6

'Nature without labor': Virgin Queen and virgin land in Sir Walter Ralegh's *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*[1]

Helen J. Burgess

> The name of the one who disappeared must have gotten inscribed somewhere else. (Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*)[2]

Sir Walter Ralegh's *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana*[3] was first published in 1595, following his exploratory voyage to the Orinoco Basin in 1594 in search of the legendary 'El Dorado', or City of Gold, reported by early (and, as it turned out, unreliable) Spanish explorers. Ralegh's *Discoverie* was an attempt to persuade Elizabeth I and her nobles to invest money in a second trip to Guiana. Ultimately, it was unsuccessful; Elizabeth refused to put up her money, and Ralegh's mission to conquer and 'protect' Guiana from Spain was deferred until his second disastrous journey under the reign of James I. However, the Guiana narrative, as a historical document, also allows us insight into a peculiar relationship – between Elizabeth the 'Virgin Queen' of England, and her virtual counterpart, Guiana, the 'virgin land' Ralegh proposes to conquer in her name. Ralegh's Guiana is presented to Elizabeth as a body – more specifically, as a woman's (virginal) body. Thus, he claims,

> Guiana is a Country that hath yet her Maidenhead, 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 an army of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any Christian Prince.[4]

Given Elizabeth's own status as the 'Virgin Queen', a peculiar mirroring was unfolding in the narrative of the *Discoverie*.

In this chapter I want to untangle some of the relationships between Elizabeth's body and the virgin body of Guiana in terms of a kind of virtuality, especially as it pertains to the narration and virtualisation of resources. In the *Discoverie* narrative Ralegh creates a 'virtual narrative space' for Elizabeth through which she can experience the voyage with Ralegh. This space is tied inextricably with the body – Elizabeth's body, Ralegh's body, and the body of 'Guiana' – as a focal point for intensities of desire and intensifications of wealth and subjection. Ralegh's document presents us with a prime example of the way in which (female) bodies are coded as landscapes for exploration and exploitation, while at the same time romanticised as being in some way ultimately inaccessible – a virgin space, inviolate.

I believe that these bodies, abstracted, virtualised, and reincorporated in the Guiana narrative, stand in for a larger anxiety about the state of England's natural resources – timber and food crops, in particular – and Elizabeth's desperate need to find an edge over the Spanish. At the same time they also say something about a search for an abstraction of desire – gold – which closely mirrors Ralegh's desire for power and privilege in the Elizabethan court. According to Elizabeth Grosz, 'the body is a surface to be inscribed, written on, which can be segmented, dissolved into flows, or seen as a part (or parts) of a larger ensemble or machine, when it is connected to other organs, flows, and intensities'.[5] In the case of the Guiana narrative, the body of Elizabeth, as a Virgin Queen and the source of power and wealth, is mapped on to the body of Guiana, a 'virgin land' that is nevertheless endlessly productive. These bodies enter into commerce with each other through the abstract medium of gold, creating a virtual equivalency between the body of a woman and the body of the country. As a supposedly truthful account prepared for a faraway monarch, the Guiana narrative is tasked with finding a way to create a space in which Elizabeth can apprehend the distant land of Guiana; thus Elizabeth's body is 'written on to' the landscape of Guiana in the written text of Ralegh's narrative. But the Guiana narrative is a writing not only of Elizabeth's body but also of many others: the suffering bodies of the sailors, travelling starving through a productive landscape, the desiring bodies of the Spaniards, figured as cruel rapists charged with 'eating out' the native towns, and the body of Ralegh himself, desiring power, desiring resources, and, ultimately, desiring Elizabeth as the signifier of England's wealth. This, finally, is Grosz's 'larger ensemble or machine': a connector of landscape, gold, bodies, and desire, drawn together and circulated in the narrative of Ralegh's Guiana voyage.

