



Fifteen Years at His Majesty's Pleasure: The Relationship of King James I of England and His Prisoner, Sir Walter Raleigh

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Fifteen Years at His Majesty's Pleasure:
The Relationship of King James I of England and His Prisoner, Sir Walter Raleigh

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Abstract

Sir Walter Raleigh, renowned Elizabethan gentleman, explorer, and courtier, would experience a radical change of fortune when James VI of Scotland became King of England. In 1603 Raleigh found himself implicated in a treasonous plot that resulted in a commuted death sentence that left him at the mercy of King James for fifteen years. This study uses the dramatic example of the relationship between King James and Sir Walter Raleigh to investigate the politics of the early Stuart court and examine the impact of individuals on government actions. Specifically, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What was the relationship between Sir Walter Raleigh and King James and for what ultimate purpose would James finally execute Raleigh after such a lengthy imprisonment in the Tower? Examination and analysis of letters written by King James, Sir Walter Raleigh, and their contemporaries shows that the relationship between King and courtier lacked the access and personal connection Raleigh had previously enjoyed under Queen Elizabeth. King James was warned away from Raleigh by his advisors and Raleigh's enemies at court and Raleigh understood that he would struggle to gain the King's trust while their relationship remained distant and impersonal. Increasingly a voice of dissent against James's foreign policy, Raleigh would eventually secure his release from the Tower under a precarious commission to mine gold in Guiana, which promised a much-needed windfall for the Exchequer. Failure in this commission and scuffles with Spanish settlers prompted King James to execute Raleigh in order to lessen his own culpability in authorizing a commission that, if successful, he knew would have alienated him from Spain and his dreams of European peace.

Dedication

“It is the end and scope of all history, to teach by examples of times past, such wisdom as may guide our desires and actions.”

Sir Walter Raleigh
The History of the World, Book 2,
Chapter 21, Section 6.

To my parents, Mark and Robin Doremus, without whom this search for wisdom would not have been possible.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the lengthy thesis process I was fortunate to have many people cross my path who influenced both my work and work ethic.

I am grateful to the late Professor Mark Kishlansky, who agreed to direct my thesis the first time I submitted my proposal. Though I did not begin work at that time, he helped me immensely in structuring the story told in these pages during our first and only meeting.

I would like to thank Professor Richard Tuck, whose guidance has been invaluable to my research. Through our many conversations he helped me think about the wider historical context of my topic when I became too focused, suggested additional sources and perspectives for my research, and reassured me when I was uncertain about my writing. He has been generous with his time and his opinions, and has encouraged me to trust my instincts and form my own conclusions.

I would also like to acknowledge those who have supported, consoled, and motivated me throughout my entire graduate career: My parents, Mark and Robin Doremus, and my sister Megan Doremus, who are always there when I need them; Alicia English, who adopted me as an unofficial advisee, despite her full schedule; George Specht, who nagged – I mean motivated – me about my progress whenever we met; and finally, everyone who ever listened to me ramble about Sir Walter Raleigh and King James. Thank you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“I do therefore on the knees of my hart beseich Your Majesty to take counsell from your own sweet and mercifull disposition, and to remember that I have loved Your Majesty now twenty yeares, for which Your Majesty hath yet geven me no reward, and it is fitter that I should be indebted to my soverayne lord than the king to his poore vassall.”¹

The Problem of Courtier and King

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England, Sir Walter Raleigh was able to distinguish himself as an explorer, a successful businessman, a trusted courtier, and the Captain of the Queen’s Guard. Raleigh spent time quelling Irish rebellions and was crucial in planning and funding the English colony Roanoke in the Americas. His political maneuvering and evident devotion to England and its glory helped him gain favor with Queen Elizabeth. Apart from several years in the early 1590s, when he was imprisoned and banned from court for secretly marrying one of Elizabeth’s ladies in waiting, Raleigh remained a fixture for almost twenty years. In those years of separation from the Queen, Raleigh boldly searched for gold and treasure in South America while espousing the excellence of his Queen to the natives he met there. Though Raleigh was allowed back at court in 1597 and regained some of his former favor with the Queen, he was increasingly distrusted by his peers and seen as out of touch with the current political climate. When

¹ To King James [from the Tower before 10 November 1603], *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh*, eds. Agnes M.C. Latham and Joyce A. Youings (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 257.

Elizabeth died in 1603 and King James VI of Scotland acceded to the English throne those detractors helped to send Raleigh's life into a tailspin.

For James VI, Elizabeth's death set in motion events that he had long anticipated. He had been King of Scotland since 1567 when, at thirteen months old, his mother Mary queen of Scots had abdicated. He grew up surrounded by power and politics, never questioning his own sovereignty. According to Jenny Wormald, James VI "knew perfectly well that he was the obvious successor to the childless queen," Elizabeth.² As he matured into the role of King of Scotland he worked to protect this claim to the English throne, for example by maintaining a close enough relationship with the Pope to prevent a Spanish claim upon Elizabeth's death, but he also refused to give in to any demands Elizabeth made or accept the "council" of the more experienced monarch in matters of Scottish state. Regarding Raleigh, King James was predisposed to dislike him before they ever met, first by Raleigh's own reputation, as a "pirate" and the man responsible for introducing smoking to the British Isles, and second by the manipulations of Raleigh's enemies, particularly Robert Cecil and Lord Henry Howard. With the death of Queen Elizabeth, and the support of men like Cecil and Howard, James acceded to the throne with relative ease.

Raleigh, on the other hand, met with difficulty in early attempts to seek favor from the King and even more so when his name became embroiled in a Spanish plot to remove James from the throne and replace him with royal relation Arabella Stuart. This

² Jenny Wormald "James VI and I (1566–1625)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/14592> (accessed July 18, 2016).

accusation of treason in 1603 stemmed from Raleigh's careless conversation with a friend and was perpetuated by those same enemies who had hindered his early relationship with James. Charged with treason, Raleigh defended himself admirably in a mismanaged trial, which resulted in a death sentence. However, the King had his own plans and perhaps believed Raleigh might yet serve some purpose. At the last moment James stayed the execution and Raleigh was instead sent to the Tower of London to live out his days in prison. No stranger to the Tower, Raleigh continued to petition the new King James I of England for his release. Raleigh also ingratiated himself to Queen Anne and Prince Henry and continued to lobby for his release. While Raleigh remained imprisoned in the Tower of London, James never forbade his wife or son to interact with Raleigh, as one might expect if James had truly loathed the man or and feared his influence.

Finally, King James found a use for Raleigh but set conditions so contrary that Raleigh could ultimately only fail. In 1617 Raleigh was released from the Tower in order to embark upon an expedition to Guiana that made all the right assurances: Raleigh's own assets contributing to the journey, restrictions placing the onus of success or failure on Raleigh, bribes for the family of the court favorite whose requests James could not resist, and promises of gold for a dwindling Exchequer. It was also advantageous that the growing anti-Spanish faction at court gave their support because they saw in Raleigh's journey a chance to provoke war with Spain. Raleigh was granted a commission to locate and work a gold mine found in previous venture, as long as he did not disrupt English-Spanish relations. But the voyage failed on all counts. It failed to discover the gold mine, it failed to operate within the restrictions set, and it failed to provoke war with Spain.

Raleigh had displayed characteristic confidence in his commission, and his failure to make the journey profitable for James forced him to make a series of hasty decisions based on fear, which may have helped him save face with his Spanish friends, but ultimately cast James as the villain in the eyes of his subjects. After a short tribunal with a foregone conclusion Raleigh's death sentence was reinstated and he was executed in 1618.

The execution of Raleigh after aggression against the Spanish in Guiana in accordance with a death sentence issued fifteen years earlier because of alleged connivance with the Spanish seems inconsistent. What was the relationship between Sir Walter Raleigh and King James I of England and how could such a relationship result in the contradictory circumstances that ended Raleigh's life? This thesis argues that Raleigh desired to serve James as he had Elizabeth, and he believed that if James only got to know him better, he would value him as Elizabeth had. But it was on a foundation of missteps, misinformation, and outright slander that the relationship between Raleigh and James began. As it continued Raleigh, every bit the proud, confident courtier that his rivals feared, would not admit defeat and continued to pursue relevance and royal favor from the accession of King James in 1603 until his own execution in 1618. When Raleigh finally did accept defeat upon the scaffold, he used his final words to become the threat that his enemies had always feared.

Legacy and Historiography

According to Anna Beer, "the most important factor in [the] posthumous

celebrity” of Raleigh, perpetrated by his contemporaries, “was the effectiveness of Raleigh’s speech from the scaffold.”³ He was permitted to address the crowd at length and his speech from the scaffold was later “transcribed, circulated, and published.”⁴ Anna Beer claims this “wide circulation of Raleigh’s speech” created “a multitude of sympathetic readers, people who... would believe Raleigh’s word against the king’s.”⁵ Beer argues that the result of this speech was its ability to essentially silence the Stuart government. It was a culmination of Raleigh’s defense of his actions, which had begun with of a series of letters from Raleigh appealing to his personal relationship with the King, which never existed according to Beer.⁶ The judges at Raleigh’s final tribunal as well as the government’s written response to Raleigh’s scaffold speech naturally tried to distance Raleigh from the relationship he presumed to have with the king. Instead, they insisted that the law was being upheld and nothing more. Yet, Beer claims that “Raleigh appeared to believe that King James would be merciful.”⁷ He had once before been spared, even if it was only to save face as a new monarch, and that might again occur. Perhaps Raleigh also sensed his actual execution would be just as damaging at this point as it would have been fifteen years earlier, easing his mind. This time, however, James failed to see the danger in eliminating a dissident and instead allowed him to become a

³ Anna Beer, “Textual Politics: The Execution of Sir Walter Raleigh,” *Modern Philology* 94, no. 1 (Aug. 1996): 20.

⁴ Beer, “Textual Politics,” 24.

⁵ Beer, “Textual Politics,” 35-36.

⁶ Beer, “Textual Politics,” 24.

⁷ Beer, “Textual Politics,” 21.

martyr.

In the years after Raleigh's death, the relationship was used to highlight the evil influence of Spain upon King James with Raleigh symbolic of English ideals. Anti-Spanish Protestant minister Thomas Scott played on the growing sympathies for Raleigh in his 1620 tract *Vox Populi*, which claimed to be "a translation of [Spanish Ambassador to England] Gondomar's report, to the Spanish council, concerning his activities in England prior to his return to Spain in 1618."⁸ Scott wrote, as Gondomar, how he had plotted the death of Raleigh in order to solidify Spain's influence over England and keep the English away from the coastal settlements in the New World. This hoax inflamed anti-Spanish feelings and distrust of King James, who was believed to be under the influence of Gondomar and Spanish interests.

Despite the elevation of Raleigh's memory to one of folk legend in the minds of the populous, according to an 1844 biography of Raleigh written by Patrick Fraser Tytler, his official memory was not so lovingly preserved. Tytler wrote his biography with the express purpose of correcting mistakes of earlier writers who "ignored the secret history of [Raleigh's] offences, his trial, and condemnation," misunderstood his voyage to Guiana, and did not sufficiently investigate the "charges against his honour and veracity."⁹ In the opinion of Tytler the combination of the King's dislike and indifference towards Raleigh and the hatred of Raleigh's enemies was what put Raleigh in the Tower. In re-examining the sources, Tytler claimed there was "strong circumstantial evidence"

⁸ Louis B. Wright, "Propaganda against James I's "Appeasement" of Spain," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (Feb. 1943): 152.

