my woes” (2) turned into a passionate torrent of self-pity and self-justification that did not shrink back from the covert criticism of the queens eulogy and femininity. The poem captures a unique moment in the history of the cult of Elizabeth, when one of the “insiders”, one of the best known active contributors and manipulators of the cult overreaches his intentions and produces a piece that is redolent of treason.

### III. The Cult in the New World

Sir Walter Raleigh in his *The Discovery of Guiana* (1596) described himself as a person who established the “cult” of Elizabeth Tudor among the natives of America.

The cult image Raleigh presents in his pamphlet was different from his *Cynthia* in his lyric poetry. The imagery of *The Discovery of Guiana* is based on the popular narratives published about voyages and expeditions, which fashioned Elizabeth as the supreme governor of the seas well before the victory above the Spanish Armada.

Elizabeth was referred to as the Ruler of the Seas, without any “courtly” overtones, in various texts to justify the overseas expansion of England. Richard Hakluyt in his *The Principall Navigations* (1589) tells the story of Drake who used a public image of the queen, in the form of a sixpenny piece bearing her image, to institute his occupation and taking of the land of Nova Albion in 1579.<sup>23</sup> Drake set up a monument with a plate carrying Elizabeth’s name, beneath which he placed the numismatic image of the queen and her arms.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1965), 643 I.

In his poem, *De Navigatione* (1582), Stephen Parmenius of Buda gives a full-scale apology for the voyages of the Elizabethans to the New World.<sup>24</sup> He refers to the simple life form of the Native Americans as representing the pattern of the ancient Golden Age, and voices his anxiety about the threat posed by the colonization of them by Catholic countries. In this context, he invites Elizabeth Tudor to restore peace and justice, virtues he associates with her reign (line 246). Parmenius's poem was written to propagate the second voyage of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh, to Newfoundland. For the expedition Raleigh built a ship of 200 tons, the *Bark-Rawley* and bought shares in the venture. In the account of his own expedition of 1596 to Guiana it is no coincidence that he echoed the tropes of justification offered by Parmenius for Gilbert's journey.

Raleigh's *The Discovery of Guiana* presents the journey as a promise for England's new wealth that could compete with the Spanish plunders, "a better Indies for her Majesty than the king of Spain hath any."<sup>25</sup> The main theme is thus the description of the wealth of the new land. In the work the word 'gold' occurs 113 times, thus prophesying profit and success both for the queen and the land's new "governor." Yet Raleigh is careful not to position himself in front of the queen as it happened with the Earl of Leicester in the Netherlands in 1586, when Leicester assumed the role of the supreme civil and military authority without the approval of Elizabeth and aroused her anger accordingly. In Raleigh's text the queen's superiority and sovereignty is emphasized and her name is mentioned at least 36 times in various contexts. But Raleigh self-assuredly defines his own role as a trustworthy mediator and transmitter of the power of Elizabeth Tudor:

The West Indies were first offered her Majesty's grandfather by Columbus, a stranger, in whom there might be doubt of deceit; and besides it was then thought incredible that there were such and so many lands and regions never written of before. This Empire is made known to her Majesty by her own vassal, and by him that oweth to her more duty than an ordinary subject; so that it shall ill sort with the many graces and benefits which I have received to abuse her Highness, either with fables or imaginations.<sup>26</sup>

Time after time in the text, as meeting new people and tribes are described, Raleigh stresses his own importance in subjecting the natives to the sovereignty of Queen Elizabeth. He paints the image of the queen in superlatives to arouse the wonder of pagans, thus using and abusing the cult of Elizabeth at the same time:

upon the river of Caroli are the Canuri, which are governed by a woman who is inheritrix of that province; who came far off to see our nation, and asked me divers questions of her Majesty, being much delighted with the discourse of her Majesty's greatness, and wondering at such reports as we truly made of her Highness' many virtues.<sup>27</sup>

The extent of the praise can be guessed from the story about the amazement of the natives above the Queen's image: "I shewed them her Majesty's picture, which they so admired and honoured, as it had been easy to have brought them idolatrous thereof."<sup>28</sup> The Catholic powers often criticized Elizabeth's cult as a form of idolatry, and Raleigh's rhetoric borders