The queen protectress

As critics have noted, Elizabeth maintained her virtue and power in part through her successful manipulation of a virgin mystique. Louis Montrose cites the most famous portrait of Elizabeth, the Ditchley portrait in which Elizabeth stands on a cartographic

map of England (Figure 4), as a representation simultaneously of maternal protection and virgin impregnability: '[t]his representation of Queen Elizabeth as standing upon her land and sheltering it under her skirts suggests a mystical identification of the inviolate female body of the monarch *with* the unbreached body of her land, at the same time that it affirms her distinctive role as the motherly protectress of her people'.[6] This image of wise management of her people can also be extended to her power over (in the case of the painting, literally over) the natural features of the landscape. Fumbling for a metaphor to explain Elizabeth's greatness to the Guianans, Ralegh describes her in terms of the landscape he sees around him: 'I made them understand that I was the servant of a Queene, who was the great *Casique* of the north, and a virgin, and had more *Casiqui* under her then there were trees in their Iland.'[7] Here power is explicitly related to power over resources, in this case trees – a commodity fast becoming scarce in Elizabethan England.

Ralegh's income from the material resources of England was directly dependent on his favour with Elizabeth. His tenure under Elizabeth's reign had yielded a substantial number of incomes based on the material wealth of England and Ireland. In 1583 he had been granted a monopoly in 'the farm of wines', charging vintners £1 a year for the right to retail wine.[8] This was followed by the monopoly licence to export woollen broadcloths, in 1584; that year Thomas Morgan, an agent for Mary Queen of Scots, informed her by letter that 'Master Rawley is the Queen's dear minion, who daily groweth in credit'.[9] Most significantly, in 1585 he was appointed Lord Warden of the Stanneries, a political position in which he negotiated profits on tin mining in Cornwall and Devon on behalf of the queen.

Ralegh was also able to capitalise on a key shortage in timber. Deforestation and fuel scarcity were a problem becoming increasingly widespread – in some places, desperate – in sixteenth-century Europe. Carolyn Merchant's studies show that, in particular, forests were under pressure by the need for vast supplies of fuel for iron smelting.[10] In addition to new building construction, slow-growing oak was used extensively in various capacities in the production of beer and wine, soap, and glass.[11] Indeed, the very stability of an Elizabethan England capable of sustaining and protecting itself as an independent nation (in other words, maintaining a strong economy and a stronger military) was dependent on trees. Merchant points out that 'the industry most dependent on wood and most critical to sixteenth-century commercial expansion and national supremacy was shipbuilding'.[12] Pitch, too, was needed for caulking ships. In 1586–1587, in a period of scarce fuel supplies due to rapid deforestation, and with permission and letters patent from Elizabeth, Ralegh joined other aristocrats in setting up a 'plantation' in Munster, Ireland, in what amounted to a land-grab on behalf of English settlers. This plantation, which would be lost in 1598, included a large amount of forested land, which was quickly sent to sawmills built on the property and used as fuel in iron production. Brewing practices required oak casks, a need also capitalised on by Ralegh. With the timber from the Irish properties, he set up a profitable business exporting wood for wine and hogshead staves.[13]

Ralegh's ongoing competition for access to resources, especially timber, manifested itself as a continuing need to be in good stead with the queen. This need, as Shannon Miller notes, was a motivating reason to conduct the journey to Guiana: Ralegh's secret marriage, to Bess Throckmorton in 1592, had caused his fall from Elizabeth's good graces. Miller suggests that 'Raleigh's expedition to Guiana can be read as … a gift of extreme wealth to regain Queen Elizabeth's now elusive affections'.[14] Indeed, in her characterisation of Ralegh's position as a 'fall from grace', Miller's choice of words suggests a possible metaphor that ties in neatly with the Guiana narrative: Ralegh's desire to return to a land of Eden 'before the fall' – a virgin land in which to apprehend once again his Virgin Queen.

In fact what is happening is a cascade of displacements, in which bodies, resources, and gold are continually deferred from one term to the next in the desire for power and wealth. Ralegh's need to maintain his material wealth is tied up with his professed desire for proximity to the queen, who often imposed temporary banishments from court (notably, of her favourites Hatton, Ralegh, and Essex) as a sign of her disfavour; thus, desire for the 'body' of England was tied in with the body of the queen. When his privileged position was cut off, the promise of Guiana's gold seemed like a good way to get Ralegh back into Elizabeth's good graces, and return him to the court from his imposed exile. His characterisation of Guiana as a virgin land suggests a direct flow of desire: the desire for the resources of England (tin, timber, wool) displaced on to desire for Elizabeth's body, which in turn was displaced on to the virgin body of Guiana.