⁹ Patrick Fraser Tytler, *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1844), 5-6.

showing that the accusations of treason against Raleigh in 1603 stemmed from Robert Cecil, who “for a considerable time before the death of Elizabeth, although he preserved towards Sir Walter the appearance of confidence, he was his bitter political enemy, and had determined on his ruin.”¹⁰ Additionally, Tytler claimed that Raleigh’s release in 1617 stemmed from corruption at court and the inability of King James to refuse his favorite. Raleigh’s proposal to sail to Guiana in search of gold only began to move forward when Raleigh paid 1500 pounds to the uncles of James’s favorite, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. “It affords striking proof of the corruption of the court,” Tytler wrote “that in this way success was at length obtained, and the monarch, who had for twelve years steeled his heart against all the demands of truth and justice, yielded at once to the desires of a capricious and venal favorite.”¹¹ Weak though James was in Tytler’s eyes for this reversal, he remained the villain because he “felt an ungenerous satisfaction in contemplating the probability of bringing [Raleigh] one day to a sanguinary reckoning.”¹²

Raleigh, ever the Elizabethan imperialist, had hoped to build an empire for England in the New World ever since his first voyage in 1595. In V.T. Harlow’s 1932 account of Raleigh’s final, fatal voyage to Guiana, he argues that “the search for a gold-mine... was merely a means to an end.”¹³ Though Raleigh ultimately hoped for empire, Harlow wrote that Raleigh understood that this line of argument would not work on James; however, promising to return with gold for the dwindling English treasury might.

¹⁰ Tytler, *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 253-254.

¹¹ Tytler, *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 307.

¹² Tytler, *Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 308.

¹³ Vincent T. Harlow, *Raleigh’s Last Voyage* (London: Argonaut Press, 1932), 6.

In the end, Raleigh's release from the Tower was orchestrated by "the enemies of Spain" at court who "had decided that the Guiana scheme was an excellent weapon for their purpose," that is, provoking war with Spain and ruining the chances of a Spanish marriage for James's son.¹⁴ Harlow further argues that the journey was allowed by King James, in spite of the inherent dangers to England's relationship with Spain, because he "understood and assented to Raleigh's territorial claims" in Guiana, and that James believed Raleigh could find his mine while operating within the letter, though perhaps not the spirit, of the restrictions set upon him.¹⁵ When Raleigh returned in disgrace, James was influenced by reports from angry captains and under pressure from the Spanish ambassador, Gondomar, to punish Raleigh for the attack on the Spanish settlement of San Thomé. In order to save face with the Spanish James made a "foolish decision, dictated by fear" and ordered a closed tribunal decided only by commissioners.¹⁶ In Harlow's opinion, "the method which James had selected was the most effective means that could have been devised for inspiring the people with abhorrence of Spain and all its works."¹⁷ The crown's explanatory *Declaration of the demeanor and cariage of Sir Walter Raleigh* published after Raleigh's execution "would only deepen the impression already created."¹⁸ Failure and fear led to Raleigh's demise, but James's reputation was not cleared.

¹⁴ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 23.

¹⁵ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 42.

¹⁶ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 92.

¹⁷ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 92.

¹⁸ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 92.

Paul R. Sellin, writing in 2011, concludes that Raleigh “was a victim of a most unjust murder by royal attainder manipulated by the Duke of Buckingham,” the King’s favorite, George Villiers.¹⁹ He places Villiers at the helm of the supporters for Raleigh’s release in order to search for the gold mine in Guiana, yet conspicuously absent in his defense upon Raleigh’s return. Further, Sellin claims that Villiers, along with an English ambassador to Madrid and Gondomar, decided Raleigh’s fate: “a death sentence in effect, which well antedated any trial that should determine Raleigh’s guilt or innocence.”²⁰ They decided that Raleigh would be executed in Madrid, unless King Philip wished otherwise; then he would be executed in London. Finally, Sellin calls into question the idea that King James acted as he did in order to save face with his “brother,” King Philip of Spain. He argues that “with the preludes to the Thirty Years’ War already rumbling in Hungary and Bohemia,” King Philip would have preferred to have England’s friendship or at least neutrality instead of risking it all “for the sake of Raleigh’s head or a tiny, god-forsaken settlement in the wilds of Venezuela.”²¹ Though likely true, it is difficult to discern whether or not James and his advisors would have come to that same conclusion without the benefit of hindsight. Overall, what Sellin seems to suggest is that the relationship between the King and Raleigh was filtered and managed by other courtiers, to Raleigh’s detriment.

In their 2011 biography of Raleigh, Mark Nicholls and Penry Williams paint a

¹⁹ Paul R. Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower: El Dorado and the Murder of Sir Walter Raleigh* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), xv.

²⁰ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 247.

²¹ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 256

slightly different picture of the man as a more active participant in both his successes and failures throughout his life. They write of Raleigh's singular focus on his own rise and his later attempts to protect and secure his family legacy through marriage, land, and livelihood, often putting himself in jeopardy in the process.²² Raleigh's refusal to adjust his behavior or approach according to the situation also endangered his relationship with those at court as well as his sovereign. Robert Cecil, who thrived at the courts of both Queen Elizabeth and King James, recognized the potential difficulties of a relationship with Raleigh when he warned James, before his accession to the English throne, that Raleigh and his associates lacked discretion, writing that "they argue openly, they pass letters about, and they cannot keep secrets."²³ While other biographers have portrayed Cecil as an enemy of Raleigh, Nicholls and Williams describe a man who could have been a friend, but for Raleigh's own drive and doggedness; Cecil could not in good conscious promote this man as a person who had the King's interests at heart or who could be counted on to behave diplomatically when required.

From the perspective of King James, the relationship with Raleigh described by Nicholls and Williams was largely one of indifference. For instance, James seemed to hesitate on whether or not to give Raleigh the benefit of the doubt when a copy error negated Raleigh's legal transfer of his Sherborne estate to his son prior to imprisonment in the Tower. In the end, however, "the pressure of Court obligations eroded altruism," and

²² Mark Nicholls and Penry Williams, *Sir Walter Raleigh: In Life and Legend* (London: Continuum, 2011), 74-75.

²³ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 182.

James gave the estate to his favorite, Robert Carr.²⁴ In the years following Raleigh's incarceration, the authors believe James was too pragmatic to really believe that a dissident like Raleigh was not a danger to his rule. Ultimately allowing Raleigh's voyage to Guiana put some distance between the Crown and a critic, and did not necessarily represent trust or confidence.²⁵ In assessing the relationship from the perspective of Raleigh, Nicholls and Williams look to his *Apologie*, written after the disaster of Guiana. This document could possibly indicate yet another misinterpretation of Raleigh's relationship to the King, believing that by simply explaining to his sovereign the forces that conspired against him and resulted in his failure would be enough to repair his standing. The other possible interpretation of this document is that Raleigh recognized the hopelessness of his situation and wished to tell his side of the story to gain the sympathy of posterity.²⁶ Regardless of the intention, the *Apologie* marked a point of no return for this doomed relationship.

In 1618, fifteen years after being sentenced to death for treason, Sir Walter Raleigh was finally executed upon his return from a voyage in service of King James I of England. V.T. Harlow wrote: "The tragedy of 1618 is repeated in some form or another whenever a genius is linked by fate to a weakling."²⁷ But men, particularly great men such as Raleigh and James, are never so simply defined. Raleigh was indeed highly intelligent and visionary, yet his attempted suicide in prison and balked escape attempts

²⁴ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 232.

²⁵ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 287-288.

²⁶ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 302.

²⁷ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 96.

could cast him as weak. And while King James was often susceptible to the influence of others, his plan for Raleigh's journey to Guiana to either fill the country's coffers or cement his commitment to a lucrative Spanish match for his son had a certain stroke of genius.

Throughout the course of this tragic relationship, the interactions that took place were, for the most part, instigated by Raleigh himself and responded to by the writings and actions of the King and his advisors. This thesis, therefore, will follow the relationship between 1603 and 1618 in three parts through important moments in the life of Raleigh. Chapter II will set the context for Raleigh's efforts at court by examining his gain and loss of favor under Queen Elizabeth. It will also trace the journey of King James as he acceded to the English throne and the manner in which Raleigh and others attempted to secure their positions under the new monarch. Chapter III will follow Raleigh as he was tried and convicted of treason against the King and his efforts to secure his release once sentenced to life in the Tower. After fourteen years, Chapter IV will look at the circumstances that finally led to his release and the aftermath of that fateful journey that led to Raleigh's execution. Through the analysis of contemporary letters, these chapters will delve deeper into the narrative, attempting to characterize this instance of the relationship between courtier and king and its impact on English politics.

The conclusion of this thesis will distill the relationship between King James I and Sir Walter Raleigh, show how his words were "constantly renegotiated... to serve new political agendas," and discuss how Raleigh's life and legend continued to contribute

to the increasingly public sphere of English politics after his death.²⁸ The tumultuous seventeenth century in England saw an increasingly antagonistic relationship between monarch and Parliament develop, as well as regicide and civil war, which ultimately moved the country towards a parliamentary monarchy type of government. The public memory of Sir Walter Raleigh and the lasting impression left by his execution speaks to the importance of the events during the reign of King James I.

²⁸ Anna R. Beer, *Sir Walter Raleigh and His Readers in the Seventeenth Century: Speaking to the People* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997), 177.

Chapter II

Accession and Transition

In 1602 Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland wrote to England's most probable heir, King James VI of Scotland, to give him "some light how perticular mens affections may be dewoted towars [him]." In this letter he defends his friend, Sir Walter Raleigh:

... I must needs affirme rawlieghs ewer allowance of yowr ryght, and althowghte I know hem insolent, extreamly heated, a man that desirs to seeme to be able to swaye all mens fancies, all mens cowrses, and a man that owt of himselfe, when your time sall come, will neuer be able to do yow muche good nor hearme, yet mwst i needs confesse what i know, that there is excellent good parts of natur in hem, a man whoes lowe is disawantageus to me in somme sort, which i cherise rather out of constancie than pollicie, and one whome i wishe your maiestie not to loose, because I wouold not that one haire of a man's head sowld be against yow that might be for yow.²⁹

The Earl and Raleigh had shared a "strategic friendship" since the 1580s. In this friendship Northumberland gained "a charismatic, knowledgeable, influential man of the world" who shared his interests in science and exploration; Raleigh gained "a wealthy earl descended from an ancient family," including the influence and prestige that came along with such a connection.³⁰ During her 44-year reign, Queen Elizabeth also cultivated "strategic" relationships, surrounding herself with those she deemed useful in maintaining a "sense of political balance," giving favors to and advancing the social and

²⁹ 0 [Henry Earl of Northumberland] to 30 [King James]. *Correspondence of King James VI of Scotland with Sir Robert Cecil and Others in England, During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. John Bruce (Westminster: Printed for the Camden Society, 1861), 66-67.

³⁰ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 42.

political standing of those who filled a need and served her well.³¹ By the Queen's grace as well as his own ambition, Sir Walter Raleigh rose to prominence and legend, but also alienated those upon whose favor he depended.

Queen Elizabeth's refusal to marry and lack of heir brought much uncertainty to the later years of her reign. Despite John Guy's assertion that James was most likely to accede to the throne because "he was male, protestant, and available," James and other Elizabethan councilors understood that it was not a "foregone conclusion."³² To that end, "strategic" correspondences were established between the Scottish King and prominent Englishmen to help smooth the transition and seek out those who would support James's claim. The Earl of Northumberland provided his "plain and sincere" assessments of three men in the above quoted missive to the King: Essex, Raleigh, and Cecil. Likely aware of Raleigh's descending popularity with those at court, and the slanderous opinions James would have heard from his enemies, the Earl concluded that Raleigh was basically a good person who would be inconsequential to James accession and reign. In the aftermath of James's accession, King, councilors, and judges would ultimately disagree with this assessment.

The Elizabethan Hero

Northumberland, in his 1602 letter to James, admitted that his friend Raleigh was

³¹ D. M. Loades, *Politics and Nation: England, 1450-1660* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 253-254.

³² John Guy, introduction to *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17.

insolent, heated, and desirous of influence and power over others. Leanda de Lisle wrote that by the final years of Elizabeth's life, most men at court considered Raleigh "an arrogant upstart" whose usefulness to the crown had passed.³³ Walter Raleigh, second son in a Devon family of some social standing and political connections, but without much in the way of fortune, certainly overcame his modest beginnings and achieved a great deal of success under Queen Elizabeth. Through the strength of his own personality and intelligence, Raleigh fought his way – both literally and figuratively – to prominence. Taking advantage of the connections he had, his aunt, first a governess then a lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth, and his half-brother, a military man and explorer, Raleigh eventually made the acquaintance of courtiers such as Sir Francis Walsingham and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester.³⁴ Like Raleigh, Leicester had come to court through family connections, but soon captured the Queen's attention, and despite the scandal that seemed to follow Leicester, Elizabeth kept him near for many years, as she would later do with other "favorites," Raleigh amongst them.³⁵

Raleigh's insolence notwithstanding, once he achieved some prominence in court at the attention of the Queen, he took to the lifestyle with ease and was soon distinguishing himself by his actions and appearance. As any proper sixteenth-century

³³ Leanda de Lisle, *After Elizabeth: How James, King of Scots Won the Crown of England*, trade paperback ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 75.