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Parmenius, *De Navigatione* (1582), In: *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius*, edited by B. Quinn and Neil N. Cheshire. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 74-105. Translation by Neil N. Cheshire.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana* (1595), Modern History Sourcebook edition, accessed November 14, 2008, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1595raleigh-guiana.asp>. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 9.

on such an attitude in Guiana.<sup>29</sup> Raleigh does realize that his praise transforms his Christian sovereign among the American natives into an idol. The devices of the cult discourse outside their cultural borders and context fail to be understood as conventions, and transform the mortal Elizabeth into a goddess, much to the material advantage of Raleigh.

The image of the queen shown by Raleigh to the natives appears, once again as in the incident of Drake, on a coin. The coin becomes a talisman-like object representing the power and presence of the queen among the people of Guiana: “I gave among them many more pieces of gold than I received, of the new money of twenty shillings with her Majesty's picture, to wear, with promise that they would become her servants thenceforth.”<sup>30</sup> The wearing of the image of the queen as a form of respect has been accounted several times by contemporaries and was now transported by Raleigh to the shores of South America. The twenty shilling pieces became cultic objects materializing Elizabeth's cult in a tribal society.

Similarly to the poem of Stephen Parmenius, Raleigh established a firm basis for his project of colonizing Guiana by presenting Elizabeth as a liberator, who frees the American people from Spanish oppression:

I made them understand that I was the servant of a queen who was the great cacique [captain] of the north, and a virgin, and had more caciqui under her than there were trees in that island; that she was an enemy to the Castellani in respect of their tyranny and oppression, and that she delivered all such nations about her, as were by them oppressed; and having freed all the coast of the northern world from their servitude, had sent me to free them also, and withal to defend the country of Guiana from their invasion and conquest. ... so as in that part of the world her Majesty is very famous and admirable; whom they now call Ezrabeta cassipuna aquerewana, which is as much as 'Elizabeth, the Great Princess, or Greatest Commander.'<sup>31</sup>

In the conclusion of his pamphlet Raleigh described Guiana as a land that “hath yet her maidenhead” (46) and that has been “never conquered or possessed by any Christian prince” (46). The state of Guiana's intactness is underlined with expressions all hinting at the possible aggressive subjection of the land: “Guiana is a country ... never sacked, turned, nor wrought; the face of the earth hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance. The graves have not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their images pulled down out of their temples. It hath never been entered by any army of strength.”<sup>32</sup> The words of aggression (*torn, sacked, turned, wrought, broken, pulled down, entered, conquered*) reminds one of the relish of deflowering this maiden land and hint at the final aim not of protecting but of possibly sacking the country.

*The Discovery of Guiana* is an apology by Raleigh which both offers a “gift,” the riches of Guiana, to Queen Elizabeth, and renders a description of the spreading of her fame in the New World. But Raleigh dramatizes his own role too with the help of the cult. He positions himself as the captain of “*Ezrabeta cassipuna aquerewana*,” the “Great Princess”, whose title for the land is realized through his own daring and service of Elizabeth Tudor.

#### IV. Petrarchan Love or Politics?

Raleigh's lyric poetry and his tribute to the queen in his narrative account of his journey to Guiana may be interpreted as political acts of self-advancement. As Raleigh was a courtier he

<sup>29</sup> Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 100-103.

<sup>30</sup> Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 46.

had first-hand knowledge of the official eulogy of the court which he assimilated in his early courtly poetry and extended with his own device of the Lady of the Sea. While *The Ocean to Cynthia* does not fit comfortably into the line of praise, it strictly observes the rhetoric of the cult. *The Discovery of Guiana* expanded the geographical borders in which Elizabeth's cult was applicable and justified with its discourse the overseas colonisation projects of many English explorers.

Yet in all of his writings Raleigh expresses devotion and loyalty to his queen. Closely upon the political calculations a sincerity of affections is demonstrated. Is it then Petrarchan love or politics? Both, I believe. The mode of Raleigh's poetry and writing gains justification from a broad social phenomenon, the cult of Elizabeth, where a society shared in the observance of the intricate ritual worship and celebrations of its queen, Elizabeth Tudor.

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