Nature without labour

For Ralegh, Elizabeth's virginity and the virginity of Guiana are linked as an image of wise management and sustainability of resources. Elizabeth, he argues, governs her people so well she can send them out to protect other countries from less wise management; in his interactions with the people of Guiana, he claims on behalf of his queen a superiority in managing resources – the 'resource', in this case, being Guiana's virgin body. His chief competitors the Spaniards, on the other hand, are represented as cruel rapists of Guiana and its people, purposely 'planted there to eat out & wast those that were natural of the place'.[15] In this competition for resources, Ralegh represents Elizabeth as a saviour and protector from Spanish rule: he reports that he has told the Guianans 'that she was an enemy to the Castellani in respect of their tyrannie 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 had sent me to free them also'.[16] This offer of protection for the virgin body of the land of Guiana even extends to the individual bodies of village women. Ralegh reports that, despite the extreme provocation of nakedness, the women of Guiana remain untouched by the hands of the sailors:

> I protest before the majestie of the living God, that I neither know nor beleeve, that any of our companie one or other, by violence or otherwise, ever knew any of their women, and yet we saw many hundreds, and had many in our power, and of those very yoong, and excellently favored which came among us without deceit, stark naked.[17]

This stands in contrast to his reports of the Spaniards, who according to the villagers 'tooke from them both their wives, and daughters daily, and used them for satisfying of their owne lusts, especially such as they tooke in this maner by strength'.[18] Here, again, women's bodies are both metaphorically equated with the 'virgin' body of the land, and rated along with food and resources: 'I suffred not anie man to take from anie of the nations so much as a *Pina*, or a *Potato* roote, without giving them contentment, nor any man so much as to offer to touch any of their wives or daughters.'[19] Rape is figured as both a sexual and an environmental conquest of the imaginary virgin body of Guiana; abstinence the marker of a wise monarch.

Ralegh's characterisation of Guiana as virgin is, of course, a fiction, and one which contains the seeds of its own exploitation. These 'virgin' tropes may help justify Ralegh's presence in Guiana, but they also provide the justification for her projected conquest. Despite Ralegh's protestation that he comes to protect the land from the marauding Spaniards, the land is already figured as a body implicitly ripe for plunder. A virgin, after all, for Ralegh, is a resource, a woman who has not been possessed; even virgin Queen Elizabeth, the exception to this rule, can maintain her power only by representing herself as a 'Prince'. Indeed, Elizabeth's management of herself and her country belies her image of virgin purity and care: the queen is a represented as a virgin who uses her resources wisely, but ironically the very reason Ralegh is in Guiana is to extend its resources to a country already beginning to suffer, among other things, the effects of deforestation and excess 'manurance'.[20] England, even governed by a Virgin Queen, is not a sustainable ecology.

Guiana, on the other hand, is described as self-sustaining, a projection of an endless cornucopia of possible wealth in the form of gold and resources which do not require cultivation:

> [the people of Orinoco] never eate of anie thing that is set or sowen, and as at home they use neither planting nor other manurance, so when they com abroad they refuse to feede of ought, but of that which nature without labor bringeth foorth. They use the tops of Palmitos for bread, and kil Deere, fish and porks for the rest of their sustenance, they have also manie sorts of fruits that grow in the woods, and great varietie of birds and foule.[21]

This idea of 'nature without labor' suggests that nature is productive without the intervening hand of human husbandry: a return to an age of plenty before the fall. Later Ralegh describes the upriver country again in terms of a naturally occurring bounty:

> we beheld plaines of twenty miles in length, the grasse short and greene, and in divers parts groves of trees by themselves, as if they had been by all the art and labour in the world so made of purpose: and stil as we rowed, the Deere came downe feeding by the waters side, as if they had beene used to a keepers call.[22]

This passage even more explicitly stages Guiana as a kind of compliant landscape; it is so naturally productive that it looks cultivated.