³⁴ Mark Nicholls, "Raleigh, Sir Walter (1554–1618)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/23039> (accessed October 15, 2016).

³⁵ Simon Adams "Dudley, Robert, earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/8160> (accessed October 17, 2016).

courtier should, Raleigh wrote poems, distributed mostly in manuscript form during his lifetime, “seeking patronage,” expressing his “love and praise” of the Queen, and also at times complaining of “her desertion of him.”³⁶ His physical presentation and manner of dress made him, according to de Lisle, “the most striking figure from Elizabeth’s court,” with his “long, wavy hair” and his penchant for pearls – “from pearl hat bands, to large drop earrings, to pearl embroidered suits and even shoes.”³⁷ To posterity, Raleigh’s extravagant style of dress often cast him as the ideal Elizabethan courtier, and it was perhaps because of his meager beginnings that he favored such ornamentation later in life. But when flaunted in the company of the plainer Scottish style of King James and his men it did little to endear Raleigh to the sovereign. To James, Raleigh’s flamboyant presentation and over-the-top declarations only highlighted the relative poverty of the Scots and bred increased distrust and dislike of the man.

Raleigh’s ambition could often result in impulsive actions; he might say or do whatever he felt necessary at the time to achieve his or his Queen’s goals and was, as his friend Northumberland wrote, “extremely heated.” Tales of Raleigh’s early years serving under the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Lord Grey de Wilton, recount his brawls and military efforts, building his reputation as a man of strategy and action. One such story told of Raleigh laying a trap for and then executing Irish soldiers who came to loot the English camp. He also made a name for himself as supervisor of the massacre that took place after the victory at Dún an Óir and his management of negotiations with the Viscount

³⁶ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 139-141.

³⁷ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 196-197.

Barry in Cork.³⁸ Raleigh could also be heated with his words when he felt slighted, even by his family relations. When his nephew, Sir John Gilbert II, attempted to interfere with Raleigh's profits in a privateering venture, Raleigh threatened him, "for your fortunes otherwise, feare not that I will labor to lessen them, as I will not hereafter looke after them."³⁹ This falling-out took years to be resolved, but Raleigh often acted rashly when his ambitions were threatened.

But threats and violence were not the only manifestations of Raleigh's ambitions; He could be equally passionate in establishing a family legacy. Following his time in Ireland, Raleigh was increasingly favored and trusted by the Queen. As he spent more time at court and gained access, Raleigh would meet Elizabeth Throckmorton, a lady-in-waiting to the Queen known as Bess. Without Queen Elizabeth's approval, Raleigh and Bess secretly married in 1591 and Bess gave birth to the couple's first child, Damerei, the following year.⁴⁰ Raleigh's passion now had a tangible purpose: to care for his family and provide for their future. In the same rift described above Raleigh also wrote to his nephew Gilbert that he "could not neglect a sonn and a wife" and railed at him that his own "fortunes had yowthe and tyme to make them," and Raleigh's "had neather."⁴¹ After a short stay in the Tower prison, Raleigh and Bess were eventually released, but Raleigh would continually make choices that would secure the future of his family, even when his own individual reputation might suffer.

³⁸ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 15-18.

³⁹ To Sir John Gilbert II, [late April 1602], *Letters of SWR*, 234.

⁴⁰ Nicholls, "Raleigh, Sir Walter (1554-1618)," in *ODNB*.

⁴¹ To Sir John Gilbert II, [late April 1602], *Letters of SWR*, 233.

During the years Raleigh struggled to regain favor with the Queen, he was not standing by idly but attempting, as Northumberland wrote, “to swaye all mens fancies, all mens cowrses,” including his own. Like many courtiers before and after him, Raleigh attempted to manipulate those around him in order to obtain income-generating patents, appointments, properties, licenses, and ultimately, power. It was at this time that Raleigh first ventured to Guiana, in search of gold and glory for England, and naturally the return of his own favor with the Queen. Other circumstances presented themselves that offered an opportunity for Raleigh to regain relevance; in 1597, when Cecil’s wife died, Raleigh wrote a heartfelt letter expressing his sympathies for the loss. Meanwhile, Bess offered to help care for Cecil’s son, which Nicholls and Williams suggest may have been part of a “combined strategy” to gain favor with the Secretary by creating a more personal connection.⁴² Raleigh wrote to Cecil that his wife had “left beind her the frute of her love, for whos sakes yow ought to care for your sealf that yow leve them not without a gwyde,” suggesting that his children still needed his guidance or perhaps the guidance of others.⁴³ Whether the reason for these actions was manipulative or merely caring, the end result would be the same: a closer relationship with the Queen’s most important secretary.

When Raleigh finally returned to the favor of the Queen it was because of his connection to another man, Robert Devereux, earl of Essex who, much like Raleigh, had meager beginnings but had risen to become the Queen’s favorite, and their combined

⁴² Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 125.

⁴³ To Sir Robert Cecil, 24 January 1597, *Letters of SWR*, 154-156.

success at Cadiz in 1596. Recognizing the opportunity to put himself back in Elizabeth's good graces, Raleigh strove to flatter and praise Essex for his part in the action, writing that Essex had "behaved hymesealfe,... both valiently and advisedly in the highest degree, without pride with[out] crueltye, and hath gotten great honor [and] mich love of all."⁴⁴ Raleigh's own contributions to the success at Cadiz were not ignored and with the support of Essex and Cecil he was finally able to return to court in 1597. Nicholls and Williams suggest, however, that Raleigh's return may have been "managed" by the Queen and William Cecil, Lord Burghley in an effort to mediate the relationship between Burghley's son Robert Cecil and Essex.⁴⁵ Regardless, Raleigh took advantage of the closer connections to these powerful men to continue to work on reestablishing some of the fortune he had lost in his efforts to regain the Queen's trust.

As well as being the manipulator, Raleigh was also manipulated – used to further the agendas of other councilors and courtiers. Exceedingly proud and sarcastic, Raleigh had not maintained whatever popularity his early days at court had brought him when he returned to the Queen's favor. While there were many at court who wished to "swaye" the course of Raleigh's political life, the man whose manipulations most negatively affected Raleigh was surely his sometime ally and Elizabeth's principal secretary, Cecil. The "tradition of pairing rival with rival" extended beyond those in the Privy Council to all courtiers, Raleigh and his wealthy friend Lord Cobham had been part of a faction at

⁴⁴ To Sir Robert Cecil from aboard ship off Cadiz, 7 July [1596], *Letters of SWR*, 151-152.

⁴⁵ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 125.

court meant to balance Essex prior to his failed rebellion.⁴⁶ Following the execution of Essex, Raleigh's usefulness to Cecil diminished but his ambition did not as he continued to pursue a spot on the Privy Council.

As Queen Elizabeth's health waned and more of her trusted councilors were looking toward the future, a number of Englishmen were corresponding secretly with King James, including Cecil. In late 1601, Raleigh's associate, Cobham, by chance met a Scottish envoy and close friend of King James in Dover. Cobham used this opportunity to express his support for James's succession claim and in his enthusiasm later shared the conversation with his brother-in-law, Cecil. Cecil manipulated the situation by admonishing Cobham, warning that if the Queen were to hear about this she would be furious, despite the fact that Cecil had already established direct communication with James himself. Cobham and Raleigh were both attempting to regain favor with the Queen, and a worried Cobham shared Cecil's cautionary advice with Raleigh, which prompted Raleigh to loudly protest that he only had time to serve his Queen.⁴⁷ Playing off the fears of the one-time favorite, Cecil maneuvered Raleigh away from a potential relationship with James's envoy. This ultimate manipulation, as well as the bad publicity from his enemies at court, made it nearly impossible to gain the King's trust when he acceded to the English throne.

Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, was another who offered his services to help smooth the way for James to accede the English throne. Northumberland wrote in his

⁴⁶ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 74-75.

⁴⁷ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 79-80.

letter to the King the year after Essex's execution that "he would have bene ane bloody scowrge to ovr nation."⁴⁸ A man much like Raleigh, with meager beginnings and great ambitions, could be viewed as a cautionary tale for Raleigh. Essex presented himself, like Raleigh, as the ideal renaissance courtier; John Bruce wrote that he behaved with "a dash and brilliancy that were nearly allied to genius," but also prone to "impulses and prejudices," which could just as easily describe Raleigh. Perhaps the most dangerous similarity between the two men was their undying devotion to the Queen, except of course when her "wishes or opinions [ran] counter to his feelings, then he was loyal only to himself" or, in Raleigh's case, his family.⁴⁹ Essex claimed and possibly believed that he was acting in the Queen's interest, protecting her from a pro-Spanish faction at court, but his rebellion in 1601 can more likely be tied to his own frustration at being denied the appointment of Secretary upon Lord Burghley's death. Elizabeth, aware of the strengths and weakness among her courtiers, knew better than to appoint Essex to such a position. Essex only confirmed her judgment by believing that he could prove himself worthy of the post through a show of military strength.⁵⁰

Northumberland also wrote of Essex that he desired "the continowall pouar of ane army to dispose of," and "of being great constable of england," ultimately warning King James that he "woore the crowne of england in hes hart these many years," and would never have ceded any power he might have attained to any sovereign.⁵¹ Essex's military

⁴⁸ 0 [Henry Earl of Northumberland] to 30 [King James], *Correspondence of King James VI*, 65.

⁴⁹ John Bruce, introduction to *Correspondence of King James VI*, xiii-xv.

⁵⁰ Bruce, introduction to *Correspondence of King James VI*, xvi-xvii.

⁵¹ 0 [Henry Earl of Northumberland] to 30 [King James], *Correspondence of King James VI*, 66.

guidance had served the Queen's purpose over the years, but his martial tendencies and growing unpopularity at court, much like Raleigh, would keep him from his personal ambition and eventually result in his death. Following the execution of Essex Raleigh felt a "deepening royal chill" so he focused his energy on regaining the love of his current sovereign. He favored stronger punishments for those involved in Essex's rebellion and wrote in praise of Elizabeth's refusal to name an heir. However, as Leanda de Lisle wrote, Raleigh's actions at this time "took [him] further from any hope of James's favor."⁵² Raleigh, the aging Captain of the Queen's Guard, never went as far as Essex – he would not use an actual military force – but in the words of Samuel Rawson Gardiner, his "voice was still for war."⁵³ James, in his hopes for peace, would not be impressed when upon meeting Raleigh he expressed his wish that James had needed to fight his way to the English throne, so he would have "seen who his real friends were."⁵⁴ Beyond Elizabeth's caution regarding military action and the lingering sting of her one-time favorite's armed rebellion, James was even more in favor of diplomacy, leaving Raleigh looking like a relic of a previous age.

The Scottish King of England

The line of succession in sixteenth-century England was complicated by religion and remarriage; at his death, the many marriages of Henry VIII of England and Ireland

⁵² de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 81.

⁵³ Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642*, 10 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 1:89.

⁵⁴ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 181.

left him with three surviving children born of three different wives. Mary Stuart was already Mary Queen of Scots when her father's cousin, Elizabeth, acceded to the English throne in 1558. After Mary returned to Scotland in 1561, Elizabeth agreed regarding her successor "that she knew no better right than Mary's," but that to make it official "would undermine her own position, as [Elizabeth] had learned when heir apparent to her sister."⁵⁵ Born to Mary, during a period of political intrigue and violence in Scotland, James became the King in 1567 shortly after his first birthday. His mother was forced to abdicate the throne after the politically fatal mistake of marrying a man most Scots blamed for the murder of James's English father, Henry Stewart, known as Lord Darnley.⁵⁶ The unofficial agreement between Elizabeth and Mary regarding the succession passed on to James with his accession and Mary's captivity in England.