Ralegh's description of Guiana as being virgin in the sense of 'unfarmed' was in fact false, or at least (if we are to be generous) farming activity was not obvious to him. It is possible that the husbandry of the Orinoco tribes people was not evident to English eyes because it lacked the intensified farming practices of Europe: enclosed farming areas, tilled and regularly rotated fields, and the marlpits (clay) and muckheaps (manure) of soil fertiliser. However, this is a generous interpretation, given Ralegh's description of 'art and labour in the world' combining to create 'natural' pastures. Citing Denevan, Whitehead notes that

> The lower Orinoco was heavily settled by native people and their own active management of landscape which, anthropology is only just beginning to appreciate, would have been reflected in the practices of maintaining coppices, burning off savannah grasses and a husbandry of fauna, especially deer … Such native activity has been denied or ignored, in both colonial and anthropological rhetoric, through the ideas of 'wilderness' and the 'natural' landscape, which erases signs of human intervention and so render such regions fit for colonial possession and development.[23]

It is also possible, however, that Ralegh's European models of cultivation blinded him to alternative forms of husbandry. Along with the lack of enclosure, by then the primary marker of farming (and more generally property) in England, the Orinoco Indians' use of raw vegetable sources and the encouragement of wild fauna such as tortugas (turtles) would have seemed alien to a European accustomed to highly regulated single-crop sections of landscape.

All this discussion of 'nature without labor' and 'art and labour in the world' is suggestive of the body of Guiana as an endless productive cornucopia, an Eden or Golden Age, implicitly gendered as a woman of great fertility (the country of Guiana is referred to as 'she'). And yet at the same time Guiana is a country that 'hath yet her Maydenhood', as if the untouched countryside is fertile precisely because it has not been cultivated.'Nature without labor' becomes an implicit trope of virginity: like the popular notion of the 'Golden Age', in which one does not need to work the land in order for it to produce abundant resources, sexual (colonial) conquest is not required in order for Guiana to be endlessly productive. This paradoxical formulation is reconciled through the formulation of a fertile virgin who is able to produce wealth without 'husbandry'.

In terms of the court and Elizabeth, this brings up some interesting questions. Was Elizabeth herself 'nature without labor', despite being a woman cultivated in the territories of the European aristocracy? Certainly the parallel could be drawn that Elizabeth was the ultimate purveyor of wealth, while maintaining her power through her unmarried status. As the arbiter of England's resources, including the parcelling out of monopolies and livings from English tin and woollens, and Irish timber, Elizabeth produces wealth. But at the same time Elizabeth is, like England and its resources, very much the product of labour, not nature. Through the careful maintenance of her image as Queen, through wardrobe, the annual progresses, and censorship of official portraits, Elizabeth laboured to retain her monarchy, most especially as a potentially marriageable asset. Elizabeth's management of her subjects, in turn, became husbandry of the country as she distributed land and the income from natural resources. In practical terms, Elizabeth's power manifests itself most often in her ability to parcel out, rather than 'protect': timber monopolies, letters of patent, and gifts of gold and ships.

Ironically, the rich resources accounted by Raleigh are belied by his descriptions of the privations experienced his own men and the inhabitants of the Spanish garrisons already there. Despite his later descriptions of the existence of Indian fermented drinks, he reports that the Spaniards had 'beene many years without wine', and traded eagerly with Ralegh for 'lynnen … and such other thinges as they wanted'.[24]

Ralegh's men also suffered increasingly from the environment and their inability to find fresh water and their need to carry food with them. Sailing up the Orinoco, he reports that

> we caried 100 persons and their victuals for a moneth in the same, being al driven to lie in the raine and wether, in the open aire, in the burning sunne, & upon the hard bords, and to dresse our meat, and to carry al manner of furniture in them, wherewith they were so pestred and unsavery, that what with victuals being most fish, with the weete clothes of so many men thruste together and the heate of the sunne, I will undertake there was never any prison in England, that coulde be founde more unsavory and lothsome, especially to my selfe, who had for many yeares before beene dieted and cared for in a sort farre differing.[25]

Indeed Ralegh's account of the richness of Guiana and the privations of his sailors sometimes becomes quite inexplicable. On one journey he describes, two of his ships 'had spent all their provisions, so as we were brought into despaire and discomfort',[26] such that only a conviction that their destination was ahead kept them going. And yet in the next sentence Ralegh reports of the 'divers sorts of fruits good to eate, flowers and trees of that varietie as were sufficient to make ten volumes of herbals, we releeved our selves manie times with the fruits of the countrey, and somtimes with foule and fish'. He notes the abundance of birds, 'without which, having little or no bread and lesse drink, but onely the thick and troubled water of the river, we had been in a very hard case'.[27]

Ralegh's true problem was one not of resources but of local knowledge and value. While he claims to have seen an abundant land not requiring cultivation, his men were constantly moving between starvation and overeating according to whether or not they were in a native settlement – i.e. whether they were being given food by the region's inhabitants. Ralegh's chief index of plentiful food seems to be bread, a cultivated and manufactured product, rather than the rich meats and plant foods which surrounded them often. This suggests not so much an inability to forage in 'nature' as a system which privileges foods with the value-added operation of labour performed on them. On the return to the port of Morequito, Ralegh describes the arrival of Topiawari's people 'loden with somewhat, as if it had beene a great market or faire in England: and our hungrie companies clustered thicke and threefold among their baskets, everyone laying hand on what he liked'.[28] While celebrating the discovery of a land of abundant food, Ralegh is unable to accept the simple notion of having to forage for food, rather than be presented with it by someone labouring to cultivate it.

The quest for gold

Ralegh's quest for unending bounty does not begin or end with food and trees. The riches of Guiana, as described in the *Discoverie*, hinge on two sources of potential wealth: natural resources and gold. Gold, as a signifier of exchange running through the narrative, is representative of the potential hard currency that can be used to buy ships and arms to fight the Spaniards, but also a way of establishing 'equivalence' in the narrative, to give an evaluative benchmark (i.e. so much gold = so much buying power) for Ralegh's audience – i.e. potential backers – back home. It is interesting, if unsurprising, to note that neither the Spanish nor the English have compunctions about 'protecting' the gold on behalf of the native Indians. But although gold is an abstraction, in the *Discoverie* it is again built upon a more general notion of wealth as naturally abundant. Ralegh includes a translation of an early (and apocryphal) Spanish description of 'the court and magnificence of Guayanacapa, auncestor to the Emperour of Guiana' which explicitly links the bountiful resources of the kingdom with the plentiful existence of their virtual equivalent, gold:

> He had in his wardroppe hollow statues of golde which seemed giants, and the figures in proportion and bignes of all the beastes, birdes, trees and hearbes, that the earth bringeth forth: and of all the fishes that the sea or waters of his kingdome breedeth … Finally there was nothing in his countrey, whereof hee had not the counterfeat in gold.[29]

In the journey itself, food and gold also come together as related terms. Ralegh describes an incident in which they come upon canoes laden with bread, which are abandoned hurriedly by their occupants (some evidently Spanish). After giving chase unsuccessfully, the sailors return to the canoes, and Ralegh reports that 'nothing on

the earth could have been more welcome to us next unto gold, then the great store of very excellent bread which we found in these Canoas'.[30] Given that the canoe occupants included a gold assayer, the bread ironically becomes some sort of 'consolation prize' for the loss of potential information about the whereabouts of the gold. But if one follows through with the idea of bread as a preferable food because it is cultivated and civilised, it is also logical that it would quickly come to be equated with the ultimate marker of economic sophistication: gold, the object of desire. Gold thus comes to occupy a double space in the text: Ralegh's thesis is that Guiana will endlessly produce gold, if they find out where it is, but at the same time it must be fought over, stripped from the ground, and abstracted into currency to be returned to England. The virgin land must 'naturally' produce gold, but it is expected that the gold will have to be laboured over in order to be extracted.