There were many Englishmen who supported James's claim to the throne by right of primogeniture, despite Mary's political troubles and other complications. Even Henry VIII's 1544 Act of Succession, excluding the Stuart branch descending from Henry's sister Margaret in favor of the Suffolk branch descending from his sister Mary, did not seem so problematic. Wanting to safeguard her authority, Elizabeth had declared Lord Beauchamp, son of the Suffolk line, illegitimate; the result seemed to favor, perhaps unintentionally, the claim of the Stuarts. But as Elizabeth's own accession had proven, illegitimacy could be reversed.⁵⁷ Another obstacle for James was the medieval law,

⁵⁵ Julian Goodare "Mary (1542–1587)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/18248> (accessed August 31, 2016).

⁵⁶ Wormald, "James VI and I (1566–1625)," in *ODNB*.

⁵⁷ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 32. de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 6, 14-15, 19.

established under Edward III, requiring all sovereigns to be born within the confines of the kingdom of England, which helped strengthen the claim of James's English-born cousin Arabella Stuart. Both Raleigh and Burghley were rumored to support her claim at one time, provided she made the correct match, perhaps to a Catholic; still, another Queen in male-dominated politics of the age had little appeal. Queen Elizabeth closely managed Arabella and her marriage prospects and, according to Leanda de Lisle, she ultimately ceased to be a serious contender for the throne after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁵⁸

James grew into his role of king in the absence of his mother, and even with the questionable nature of the succession, he was raised with the understanding that he would someday inherit the English throne. James gained some support from Elizabeth even in his childhood, as his mother Mary, in captivity in England, continued to pursue all avenues that might lead to her reinstatement as Queen. As near civil war broke out in Scotland, nobles who supported Mary were defeated by Queen Elizabeth's forces, who favored protecting the young King James. According to Julian Goodare, Mary "looked forward to a time when [James] would espouse her cause like a dutiful son," which through all of her scheming, he never did.⁵⁹ James did write to Queen Elizabeth to argue for his mother's life, as Mary's final plot to regain her title and assassinate Elizabeth resulted in parliament demanding execution of the former Queen of Scots. In his commentary on one such letter, G. P. V. Akrigg argues "there is no reason to think that

⁵⁸ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 25-26.

⁵⁹ Goodare, "Mary (1542–1587)," in *ODNB*

James did not sincerely wish to save his mother's life," though he barely remembered her, but that ultimately "his motives were political: he would lose status and honour if his mother were executed."⁶⁰ Goodare agrees, suggesting that James's "only effective move would have been to break the Anglo-Scottish league, imperilling his own succession claim," and he would not risk that loss.⁶¹ Despite the pleas of her son and Elizabeth's own hesitation, Mary was executed in 1587.

The only threats he perceived to his eventual accession to the English throne were Catholic interference from beyond the British Isles or the manipulations of the Queen's English councilors. The potential threat of Catholic Spain's agenda meant positioning the Spanish Infanta Isabella as a claimant to the English throne. In response, James purported to appear religiously inclined towards Catholicism, even sending an emissary to the Vatican to convince the Pope. Though the Catholic Church did not entirely trust these overtures, they achieved the desired effect; James's rumored plan to convert Scotland and later England back to the Catholic faith kept Spain from pushing their claim to the crown.⁶² Meanwhile, James maintained a friendly, but complicated relationship with Queen Elizabeth, often infuriating the Queen by refusing to follow her advice. Though Elizabeth never outright confirmed James as her successor, she also did not speak against claim. Unlike his mother, who spent decades plotting to regain her position in the English succession, James did not seem to question his role; He did, however, seek friendships

⁶⁰ To Queen Elizabeth, 26 January 1587. *Letters of King James VI & I*, ed. G.P.V. Akrigg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 81.

⁶¹ Goodare, "Mary (1542–1587)," in *ODNB*.

⁶² Wormald, "James VI and I (1566–1625)," in *ODNB*.

with Englishmen who might further his cause and protect his future interests.

Despite his strong claim and the general acceptance of his right to the succession, James desired correspondence with someone close to Queen Elizabeth and her advisors. By the time of Raleigh's disgrace with the Queen over his secret marriage to Bess in 1592, the Earl of Essex was firmly ensconced in his role as royal favorite. According to Leanda de Lisle, Essex had first made overtures to James in 1589, but they were rebuffed; she sets the beginning of their secret correspondence in 1594, once he had been appointed to the Queen's Privy Council.⁶³ In his introduction to the 1861 *Correspondence of King James VI of Scotland with Sir Robert Cecil and others in England, During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I*, John Bruce claimed that James had established his communication with Essex as early as 1598.⁶⁴ In the 1984 *Letters of King James VI & I*, Akrigg attributed an ambiguously addressed 1595 letter from the King to Essex. In this letter James wrote of a need for secrecy and trustworthy letter carriers, as "so many Argus eyes" – presumably English intelligence – watched over him, indicating that a line of communication had already been established.⁶⁵ Raleigh, who despite his status as some-time favorite to the Queen and Captain of her Guard, was never appointed to the Privy Council, clearly never appealed to James as a contact worth having.

Essex's desire to help shape the future of England through contact with James and his position on the Queen's Privy Council clearly seemed invaluable to the Scottish

⁶³ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, note on 28.

⁶⁴ Bruce, introduction to *Correspondence of King James VI*, xxi.

⁶⁵ To Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex[?], 6 October 1595. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 142-143.

sovereign and they continued to correspond until Essex's fall in 1601. However, in his efforts to gain information and support from the English court, James made a miscalculation in his trust of Essex as the man to guide his accession. In the years before his failed rebellion, Essex was increasingly at odds with the prevailing direction of English politics, particularly in "his commitment to waging aggressive war against Spain in partnership with the French and the Dutch," which "now risked leaving him stranded by the changing tide of European politics."⁶⁶ Essex also bred a great deal of mistrust from the Queen's new Secretary of State, Robert Cecil, his rival at court and the man who would later successfully guide James to the English throne.

James's written relationship with Essex remains largely a mystery, as Essex burned many documents when his rebellion failed including, one imagines, letters from the King. However, evidence of their communication and some amount of cooperation exists in a letter written by Essex's secretary, Henry Cuffe, to Sir Robert Cecil. Cuffe reported in this letter Essex's instructions for the arrival of the Earl of Mar from Scotland in an effort to counter the supposed faction at court that was for the Spanish Infanta in the succession.⁶⁷ Around the time of Essex's incarceration and eventual execution, James sent not only the Earl of Mar, as expected, but also Mr. Edward Bruce, the secular Abbot of Kinloss. Whether or not James intended these ambassadors for the function Essex proposed is not clear; his delay of their departure and the addition of Mr. Bruce might

⁶⁶ Paul E. J. Hammer, "Devereux, Robert, second earl of Essex (1565–1601)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/7565> (accessed September 9, 2016).

⁶⁷ Henry Cuff to Sir Robert Cecil. *Correspondence of King James VI*, 81-84.

indicate that he had other motives. In a letter accompanying his two ambassadors, James wrote to the Queen that since he had “oft found by experience that evil-affected or unfit instruments employed betwixt us [had] oftentimes been the cause of great misunderstanding amongst us,” therefore the Queen should trust these two men to know the King’s mind and no other.⁶⁸

Apart from being official representatives, Mar and Bruce also managed James’s more clandestine relationships and saved the King from acting upon misinformation from Essex and his own misunderstanding of the situation in England. James feared that there was a large disparity in the mind of the people and the mind of the Queen in the wake of Essex’s failed rebellion. He therefore instructed Mar and Bruce to be “surely informed of the people’s present disposition and inclination and to conform [their] behaviour accordingly.”⁶⁹ James also instructed them to impress upon the Queen his innocence in “that unfortunate accident” of Essex’s Rebellion, as well as pursue other “necessities” and interests on his behalf.⁷⁰ In the introduction to his *Correspondence of King James VI* John Bruce claims these instructions show, not the King’s “sound judgment,” but instead “his want of information, and folly.”⁷¹ The lasting effect of Essex’s schemes and influence on James resulted in the near ruin of all his succession plans, but for the wisdom and assessment of his ambassadors in regards to the way forward.

Fortunately, James was soon to gain his greatest ally in the succession, the

⁶⁸ To Queen Elizabeth, 10 February 1601. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 168-169.

⁶⁹ To the Earl of Mar and Edward Bruce, 8 April [1601]. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 173.

⁷⁰ To the Earl of Mar and Edward Bruce, 8 April [1601]. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 174-175.

⁷¹ Bruce, Introduction to *Correspondence of King James VI*, xxxi.

Queen's Secretary of State, Robert Cecil. Because of his correspondence with Essex, who despised Cecil, King James was not inclined to trust the man who had been among the faction responsible for the death of Essex. However, based on the recommendation of trusted Lord Henry Howard the Scottish sovereign began writing to Cecil, who promised to guide and assist him in his eventual transition to the English throne. Before long James was addressing letters to his "right trusty and well-beloved 10" or "dearest 10," incorporating code numbers for the names to subvert potential discovery and also indicating the importance of Cecil's relationship to the King.⁷² The correspondence remained secret from most Englishmen, including the Earl of Northumberland whose 1602 letter referenced above offered assessments not only of Essex and Raleigh, but also of Cecil, who had been in communication with the King for nearly a year.

Northumberland wrote to James of Cecil that he would never "open hem selfe unto your majestie... so long as her majestie liveth," clearly not aware of the correspondence.⁷³

James, in his reply, did not dissuade Northumberland from this belief.⁷⁴

With the help of Cecil, James was restrained from acting on his impatience for confirmation to the throne and guided towards a peaceful transition. Queen Elizabeth's death on March 24, 1603 was followed quickly by the reading of a proclamation of the accession of James to the English throne. A copy of this proclamation had already been

⁷² To "10" [Sir Robert Cecil], [May? 1601], [June? 1601], [1601-1602]. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 178-184.

⁷³ 0 [Henry Earl of Northumberland] to 30 [King James]. *Correspondence of King James VI*, 68.

⁷⁴ Akrigg, preface to [To Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland], [April? 1602]. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 185.

sent to James for his approval and was met with relief by the uncertain public in London and around the country who feared the possibility of revolution in the transition.⁷⁵ At this time Raleigh was still making his way back to London and was not present to sign this proclamation, perhaps to the further detriment of his reputation with James. When Raleigh finally arrived, the Council was in discussions regarding the transition of power to King James and his chosen officials. Some suggested that all non-peers, Raleigh included, should resign their positions until James could appoint his own representatives. Naturally, there was some push back and in the end a moderate approach was taken; Raleigh would keep his Captaincy of the Guard until James was ready to make his own appointments.⁷⁶

King James would begin his progress from Edinburgh on April 5 and many noblemen, courtiers, and onlookers would flock to the procession, hoping to catch sight of the new sovereign, declare their support for him, and perhaps be rewarded for their efforts. Raleigh was, naturally, among those interested in establishing himself in the King's good graces and he traveled to Burghley House in Northamptonshire in 1603, claiming to need the King's signature on some letters. Though no longer as well loved as he had been at the height of Elizabeth's reign, Raleigh did have experience and connections that could have made him an asset. However, under the guidance of Cecil, Raleigh's interaction with the new King was kept at a minimum during the early days after Queen Elizabeth's death and Raleigh was turned away at Burghley House, perhaps because, as Raleigh Trevelyan wrote, "it had been feared that after all James would have

⁷⁵ Gardiner, *History of England*, 1:82-86.

⁷⁶ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 132-133.

been impressed by this tall haughty figure, confident that his long experience near the seat of power would be accepted as invaluable to the new sovereign.”⁷⁷ But for many reasons this mutually beneficial relationship was not to be.

The rise of Cecil, after being slandered by Essex to the King, demonstrates that misinformation could be corrected and relationships repaired between King and courtier. Raleigh, also slandered by Essex, was not able to overcome his bad association with the execution of Essex in 1601, and according to Maureen King, “throughout [Raleigh’s] disgrace, trial, and eventual execution, Essex is always there.”⁷⁸ Raleigh’s reputation also suffered because of his connection to the popularization of smoking in the British Isles, a habit the James despised.⁷⁹ Further, at a second audience with the King in Beddington Park in May 1603, Raleigh attempted to reestablish his usefulness in regards to foreign policy – particularly in advising how to proceed in the fight against Spain. A. L. Rowse writes that the presentation of his ideas, written in a pamphlet referred to as *Discourse concerning a War with Spain*, only took Raleigh further from the King’s favor by triggering the sovereign’s fear of violence and “naked steel” from the “marauding Scots swordsmen” of his early years, not to mention James’s ambition to create peace with

⁷⁷ Raleigh Trevelyan, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 357.

⁷⁸ Maureen King, “The Essex Myth in Jacobean England,” in *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences*, ed. Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer, and Jason Lawrence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 180.

⁷⁹ David Teems. *Majestie: The King behind the King James Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 127. Other sources claim that Raleigh was only responsible for popularizing the habit at court, not the arrival of tobacco on the British Isle – with the possible exception of Ireland. Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 69.

European nations.⁸⁰ While this assessment of James as a man provoked to dread by the mere mention of violence seems extreme, at the very least, as Nicholls and Williams write, James's disposition towards peace on top of the general dissatisfaction of Englishmen with continued war made Raleigh appear the out of touch.⁸¹ Unfortunately for Raleigh, in the words of Samuel Rawson Gardiner, James did not possess "the spirit of righteous indignation which had animated the Elizabethan heroes in their conflict with Spain" and instead desired peace.⁸² Regrettably, Raleigh showed himself to be out of touch with the general mood of government and the intentions of his new king.⁸³ More interesting is that despite this anti-Spanish display, Raleigh would soon be charged with being in collusion with the Spanish as part of a plot to put Arabella Stuart on the throne in James's place.

⁸⁰ A.L. Rowse, *Raleigh and the Throckmortons* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 233.

⁸¹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 193-194.

⁸² Gardiner, *History of England*, 1:102-103.

⁸³ Christopher Lee, *1603: The Death of Queen Elizabeth, the Return of the Black Plague, the Rise of Shakespeare, Piracy, Witchcraft, & the Birth of the Stuart Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 270-271. Trevelyan, *SWR*, 360.

Chapter III

Treason and the Tower

While the accession of King James to the English throne would prove auspicious for many, including Robert Cecil, who was raised to the peerage as Lord of Essendon in the summer of 1603, humiliations continued to rack up for Sir Walter Raleigh. At the end of May 1603 Raleigh was, not surprisingly, relieved of his position as Captain of the Guard, in favor of the man who had held the same position in Scotland, Sir Thomas Erskine. Raleigh was reported to have “most humbly submitted himself” to this outcome, perhaps softened by the £300 he received as compensation. He performed his final duties as Captain of the Queen’s Guard at Elizabeth’s funeral procession and service; this final act also symbolized the end of his political career as governance transformed under the new King.⁸⁴ Raleigh was dealt another more serious blow to his dignity, the rushed removal from his residence at Durham House. In a 9 June 1603 letter to Lord Keeper Egerton, Chief Justice Popham, and Attorney General Coke Raleigh lamented that he did not “know butt that the poorest artificer in Londun hath a quarters warninge geven hym by his land lord,” and he was to be forced to vacate within a fortnight.⁸⁵ What friends and connections Raleigh had at court seemed to be abandoning him and those that remained would soon entangle him in the treasonous plot that would cost his freedom.

⁸⁴ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 184. Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 191.

⁸⁵ To Lady Raleigh [from Winchester, 4-8 December 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 246.

The Plot and Trial

The royal transition from Elizabeth to James created an environment of uncertainty for Scots and Englishmen alike. Those who had previously held positions of importance for each sovereign remained cautious, hoping to either gain or maintain James's recognition of their potential contribution to his court and government. In this context, the development of ploys and plots to direct policy and achieve personal ambitions were to be expected; that Raleigh became connected to the treason known as the Main Plot was likewise predictable, considering his desperation as the summer of 1603 progressed. However, Raleigh's discontent may have faded into the pages of history, along with his career, if it were not for the discovery of a Catholic plot against James and its connection to one of Raleigh's few remaining friends, Lord Cobham. The so-called Bye Plot to kidnap King James and hold him hostage until he met the demands of a Catholic minority was discovered in mid-July. Among the conspirators was Cobham's brother, George Brooke, a connection that caused Raleigh to be questioned by the Privy Council on 15 July. He had no intelligence to share, for he was unaware of the Bye plot, but days later Raleigh was remanded to the Tower when he and Cobham were implicated in a separate treasonous plot.

The true extent and seriousness of Raleigh's involvement in the Main Plot remains unclear, as little original documentation of the proceedings survive. Additionally the central proof of Raleigh's guilt, Cobham's damning accusations on 20 July, remained an important piece of evidence in the prosecution's case though they were quickly recanted,

bringing into question their veracity.⁸⁶ The pair were charged with the treasonous act of plotting to invite Spanish invasion in order to forcibly replace James with Arabella Stuart on the English throne, and though in actuality no such arrangement had been reached, the law of the era accounted for “treason by word, by writing, or by conspiracy,” even without the overt act.⁸⁷ The “heated” nature of Raleigh’s personality combined with the disappointments of the spring and summer of 1603 perhaps could not have resulted in anything less than a guilty verdict on the charge of treason. Whether he intended to follow through with any plot against James or not, according to Nicholls his crime was that he “had made the mistake of giving vent to frustrations while dining privately with a trusted friend” at a time when all relationships were in flux.⁸⁸ Raleigh, ever a man of plans and passions, almost certainly said some words against the King, and when his friend Cobham felt betrayed, he used those words against Raleigh.

Examinations and private interviews formed the bulk of the “trial” against seventeenth-century suspects; if they could prove their innocence they were released, otherwise the findings were presented to the judge and jury.⁸⁹ Raleigh was first brought in for questioning to discover what he knew about the Catholic conspiracy under investigation, which was nothing. However, his peripheral connection to George Brooke and the Bye Plot became more serious when Raleigh attempted to throw suspicion away

⁸⁶ Mark Nicholls, “Sir Walter Raleigh’s Treason: A Prosecution Document,” *English Historical Review* 110, no. 438 (Sep. 1995): 902.

⁸⁷ L. M. Hill, “The Two-Witness Rule in English Treason Trials: Some Comments on the Emergence of Procedural Law,” *American Journal of Legal History* 12 (1968): 96-111.

⁸⁸ Nicholls, “SWR’s Treason,” 912.

⁸⁹ Gardiner, *History of England*, 1:124-125.

from himself and toward Cobham. Whether it was a guilty heart or simply an effort to appear more helpful to the investigation, Raleigh wrote a letter to the Council after his 15 July interview in which he reported that perhaps Cobham had secretly been in contact with Count Aremberg regarding pensions and Spanish peace. When this letter was then read to Cobham he became enraged, reportedly calling Raleigh a “wretch” and a “traitor” before directly accusing him not only of being involved, but of orchestrating the whole intrigue.⁹⁰ The fact that Cobham retracted his accusations “as soon as he reached the stair-foot” did not help reestablish Raleigh’s innocence. Nor did Raleigh’s efforts to reassure Cobham through secret letters in the Tower help their cause. Raleigh’s written assurances to Cobham that with only a single accuser they could not be found guilty would not, in the end, save either man.⁹¹ Cobham appears to take most of the blame for charges being brought against Raleigh, for it was he who could not help but talk of dangerous schemes to untrustworthy friends and relations and he who was manipulated into making angry accusations. Ultimately though, Raleigh’s inability to choose his confidants wisely and disentangle himself from Cobham and Brooke determined that he would be brought before the bench for judgment.

Raleigh’s desperation upon his imprisonment was apparent enough that the Lieutenant of the Tower wrote to Cecil on 21 July that Raleigh maintained ‘styll uppon his inocencye, but with a mynde the most dejected that ever I sawe.’⁹² He was so

⁹⁰ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 196-197.

⁹¹ Gardiner, *History of England*, 1:120-121.

⁹² Quoted from Hatfield MS 101/82 in Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 197.

dejected, it seemed, that he wrote to Bess on 27 July in anticipation of his suicide. In this letter he regretted that Cobham “hath proclaimed [him] to be a partaker of his vaine imag[i]nations, notwithstanding the whole course of [his] life hath approved the contrarie.”⁹³ Despite his reputation as a strongly martial opponent to Spain, Raleigh did not seem to believe he would be able to prove his innocence against the treasonous charges. Among the missteps Raleigh made – the lies and secret correspondence with Cobham – which only served to make him look guiltier, his attempted suicide was an act that seemed to show his inner turmoil regarding false accusations. While eating dinner, Raleigh stabbed himself with a table knife, producing a bloody scene but leaving only a superficial wound from which Raleigh easily recovered.⁹⁴ Both contemporaries and modern commentators have questioned the resolve behind his attempt to “destroye the memorie of theis” disgrace. Regardless, Raleigh soon began to fight for his innocence in hopes of rescuing his reputation, even if not his life.⁹⁵

Leanda de Lisle has suggested that Raleigh’s motivation in attempting suicide was merely in service of saving his estates from confiscation. Raleigh believed that if he died before his trial, they would be safe.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that Raleigh discovered his will to live was greater than his desire to protect his estate, the motivation is interesting. As such, it is prudent to examine other actions and accusations surrounding the investigation and trial of Raleigh’s treason to discover who would benefit most. Cobham’s accusations of

⁹³ To Lady Raleigh [from the Tower, on or shortly before 27 July 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 248.

⁹⁴ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 198-199.

⁹⁵ To Lady Raleigh [from the Tower on or shortly before 27 July 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 249.

⁹⁶ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 232.

his friend Raleigh did little to benefit his own situation, as he remained party to the treason with or without Raleigh. In fact, Nicholls writes that during Cobham's first four days under interrogation, he consistently implicated himself by providing more details of his plotting against the King and did not once accuse Raleigh until 20 July.⁹⁷ These accusations were incited by Cecil, manipulated in the same way Cecil had "broken" another conspirator in the "Lopez plot nearly a decade before," by presenting a letter containing apparent betrayal from a trusted friend.⁹⁸ When Cobham later recanted the accusations he was enticed to make, it was likely because he realized he had been deceived.

Two other men who had a personal stake in Raleigh's destruction, and are often blamed for his fall, were Henry Howard and Secretary Cecil. Of the two, Cecil is more likely the main architect, but Henry Howard's longstanding hatred of Raleigh is worth mentioning. Howard was among the secret circle of correspondents who paved the way for James's accession along with Cecil, and was responsible for the most vitriolic rhetoric poisoning the King against Raleigh and Cobham. In the summer of 1603 he was rewarded for his friendship and loyalty to James with an appointment to the Privy Council.⁹⁹ As a member of the council, Howard was part of the examination of Raleigh and it is difficult to imagine that his long-standing hatred of Raleigh would not color his assessment. Rowse suggests that Howard's hatred stemmed from the idea that Raleigh represented everything

⁹⁷ Nicholls, "SWR's Treason," 906-907.

⁹⁸ P.M. Handover, *The Second Cecil: The Rise to Power, 1563-1604 of Robert Cecil, Late First Earl of Salisbury* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959), 309.

⁹⁹ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 182.

that he was not; Howard's true benefit at Raleigh's decline appears to be little more than the personal satisfaction of seeing the man, whom he had long plotted to remove from favor, brought down.¹⁰⁰ Raleigh, it seems, did not suspect any deeper malevolence or motivation on Howard's part, for he asked Bess in his 27 July farewell letter to forgive Howard, even though he was his "heavie enimye."¹⁰¹ Raleigh was less understanding of his onetime friend, Secretary Cecil.

Raleigh showed his misunderstanding of the current direction of an English government guided by Cecil and his plans for foreign policy when he wrote unforgivingly of Cecil to Bess on 27 July. He wrote how he had "thought [Cecil] woulde never forsake [him] in extremitie" and that Raleigh "woulde not have done it" to Cecil.¹⁰² While Raleigh saw betrayal of a sometimes friendly working relationship, Cecil did not act entirely out of personal malice according to P.M. Handover. Handover claims that all the efforts Cecil made to attain power over the direction of English government were in order to "make his country secure and prosperous," and to that end he would betray anyone, friend or even monarch, without compunction so long as it was in service of the institution of English government.¹⁰³ Despite the view of Spain as the traditional enemy of England, Cecil saw the practicalities of a Spanish peace: access to trade routes and a reduction of wartime expenses.¹⁰⁴ Cecil's rational approach to foreign policy and

¹⁰⁰ Rowse, *Raleigh and the Throckmortons*, 230. de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 72.