Beyond a potential product of a virgin land, gold also has a gendered value system for Ralegh. He reports of the 'very cruell and bloodthirsty'[31] Amazons not only as warrior women but also as figures in the gold economy of Guiana:

> These *Amazones* have likewise great store of these plates of golde, which they recover by exchange chiefly for a kinde of greene stones, which the Spaniards call *Piedras Hijadas*, and we use for spleene stones, and for the disease of the stone we also esteeme them: of these I saw divers in *Guiana*, and commonly every king or *Casique* hath one, which their wives for the most part weare, and they esteeme them as great jewels.[32]

In a discussion of the *Discoverie* as anthropological text, Neil Whitehead argues that this exchange of gold for the Amazonian 'greene stones' has its basis in Guianan cultural myth. In Cuba and the Hispaniola Islands, notes Whitehead, the Guianan myth-cycle of the Amazons includes an episode in which Guayahona, the 'first ancestor', kidnaps a group of women and abandons them on the island of Matinino, returning with '*guanin* and *takua*' (alloyed gold and carved stone tokens). Whitehead suggests that 'In this context Matinino, the "island of women-without-men," represents the site of these exchanges, just as the land of the Amazons is the source of the "spleen-stones" [*takua*] of Ralegh's account'.[33] He goes on to summarise Goeje's argument that 'the *takua* are representative of the water, nature and woman, and the *caracoli* [gold] are representative of the sun, culture and man'.[34] The figure of the *takua* (possibly nephrite jade) as a feminine currency opposed to masculine gold suggests something about the relative valuation of a woman's body – the *takua* being 'magic stones' associated with the Amazons, but also esteemed as spiritual objects for healing, rather than fully exchangeable currency. Ralegh's description of the routine exchange of the 'feminine' *takua* for 'masculine' gold suggests that, in order for a woman to circulate, she must enter into the gold economy, not the *takua* economy, thence becoming masculinised in the process. In short, female 'nature' can be bought and sold with male gold.

Into this system of female token and male gold comes the paradoxical figure of Elizabeth as a woman's head stamped on to a gold coin. Ralegh reports that 'I gave among them manye more peeces of Golde then I receaved of the new money of 20. shillings with her Majesties picture to weare, with promise that they would become her servants thenceforth'.[35] Shannon Miller notes that through this introduction of iconic Elizabethan coinage 'Elizabeth becomes an exchangeable, substitutable object';[36] but perhaps more accurately she becomes an emblem of the twinned and incompatible desires of the English for a virgin land that is endlessly productive of natural resources while at the same time being within the economic trading zone of gold. In his descriptions of Guianan modes of exchange, Ralegh reveals some of the confusion in the text between the virgin as *naturally* productive and the virgin as potentially exploitable through a *process* of coining and abstraction. On the one hand, he is trying to convince Elizabeth of the country as a place of 'nature without labor'. But on the other hand, he has to describe to her an already established economy based on the exchange of gold and tokens. This paradox leads to the constant tensions in the text, between the quest for gold (a metal associated with masculinity which must be extracted and alloyed, i.e. laboured upon) and the establishing of the metaphor of the virgin land as a naturally abundant feminine landscape.

Unfortunately for Ralegh, despite his descriptions of the circulation of currency that must surely suggest the presence of mines and ores, his trip does not yield the hoped-for plates of gold. Still languishing out of favour after his failure to return with enough gold to justify the expense of the trip, and desperate to redeem himself (or at least to get back to the profitable intrigues of the court), he resorts to narrative speculation, reporting not only his own observations but second-hand accounts from his Spanish counterparts and from local villagers anxious to please him. However, the way in which he chooses to narrate Guiana's worth for future exploration depends on a sleight-of-hand (or possibly 'making the best of a bad situation'), suggesting that in the absence of gold Guiana should still be colonised as a valuable source of replacement for England's own dwindling resources. In addition to gold (for which 'it is in effect nedeles to remember other commodities for trade'),[37] thus, Guiana is depicted as a source of plentiful food and leisure activities: 'It hath so many plaines, cleare rivers, abundance of Phesants, Partridges, Quailes, Rayles, Cranes, Herons, and all other fowle: Deare of all sortes, Porkes, Hares, Lyons, Tygers, Leopards, and divers other sortes of beastes, either for chace, or foode.'[38] This is a land not for protecting, like a virgin, but for *using up* in the manner of the landed wealth of England – blood sport, and plentiful meats of the kind reserved for the richest of English nobles.