¹⁰¹ To Lady Raleigh [from the Tower on or shortly before 27 July 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 248.

¹⁰² To Lady Raleigh [from the Tower, on or before 27 July 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 248.

¹⁰³ Handover, *The Second Cecil*, 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Handover, *The Second Cecil*, 315.

political relationships likely caused him to overlook personal relationships in favor of the greater good, for instance his ability to loyally serve Queen Elizabeth while secretly grooming James as her replacement. As statesmen, Cobham and Raleigh could not remove their personal motives from the political actions and that, from Cecil's perspective, could be dangerous to the future of England.

When Raleigh became entangled in the Main Plot of 1603 it was because Cecil had allowed it to happen and getting Raleigh out of the way served his purposes. After many years together under Queen Elizabeth, Cecil knew that Raleigh's ruin and removal from court did not require him to actually manufacture a plot but simply to set the right conditions.¹⁰⁵ For years Raleigh had been kept from even attempting contact with James, until it was too late; by the time James became king, the damage was done. Cecil, and to a greater extent Howard, had long been turning the King's mind from Raleigh. Raleigh lost his estate, his monopolies, and his importance in the spring and summer of 1603, after being passed over for years for appointments to the Privy Council. All of this made him more susceptible to treasonous talk. But Raleigh's greatest crime against Cecil's vision of government was that he was vocally anti-Spain while Cecil attempted to pursue peace.

Upon his accession, King James had also declared his intentions to pursue peace with England's neighbors. Though Cecil's plan was to negotiate peace primarily with Spain, James met first with the French ambassador, de Rosni, both publicly and privately. Handover writes that during these meetings, James made intimations of peace and marriage between the nations to de Rosni and publicly declared "his emphatic resentment

¹⁰⁵ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 205-206.

against Spain.”¹⁰⁶ Though de Lisle suggests that the French knew James to be “notoriously untrustworthy,” Cecil’s dreams of achieving a Spanish peace treaty appeared to hang in the balance. If Raleigh were to gain the attention of the King at a time when he seemed to be more for the French than the Spanish, it could have destroyed everything for Cecil.¹⁰⁷ That Raleigh’s defense against the treasonous accusations he became entangled with saw him fervently proclaiming his hatred for Spain only solidified Cecil’s resolve to remove him from the political sphere.

If the case against Raleigh had already been approved and made, then the trial itself can be viewed essentially as a performance, both for Raleigh and the State. Raleigh faced a group of commissioners and judges who shared contempt for him, including Cecil and Henry Howard, and a jury of gentlemen, whom Raleigh declared “all honest and Christian men.”¹⁰⁸ The Attorney General, Sir Edward Coke, had the task of presenting the state’s case against Raleigh and did so without much elegance or subtlety and perhaps with too much emotion and disdain. Nicholls and Williams argue that Coke’s primary focus in the trial was to highlight Raleigh’s personality flaws in order to cast him as the traitor type more than proving him culpable of the charges.¹⁰⁹ If this is true, Coke was clearly rattled by Raleigh who refuted the character assassination by carrying himself with composure, confidence, and intelligence. As the proceedings continued, Coke became

¹⁰⁶ Handover, *The Second Cecil*, 305.

¹⁰⁷ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 199-204, 211. Handover, *The Second Cecil*, 311.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 205. de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 261.

¹⁰⁹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 206-207.

increasingly frustrated with Raleigh's reasoned responses to the charges, losing his temper and calling Raleigh names such as "spider of hell," "vile traitor," and "odious fellow" among other derisions.¹¹⁰ Coke's behavior only made Raleigh's performance more moving.

Though he understood that his innocence would be almost impossible to prove, Raleigh entered his 17 November trial with several arguments to attempt just that. He first attempted to show that the prosecution had no real proof against him, only circumstantial evidence. Raleigh also argued that his friend Cobham was not such a weakling that he could be so easily swayed into treason as he claimed, therefore removing the onus of the plot from Raleigh. Perhaps his greatest argument was based on the idea that two witnesses were required in cases of treason, as he had previously written to Cobham while in the Tower.¹¹¹ When the Chief Justice dismissed this argument, Raleigh demanded that he be confronted by his accuser in person, exclaiming that to be denied this request was a tactic more fitting to the Spanish Inquisition. Again he was denied. Yet the Lady Arabella and the Lord Admiral Nottingham were allowed to speak, in order to protect her name from scandal, and a Portuguese sailor recounted the rumors he had heard in Lisbon.¹¹² All this seems to highlight the hopelessness of Raleigh's case; even the dramatic presentation of the letter he had solicited from Cobham in the Tower exonerating him was met with

¹¹⁰ *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, vol. 2 (London: Printed by T.C. Hansard, 1809), 20, 26.

¹¹¹ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 264-265.

¹¹² Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 208-209. de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 266-267.

defeat.¹¹³

In the theatre of the courtroom Raleigh's performance had been spectacular and moving, accentuated by Coke's anger, and still he was found guilty. Leanda de Lisle writes that despite the verdict of the trial, he was ultimately "cleared at the bar of public opinion."¹¹⁴ The public perception of Raleigh's trial, sadly, could only rescue his reputation at this point, not his life, and Raleigh continued to work towards achieving this aim. In the month before the trial, Bess had been distributing manuscript copies of Raleigh's July suicide letter to her, garnering some sympathy for his plight.¹¹⁵ Raleigh also continued to proclaim his innocence and beg for mercy in letters written to the trial commissioners, Cecil, Howard, and even the King, which also found their way into circulation. On the day Raleigh had been sentenced to a traitor's death – to be hanged, drawn, and quartered – he wrote to King James making his case again and begging for his life. He pleaded that he never meant any harm to the King, that his treason of "heringe only, but never belevinge or acceptinge" the plans of Cobham was his only true crime. He continued, "the more my misery is the more is your Majesties mercy if yow pleas to behold it, and the less I can deserve," attempting to flatter the King and to humble himself before his judgment.¹¹⁶ Perhaps Raleigh hoped that the King might spare him, or that he would be able to sway public opinion in such a way that the King would be forced

¹¹³ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 212.

¹¹⁴ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 269.

¹¹⁵ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 254.

¹¹⁶ To King James I [from Winchester, shortly after 17 November 1603]. *Letters of Raleigh*, 258-260.

to commute his sentence to something less grisly; but Raleigh could not have anticipated the final act that James had in mind.

As the newly crowned King of England, James likely felt that he needed to prove himself to be clever and free from the control or manipulation of his advisors. The unfortunate number of plotters upon his accession created a safety and image issue that James had to deal with appropriately. Many of the Catholic gentlemen who had been associated with the Bye Plot had escaped prosecution altogether, arguably because “putting too many members on trial for treason would have exposed the government’s unpopularity,” according to de Lisle.¹¹⁷ Of those who had been tried in connection with the Bye, two priests and Cobham’s brother George Brooke, were executed weeks after Raleigh’s trial. James showed his willingness to punish those who endangered his person, but restraint in the breadth of those punishments. The King further attempted to show his cleverness in the way he treated the execution of the death warrants of Lord Grey and Sir Markham of the Bye and Lord Cobham. Each man was allowed to mount the scaffold, make any final declarations, and perhaps reveal additional incriminating information, before being mysteriously led back inside. A letter delivered to the Sheriff by the King’s servant claimed that he was now “resolved to mix clemency with justice,” and stayed the executions.¹¹⁸ Witness to the macabre theatrics, Raleigh too was offered clemency on 9 December. The relief of the public upon hearing that the executions had been stayed,

¹¹⁷ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 258.

¹¹⁸ To Sir Benjamin Tichbourne, Sheriff of Hampshire [8 December 1603]. *Letters of King James VI & I*, 217-219.

according to de Lisle, seems to indicate that James had dealt with the situation well.¹¹⁹ Despite the twisted nature of James's scene on the scaffold, his apparent benevolence would linger.

Life in the Tower

Reprieved, Raleigh was still a prisoner but "as a man rased from the dead," almost immediately he began writing letters of gratitude from the Tower to those he still believed might hold sway over his future: Robert Cecil and King James.¹²⁰ Raleigh wrote to the Secretary, who during the trial had at least seemed to support Raleigh's requests to be confronted by his accuser and whom Nicholls and Williams suggest Raleigh may have believed could still secure a pardon on his behalf or at least a life in exile.¹²¹ In this letter, dated on or shortly after 10 December 1603, Raleigh admitted that he had "fayled both in frindshipec and in judgment" and that while he had previously been guided by fortune and vanity, now he swore to abide by Cecil's council.¹²² Cecil's response to Raleigh was delivered through the Lieutenant of the Tower, asking him to encourage Raleigh to write directly to the King expressing his thanks and that Cecil himself "wold be gladd of [Raleigh's] future good."¹²³ In truth, it is unlikely that Raleigh truly felt, as he wrote, "a

¹¹⁹ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 275.

¹²⁰ To Lord Cecil [from Winchester, on or shortly after 10 December 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 268.

¹²¹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: in Life and Legend*, 226.

¹²² To Lord Cecil [from Winchester, on or shortly after 10 December 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 268.

¹²³ Secretary Lord Cecil of Essingdon to Sir George Harvey, Lieutenant of the Tower, 20 December 1603. *The Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, 2 vols., ed. Edward Edwards (London: Macmillan, 1868), 2:486.

love without maske or cover” for the Secretary, but he no doubt recognized the benefit of a well place friend such as Cecil. Before even receiving Cecil’s response, Raleigh had already decided to write to the “most mighty and most mercifull Kinge” James, showering him with thanks and vowing fidelity and service.¹²⁴ After the graciousness of Raleigh’s stay of execution, his effusive letters did not garner any additional favor in determining his destiny.

The gruesome executions of Watson and Clark for their parts in the Bye were fortunately not the same as fates of the remaining plotters. Sir Markham and some fellow Bye conspirators were sent into exile, while others were pardoned entirely.¹²⁵ Lord Grey was unfortunately closely associated with Cobham, and both were imprisoned in the Tower until their deaths or its imminent arrival. Cobham had the further misfortune while imprisoned to lose most of his fortune and holdings to his wife, unusual in the seventeenth century, and to his brother-in-law, Robert Cecil.¹²⁶ The purported object of the Main Plot, Arabella Stuart, was allowed at court following the treason trials and continued to live under the scrutiny and control of King James. When the aging Arabella secretly married William Seymour in 1610, a union that would combine the lines of both Mary and Margaret Tudor if they produced a child, her new husband was imprisoned in the Tower and she was sent first to Lambeth and later to Durham to keep the couple apart. When the couple attempted to escape England, Arabella was caught and sent to the

¹²⁴ To the King [from Winchester, 11-15 December 1603]. *Letters of SWR*, 269-270.

¹²⁵ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 275. Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 226.

¹²⁶ de Lisle, *After Elizabeth*, 275-276.

Tower, where she would die in 1615 of illness exacerbated by her refusal to eat.¹²⁷

Raleigh was a man too well known to be pardoned outright or sent abroad into exile to gather foreign intelligence as other had been. Perhaps he was also too dangerous for such treatment, especially after his trial that had, largely because of Coke's angry outbursts, transformed Raleigh from a villain to a hero in the eyes of the public.¹²⁸ Instead, like Cobham and Lord Grey, he was remanded to the Tower indefinitely, where James would have some semblance of control over Raleigh's influence. This punishment was a long way from the traitor's death he had been sentenced with at his trial. In fact, during his residence at the Tower Raleigh had two rooms, a laboratory, use of a private gardens for air and exercise, a 500-volume library and access to more, and an allowance for food, fuel, and light. Additionally, visitors were allowed to come and go with great liberty and were given a reasonable amount of privacy, considering his wife Bess gave birth to the couple's third son, Carew in 1605.¹²⁹

Despite the relative comforts of his imprisonment, Raleigh's initial gratitude at having his life spared did not last long; a man who had long thrived on exploration and politics needed constant engagement and a large project to occupy his mind. As such, Raleigh began working on his most ambitious work, *The History of the World*, in 1611. This work, dedicated to James's son, Henry, expounded and commented upon biblical

¹²⁷ Rosalind K. Marshall, "Stuart, Lady Arabella (1575–1615)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/601> (accessed December 16, 2016).

¹²⁸ Nicholls, "SWR's Treason," 905.

¹²⁹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 227-229.

and classical histories. During his years in the Tower, Raleigh nurtured a relationship with Prince Henry, in many ways his father's opposite, who according to Anna Beer "is described as the inspiration, editor and ideal reader for the series of political and naval tracts which culminated in the *History [of the World]*."¹³⁰ Raleigh likely saw an opportunity to use this relationship to facilitate his eventual release. When his *History* was published in 1614 it would ultimately only cover creation until the rise of the Roman Empire, as Raleigh abandoned the project when Prince Henry died in 1612. In its original edition it was published in London without his name, but was soon censored by the government for being "too sawcie in censuring princes."¹³¹ If Raleigh had hoped he might impress and gain the Prince's royal favor with *The History of the World*, he was surely disappointed with James's reaction after Henry's death. But this tome was far from his only effort while in the Tower to regain his usefulness and perhaps his freedom.

Pleas and Petitions

Raleigh, who had been imprisoned by his sovereign before, must have felt confident that as before he would eventually be released. As such, Raleigh attempted to maintain and improve any beneficial relationships from the Tower and continued to argue for his freedom. In the summer of 1604 he wrote a letter to his "friend" Cecil, begging him not to forget or doubt him and expressed his anger that "those which plotted to

¹³⁰ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 22.

¹³¹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 256-257.

surprize and assaile the person of the Kinge, thos that ar papists, ar att liberty.”¹³²

Raleigh’s assessment, that the Catholic plotters of the Bye with their fully formed but poorly executed plan to kidnap James was a more serious threat than the discussion of a royal replacement that he and Cobham were convicted of, missed a crucial element: that Raleigh’s participation in political matters was no longer relevant, needed, or desired. In the following winter Raleigh perhaps finally understood that his pardon and release were not forthcoming. Raleigh wrote again to Cecil, depressed, claiming that his time in the Tower “cannot be calde a life but only misery drawn out” and presenting his pleas regarding the management of his Sherborne estate and the fate of Bess and his son.¹³³ Despite trouble with the wording of the legal documents, the estate was for a time put into the trust of men whom had supported Raleigh. When in 1609 King James gave the estate to the rising favorite Robert Carr, “The Raleigh of twenty years earlier” according to Nicholls and Williams, the Raleighs were compensated kindly for their loss.¹³⁴ Though Raleigh suffered some setbacks in these early years of imprisonment, it did not dissuade him from continuing to maneuver for his release.

In addition to seeking the patronage of Prince Henry with his *History* and other tracts, Raleigh also pursued a relationship with James’s wife, Queen Anne in his efforts to regain his liberty. Through the Queen, Raleigh gained the attention of her brother, King Christian IV of Denmark, as a potential asset in his own expansion plans. A 1618 letter to

¹³² To Lord Cecil [from the Tower, shortly after 16 June] 1604. *Letters of SWR*, 279.

¹³³ To Lord Cranborne [from the Tower, winter 1604-1605]. *Letters of SWR*, 287.

¹³⁴ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: in Life and Legend*, 232-233.

King James from a record keeper named Thomas Wilson references the King of Denmark's earlier request to have Raleigh released as his Admiral for some venture, which was denied by James.¹³⁵ However, Anna Beer suggests that his interest in Raleigh did not lead Christian IV to advocate for Raleigh's release.¹³⁶ In 1607 Raleigh wrote to Cecil, now Earl of Salisbury, proposing a joint venture to Guiana in which the primary investors would be himself, Cecil, and Queen Anne, whom Raleigh felt "bound for her compassion."¹³⁷ The political atmosphere was not right for such endeavors, but the "compassion" that Raleigh felt towards the Queen would continue to develop into a relationship such that Raleigh wrote to her personally in 1611 lamenting that his Guiana proposal had been rejected again and bemoaning his continued incarceration.¹³⁸ Even after the setbacks of this 1611 denial, Raleigh would not give up on his Guiana ambitions and would continue to count Queen Anne among his allies.

¹³⁵ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 283.

¹³⁶ Beer, *SWR and His Readers*, n.19, 20.

¹³⁷ To the Earl of Salisbury [from the Tower, c.July] 1607. *Letters of SWR*, 298.

¹³⁸ To Queen Anne [from the Tower, after 11 July 1611]. *Letters of SWR*, 327-329.

Chapter IV

Release

After his 1603 trial and imprisonment few men in power trusted Sir Walter Raleigh and perhaps fewer believed in the honor of his word. Raleigh admitted as much in his “*Large Appologie for the ill successe of his enterprise to Guiana,*” written to King James while being taken from Plymouth to London in July 1618 under the guard of Sir Lewis Stucley. Raleigh wrote that prior to his disastrous 1617-1618 expedition to Guiana many in England believed:

That I meant nothing lesse then to goe to Guiana, but that being once at Libertie, and in my own power, haveing made my way with some forraigne Prince, I would turne Pyratt and utterly forsake my owne Countrie; my being at Guiana, my returninge into England unpardoned, and my not takeing the spoile of the subjects of any Christian Prince, hath I doubt not, distroied that opinion.”¹³⁹

He once again was on a campaign to explain his actions, save his reputation, and hopefully emerge with his life. Raleigh believed that the very fact that he had done what he had promised should garner him some trust. He further argued that at the start of his journey he was in possession of “22,000 of two and twentie shillinge peices” that he could easily have absconded with, saving himself all the trouble of the expedition. Considering his notoriety, Raleigh’s release from the Tower could only occur within a unique set of events and circumstances, which began to fall into place in 1612 after the death of his long time “friend” and adversary Robert Cecil.

¹³⁹ “Sir Walter Raghleys *Large Appologie for the ill successe of his enterprise to Guiana,*” *Raleigh’s Last Voyage*, 317.

England's relationship with Spain had long been a complicated affair, but with James's accession to the English throne and the support of his principal secretary Robert Cecil it had begun to normalize. Royal favorite and current owner of Raleigh's Sherborne estate Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, was also pro-Spanish and had begun negotiating marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta in 1614, even as the anti-Spanish faction at court was gaining support.¹⁴⁰ But Carr soon found himself implicated in scandal and losing favor, and Sir Ralph Winwood, whose time as a diplomat in France and the Low Countries had made him anti-Spanish, was named Secretary of State. Combined with the increasingly desperate financial situation in England, Raleigh's proposal to locate a gold mine in Guiana he had found on a previous journey – the same proposal he had been making since 1607 – gained appeal.

The Guiana Commission

Raleigh had been enchanted by Guiana after his first voyage in 1595 when he wrote glowingly about its people and resources, selling his vision of glory and gold for England in the New World. Following his first journey he backed two additional voyages though he himself was distracted by campaigns at Cadiz and the Azores Islands and did not renew his own efforts to return to Guiana until 1607 while prisoner in the Tower.¹⁴¹ Raleigh proposed an enterprise to work a gold mine near the banks of the Orinoco River

¹⁴⁰ Alastair Bellany, "Carr, Robert, earl of Somerset (1585/6?–1645)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/4754> (accessed January 12, 2017).

¹⁴¹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 110-117.

that he had discovered during his 1595 voyage. This venture would cost 5,000 pounds, he estimated, and could be split three ways between himself, Cecil, and Queen Anne. To maintain some secrecy and not alarm the Spanish, he suggested that the journey could claim to be headed for Virginia, as his 1595 expedition had, yet he also promised “Wee will break no peace, invade none of the Spanish towns.”¹⁴² That proposal was rejected, but Raleigh was persuaded by his friends, he wrote to Cecil in 1611, to try again. In this letter he reiterated his argument that it was best to send a mission of recovery, not only discovery, as it would only delay the golden reward and possibly allow Spain to take advantage of their discovery. Since it had been nearly sixteen years, Raleigh stressed the difficulty of finding the mine at all without the presence of both Lawrence Keymis and himself at the site. He also dramatically declared to Cecil that “if it be thought better for His Majestie to loose so great riches then that I be employed in his service I know noe reason why such a one as I am should be suffred to live.”¹⁴³ Raleigh’s desperation to escape his confinement is apparent and may have strengthened his own belief in the mine’s existence and his ability to find it.

Many changes had occurred in England by 1616 when Raleigh’s Guiana scheme finally gained some traction. Two of his main detractors in the Privy Council, Robert Cecil and Henry Howard, had died. While James continued to pursue marriage negotiations with Spain, his pro-Spanish favorite, Robert Carr, had lost favor, and George Villiers, a new favorite guided by the new Secretary Winwood and the anti-Spanish

¹⁴² To the Earl of Salisbury [from the Tower, c.July] 1607. *Letters of SWR*, 298.

¹⁴³ To the Earl of Salisbury [from the Tower, 1611]. *Letters of SWR*, 322-323.

faction, was approached by Raleigh's friends.¹⁴⁴ Raleigh recognized the new environment when he suggested to Secretary Winwood in a 1616 letter that the opinion of his Guiana journey "wold be better understoode now then when itt was first propounded."¹⁴⁵ Latham and Younings suggest that he was likely referring to the death of Cecil, whom had heard and rejected Raleigh's proposition previously, but perhaps he also understood that the King needed money. Regardless, Raleigh's Guiana project became more alluring to many at court, not only as a money-making venture but also as a tool to interrupt James's Spanish marriage negotiations.¹⁴⁶ Raleigh was allowed to leave his Tower prison on 19 March 1616 to begin organizing his second and final voyage to Guiana.

An examination of King James's complicated marriage negotiations with Spain, as well as the relationship between England, Spain, and the rest of Europe, can help to explicate some of the reasons why he would grant his prisoner this commission at all. Samuel Rawson Gardiner's assessment of James as a ruler was that he "thought enough of politics to make him jealous of interference, and not enough to make them the business of his life," for example ignoring the advice of his council or accepting the corruption which occurred at his court, so long as it did not negatively affect him.¹⁴⁷ The implication seems to be that he was not equipped to make the best decisions for his country. Further, V. T. Harlow describes James's foreign policy as full of contradictions; he could see all

¹⁴⁴ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 83. Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 285-287.

¹⁴⁵ To Sir Ralph Winwood from the Tower, [early 1616]. *Letters of SWR*, 335.

¹⁴⁶ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 23-24.

¹⁴⁷ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:73-74.

sides of a conflict and often vacillated between the two, hoping not to offend either side.¹⁴⁸ In pursuit of a peaceful Europe, James hoped to cement a friendship with Catholic Spain through marriage. When Spain did not receive the Pope's blessing for such a union and hesitated to continue negotiations, an annoyed James became friendlier with Protestant Venice and went so far as to imply England might be willing to be in league with Savoy, Holland, and Protestant Germany. Suddenly, Savoyard interest in Genoa's conflict with Spain became an English concern. Raleigh leapt at an opportunity to redirect his ships to the Mediterranean and hopefully regain the trust of his sovereign, as well as his freedom, much closer to home. However, when James sensed that a diplomatic solution was on the horizon he once again set Raleigh's ships toward Guiana.¹⁴⁹ Raleigh's willingness to be diverted from his intended voyage perhaps indicates a level of uncertainty related to successfully locating and working the Orinoco mine and likewise James's comfort with playing both sides of the Protestant-Catholic divide should have provided a warning for his support for Raleigh's voyage.

The risk of authorizing a mining venture in land claimed by a country he hoped to marry his own kingdom to was another danger James faced. Spain, which had a vested interest in maintaining a "commercial monopoly" in Guiana, protested strongly through its ambassador, Gondomar, against Raleigh's voyage. Ideologically, James believed that occupation was necessary to back up land claims, though in practice he was characteristically inconsistent and Harlow argues that his close relationship with

¹⁴⁸ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:49-52.