Ralegh's *Discoverie* is, in this way, not an adventurer's account of a strange land but a catalogue of resources available for English plunder. His description of the fabled riches of El Dorado, and his wayside descriptions of vast stands of timber, pitch, and stone (all used to justify his trip when no gold is found) are a manifesto for colonisation, or at least exploitation. But, if his representation of Elizabeth to the Guianans hides the immediate English need for resources, then his representation of Guiana to the English

court is also less than accurate. In between his descriptions of trees which 'have alwaies fruite either ripe or green, and most of them both blossomes, leaves, ripe fruite, & green at one time',[39] and the wondrous 'thousands of *Tortugas* eggs, which are very wholsome meat, and greatly restoring',[40] we find that Ralegh's boats are rotten and his crew sick and starving. Thus Ralegh subtly shifts his characterisation of Guiana, from an endlessly productive virgin land to a virgin land which must be exploited (raped) in order to produce the resources the English require.

Virtual bodies

In Ralegh's narrative we are offered many 'bodies' to consider as figures of potential wealth and exploitation. Bodies are sites of contestation; they are also virtual spaces, in which battles for power and resources take place (think of the jockeying for proximity to the queen's body which took place so frequently in the English court). However, if these bodies are virtual spaces, what about the resources they seem to represent? Might they be 'virtual' as well? The suffering bodies of Ralegh's sailors would suggest this is the case. The fact that Ralegh's sailors are starving suggests that resources are hard to find, hard to prepare and above all not endless but exhaustible. Ralegh's lists of food sources, pitch, and timber, resources for which England is so desperate, are thus not so much signs of the endless productivity of Guiana as they are signs of England's need to believe that such inexhaustible wealth exists – wealth which England must plunder in order to survive.

The bodies of the suffering sailors thus point to another (virtual) body that is never mentioned – that of England. And since battles for resources are refigured as contested bodies, England's internal contestations for resources are rewritten as the battle for Elizabeth's body. Elizabeth's manipulation of her own body ranges from her assertion of hidden masculinity and thus autonomy (her 'man's heart in a woman's body') to her careful control over official portraits, which continue to represent her as desirable even as an old woman. Elizabeth is engaged in a battle with her subjects over her own body: suitors vie for access and favours, Elizabeth woos Parliament and her people for money, and her adventurers woo her with gifts from strange lands; marriage contracts are negotiated but never consummated. However, if this battle for Elizabeth's body is representative of the contestation for England's resources, ultimately power over her body is not enough. England is an unsustainable ecology; the site of contestation must thus be displaced on to *another* body. This highlights the virtuality of the body as a sign for the competition for resources: the (equally virtual) resources are always someplace else. Guiana, in this case, is that other virtual body, both connected to and a result of the displacement of power from Elizabeth. The environmental rape of England by its aristocracy, displaced on to the (sexual) courtship of Elizabeth by her courtiers, becomes the projected exploitation of Guiana by the English; Elizabeth can maintain her status as a wise virgin only through the environmental and sexual rape of another virgin land.

Both economies and ecologies, of course, are unsustainable. Despite Ralegh's projection of Guiana as a colony 'protected' from its enemies, the virgin body of Guiana cannot be preserved except at the expense of another body – that of England, already deforested, refigured in terms of the suffering bodies of Ralegh's sailors. Conversely, England's Virgin Queen requires new territories to maintain her status as a wise distributor of resources; thus, Guiana's virgin body must be conquered and stripped, in order to feed England. In neither case are these economies 'sustainable' – each is reliant upon the 'rape' of the other to maintain its virgin body. Ralegh understands this, and can appeal only to Elizabeth's sense of pride by comparing her with the fierce fabled Amazon women, who conquer land (and men) in order to take resources and reproduce themselves without husbands. Confusing a local tribe with the fabled Amazons, he reports:

> Upon the river of Caroli, are the Canuri, which are governed by a woman (who is inheritrix of that province), who came farre off to see our nation, and asked mee divers questions of her Majesty, beeing much delighted with the discourse of her Majesties greatnes, and wondring at such reports as we truely made of her highnes many vertues.[41]

Ralegh finally argues that Elizabeth must prove herself greater than these – as a Virgin Queen, the source of all bounty: 'And where the south border of *Guiana* reacheth to the Dominion and Empire of the *Amazones*, those women shall heereby heare the name of a virgin, which is not onely able to defend her owne territories and her neighbors, but also to invade and conquere so great Empires and so farre removed'.[42] Bestowed the title '*Ezrabeta Cassipuna Aquerewana*, … the great princesse or greatest commaunder',[43] Elizabeth finally becomes Queen of the Amazons – queen of a land of (vanishing) resources, Virgin Queen of a plundered ecology.

Virtual ecologies

The Discoverie of Guiana is in many ways an example of an early virtual reality. Elizabeth never physically apprehends Guiana except through Ralegh's text and the few pieces of plunder he brings back; instead, she travels there through stories and images, related by her faithful soldier to the inhabitants of this distant land. Ralegh reports that 'I shewed them her majesties picture which they so admired and honored, as it had beene easie to have brought them Idolatrous thereof'.[44] In this moment, a supremely mediated moment in which an image of a body comes to stand in for a queen, Elizabeth is transported virtually to the Orinoco delta, imagining herself a Queen of infinite resources.

The chief quality, I think, of the act of virtualisation, is the abstraction of a 'reality' from its underlying material necessities. Indeed, the virtual realities we see today are valued precisely because they do not have 'real' effects: computer game avatars can be

reborn, virtual surgery does not penetrate the boundaries of the body, virtual sex is 'safe'. Jacques Derrida notes that it is in the act of virtualisation that we are left with a kind of ghost, or remainder:

> It obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever ... from opposing presence to its representation, 'real time' to 'deferred time', effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.[45]

But one could argue that Ralegh's narrative has also effected the virtualisation of resources. Elizabeth is given a catalogue of Guiana's riches, displacing and deferring England's desire for timber, pitch, and minerals on to another ecology. The creation of the narrative is a moment of pure virtualisation, in which a Virgin Queen stands in for a virgin land, even while Guiana stands in for, as Derrida puts it, 'the monetary specter, value, money or its fiduciary sign, gold'.[46] Elizabeth's body, stamped on a coin of gold, haunts the narrative of Guiana, a reminder that resources can be plundered in the name of a Virgin Queen just as easily as they can be protected.

Ralegh's tale of Guiana is thus ultimately a story about an ecological crisis in England. But it is also a marker of the virtualisation and abstraction that happens in attempting to represent new resources in such a way that they can be both protected and exploited. This abstraction is reflected in many ways as a series of paradoxes: sailors starving in the land of plenty, landscapes 'cultivated' by nature, a feminine figure stamped on masculine gold. And finally, it is reflected in the paradoxical figure of the endlessly productive virgin: a fond imagining on Ralegh's part of the power of Elizabeth to produce endless favours and rewards, and a New World dream of limitless resources in a time of scarcity.

Notes

1. Many kind thanks are due Robert Markley for early comments on this chapter.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 5.
3. Sir Walter Ralegh, The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana, ed. Neil L. Whitehead (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).
4. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 196.
5. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 121.
6. Louis Montrose, 'The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery', in *New World Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 190.
7. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 134.
8. Raleigh Trevelyan, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002), p. 55.
9. Trevelyan, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, p. 77.
10. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1983), p. 64.

11. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 65.
12. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 65.
13. Trevelyan, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, p. 142.
14. Shannon Miller, *Invested with Meaning: The Raleigh Circle in the New World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 153.
15. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 134.
16. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 134.
17. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 165.
18. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 165.
19. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 165.
20. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 159.'Manurance' in this context implies the European practice of intensified land cultivation through the use of fertiliser, enclosure, and crop and stock rotation. For a discussion of the environmental effects of cultivation on topsoil and vegetation during this period see Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, pp. 46–50.
21. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 159.
22. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 163.
23. Neil Whitehead, 'Introduction', in Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 5.
24. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 132.
25. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 135.
26. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 161.
27. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 161.
28. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 181.
29. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 137.
30. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, pp. 163–164.
31. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 146.
32. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 146.
33. Neil Whitehead, 'The *Discoverie* as Ethnological Text', in Sir Walter Ralegh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 90.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
35. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, pp. 185–186.
36. Miller, *Invested with Meaning*, p. 177.
37. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 195.
38. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 195.
39. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 179.
40. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 167.
41. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 192.
42. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 123.
43. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 134.
44. Ralegh, *Discoverie*, p. 134.
45. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 169.
46. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 42.