Gondomar made it very likely that he was aware of the closeness of Raleigh's mine to the Spanish settlement of San Thomé.¹⁵⁰ Nicholls and Williams agree that James was willing to risk potential conflict between Raleigh's crew and the Spanish "so long as the rewards were sufficient."¹⁵¹ But Raleigh claimed his mine was far from any Spanish settlement, and this gave James a chance to "wash his hands of the whole matter" – if it was true, Spain had fewer reasons to be upset; if it was a lie, Raleigh would shoulder all the blame and James would cooperate with any punishment Spain demanded, securing their friendship.¹⁵²

Perhaps the simplest explanation of why James allowed Raleigh's voyage to go forward was that it silenced a political critic by "entrusting him with a hazardous mission that took him far from England," and from the start Raleigh's expedition faced many difficulties before failing outright.¹⁵³ After sailing from Plymouth on 12 June 1617, Raleigh's fleet met storms and strong winds that forced them to spend two months in Ireland before heading south across the Atlantic. With a crew of incompetent and inexperienced sailors and more difficult weather on the open seas, many men became ill and by November when they finally reached harbor near the Orinoco, many had died. Raleigh himself was too ill to lead the expedition for the mine and had to send Keymis, his nephew George, and his son Wat to find the mine that would save his life. The small mine reconnaissance crew was gone for almost two months and with their return brought

¹⁵⁰ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 24-26.

¹⁵¹ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 289.

¹⁵² Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:42.

¹⁵³ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 287-288.

news that severely dampened Raleigh's hopes of reprieve. Keymis and the others encountered the town of San Thomé not far from the alleged site of the mine, which Harlow argues was known to both Keymis and Raleigh, though Raleigh would later claim it was newly settled since his last voyage.¹⁵⁴ The men fought with the Spanish settlers, killing their governor in the fray, and burned part of the town in violation of the promises Raleigh had made. Worse still, Raleigh's son Wat had been killed in the action and no gold nor ore of any kind was recovered.

Raleigh understood that his expedition was in grave danger and that he risked losing not only his freedom but also his life if he returned to England without gold. A desperate Raleigh, grief-stricken over the death of his son, berated Keymis for his mistakes, blaming him for his own impending punishment. Keymis took the condemnation to heart and later committed suicide in his cabin. Frantic, Raleigh began to plan for another journey to the mine site in order to recover some ore and hopefully make up for the violence against the Spanish, but his crew would have none of it. Taking another track, he proposed they plunder the Spanish treasure fleet so as not to go home empty handed, which nearly led to mutiny. When the remaining ships stopped briefly in Kinsale, Ireland on the way back to England many of the crew deserted the expedition, perhaps sensing the retribution that was to come.¹⁵⁵ Raleigh himself doggedly sailed on, seeming to believe that his voyage's failure was not his fault and that his powers of

¹⁵⁴ Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 62-62.

¹⁵⁵ This summary of the voyage is based on the brief description in Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 290-298. More detailed accounts can be found in V. T. Harlow, *Raleigh's Last Voyage* and S.R. Gardiner, *History of England*, vol. 3.

persuasion could still save his life.

Tribunal and Execution

When Raleigh complained to Secretary Winwood in 1616 that even though he owed his life to King James, “His Majestie not knoweing of me hath beene my ruine,”¹⁵⁶ he was thinking of the “ruine” of his long imprisonment in the Tower. Yet the sentiment could also be applied to the “ruine” Raleigh would face after his failed Guiana voyage. All of his pleas and explanations seem to assume that if only the King could understand what had happened, if only he could know the truth, then Raleigh would be saved. Raleigh began mounting his defense months before his return to England, writing again to Secretary Winwood from St. Christopher in the Lesser Antilles on 21 March 1618 lamenting his “unpardoned” status and the reality that his “poore estate” had been consumed by the voyage. He also begged him not to believe the stories of some “unworthy persons” who would arrive before him, “that these scumme of men may not be believed of me who have taken more paynes and suffred more then the meanest rascall in the shippe.”¹⁵⁷ Unaware that the Secretary had died shortly after he had departed from England the previous year, Raleigh’s hope of a sympathetic ear from one of his strongest supporters at court would fail.

Once Raleigh arrived at Plymouth he began intensifying his campaign of innocence. Since he had not returned with any gold from the alleged mine nor even the

¹⁵⁶ To Sir Ralph Winwood from the Tower, [early 1616]. *Letters of SWR*, 336.

¹⁵⁷ To Sir Ralph Winwood from St Christophers, 21 March 1618. *Letters of SWR*, 351-352.

spoils of an attack on a Spanish treasure fleet, as he was likely encouraged to do by Secretary Winwood, Raleigh had nothing to distract from the violence against San Thomé.¹⁵⁸ He wrote a letter on 11 June to Lord Carew, his friend and supporter at court, laying out the basic arguments Raleigh seemed to believe would save him. His chief argument centered on his belief that Guiana was not Spanish territory at all; he insisted that it belonged to England “by virtue of a cession by all the native chiefs of the country” to him upon his previous visit. Raleigh contended that another recent commission granted for an Englishman named Harcourt to explore Guiana proved that the King also understood that the region was “not justly in the possession of any Christian prince.”¹⁵⁹ He was not so bold or presumptuous of his relationship to explicitly make this same argument to the King when he wrote to him on 16 June. Instead he pleaded that he had not ordered the town to be destroyed, throwing the blame at Keymis, and then attempted to justify the attack as a reasonable reaction to the treachery the English had suffered at the hands of Spanish settlers. Raleigh finished this letter with appeals to his trustworthiness, as he had not faltered from his aim by sacking other Spanish towns nor had he taken advantage of his provisional freedom by selling off the supplies of his voyage and remaining abroad with the profits.¹⁶⁰ What Raleigh did not realize was that there was no excuse that would make up for coming back to England empty-handed.

Without gold to soften the blow of the misadventures of his men, Raleigh had only

¹⁵⁸ M. Greengrass, “Winwood, Sir Ralph (1562/3–1617),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/29783> (accessed January 17, 2017)

¹⁵⁹ To Lord Carew from Plymouth, [c.11] June 1618. *Letters of SWR*, 358-359.

¹⁶⁰ To King James [from Plymouth], 16 June 1618. *Letters of SWR*, 362-363.

his words to save him, but not even those would do the job. After his ship was impounded at the end of July 1618, Raleigh was escorted to London by his cousin, Sir Lewis Stucley. Pausing in Salisbury to allow Raleigh to recover from an illness he had brought on himself with the help of a French doctor, he wrote his *Large Apologie for the ill successe of his enterprise to Guiana* to King James.¹⁶¹ In this text he reiterated his previous claims about England's rights to Guiana as well as Keymis' culpability for the San Thomé violence and lack of gold. Additionally, though, he began to focus on his own reputation and the honesty of his intentions; he had only instructed and done what he was commissioned to do, he had not turned pirate, and he had returned to England in spite of his failed mission.¹⁶² Anna Beer points out that Raleigh's *Apologie* attempts to appeal to a personal relationship based on trust between the King and himself, which did not exist. Raleigh's predicament was not the result of the King doubting his intentions and could not be resolved, as Raleigh seemed to think, through a better understanding of the intentions and circumstances of the voyage, and in reality, Raleigh was simply a pawn in the King's game of foreign affairs.¹⁶³ He was betrayed by the King before his fleet had even left England, as Gardiner writes, when James promised Gondomar that if Raleigh should return with Spanish gold, he would turn it all over and allow the thieves to be hanged in Madrid.¹⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, the *Apologie* was not well received by the King but it started

¹⁶¹ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:137-140.

¹⁶² "Large Apologie," *Raleigh's Last Voyage*, 316-334.

¹⁶³ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 87.

¹⁶⁴ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:132.

to amass public sympathy when manuscript copies were distributed.¹⁶⁵ Raleigh's defense was getting him nowhere with the King but, unfortunately for James, his popularity was on the rise.

Before James and his council could decide what to do with Raleigh he had opportunity to escape and made two unsuccessful attempts. Nicholls and Williams suggest that James might have been relieved if Raleigh had not returned to England at all or had successfully escaped when he had the chance, seeming to agree with Harlow and Gardiner's assessment above regarding the contradictory nature of his foreign policy. James, not wanting to upset his relationship with Spain had made the kind of promises they wanted to hear, but had still allowed Raleigh's voyage to continue.¹⁶⁶ If Raleigh had not returned, Spain would still have been upset but there would have been little James could be expected to do in response and he would have been relieved of making a difficult decision. As things were, he now had to make an example of Raleigh in order to defend his own reputation and that of England as a sovereign nation.¹⁶⁷ James and his council discussed how Raleigh would be sentenced, since he had been legally dead since 1603, while appointed commissioners examined the prisoner. They agreed that Raleigh must be given a trial, in appearance at least, in order to avoid the kind of fame he had attained after his controversial treason trial fifteen years before. The council suggested a public trial, which James denied, fearing Raleigh's ability to play to the emotions of the

¹⁶⁵ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 302-303.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 305-306.

¹⁶⁷ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:132-134.

common man. Gardiner believes this was a mistake on James's part, as any appearance of a secret trial would only feed the anger of those who were already suspicious of Spanish influence and opposed the Spanish marriage negotiations. The ultimate decision was that Raleigh would present himself in front of the commissioners, who had already interviewed him, and then appear at the King's Bench for a reinstatement of his suspended death sentence from 1603. On 28 October 1618 a sick Raleigh appeared, but was stopped before he launched into his defense of the Guiana failure and informed that he would die the next day.¹⁶⁸

In the days after Raleigh first learned that he was to die and before his official sentencing at the King's Bench, he wrote one last time to James, pleading his case. In the extant fragments of this letter he noted the difficulties of his sea journey compared to his accommodations in the Tower, especially with his advancing age and declining health. Why, he lamented, would he have allowed himself to suffer so if he had only intended to deceive the King and suffer his wrath? Raleigh begged the King to believe the he "never had any hidden or any dishonest intention" regarding the Guiana venture.¹⁶⁹ Gardiner claims that Raleigh always intended to break his promise regarding violence against Spanish settlements, in a manner of speaking, because he had made arrangements that a French fleet would attack San Thomé, not Raleigh's crew. But he had always intended to return with gold.¹⁷⁰ Sir Thomas Wilson reported to the King that in one of his clandestine

¹⁶⁸ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:145-148.

¹⁶⁹ To King James from the Tower [between 24 and 28 October 1618], *Letters of SWR*, 375-376.

¹⁷⁰ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:112-113.

conversations with Raleigh he claimed his interactions with the French were “well known to yo^r Ma^{ty} for what cause it was.”¹⁷¹ So if we understand his intention to be that he would enrich King and country, then it is reasonable to believe his claim that his intentions were known and honorable. In the same letter to James, Raleigh seems to indicate that he might have intelligence on other important matters, but none of it mattered anymore. James had been motivated to repair his relationship with Spain and without considerable financial gain for England and regardless of territorial ownership, the attack on San Thomé had been something he could not allow to go unpunished.

In his final night among the living, Raleigh wrote letters from the Gatehouse prison and talked with his wife and the Dean of Westminster, appearing to calmly accept his fate. That evening and early the next morning he was also preparing for his final act of theatre, making notes for the speech he would deliver from the scaffold in Old Palace Yard on 29 October 1618.¹⁷² Unlike traditional scaffold speeches, in which the guilty were to repent and acknowledge justice having been done, Raleigh used “the occasion to make politically charged points through both action and speech,” much to the chagrin of James’s government.¹⁷³ In his final performance Raleigh refuted all of the “Points of Suspicion” against him, claiming he had no reason to lie now, as the only mercy he hoped to receive was from God.¹⁷⁴ Gardiner points out that Raleigh’s speech was carefully

¹⁷¹ *Wilson to the King* (4th Oct. 1618). *Raleigh’s Last Voyage*, 283.

¹⁷² Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 315-317.

¹⁷³ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 95.

¹⁷⁴ Many manuscript copies of Raleigh’s speech exist, with variation according to the author. I have used the text printed in Harlow, *Raleigh’s Last Voyage*, 305-311.

prepared and “literally true; but it was not the whole truth, and it was calculated in many points to produce a false impression on the hearers.” particularly regarding his dealings with France.¹⁷⁵ However, in combination with his reported physical actions – some manuscripts describe him embracing his friends, kneeling in prayer, kissing the axe, and cheering up the executioner among others – Raleigh’s performance impressed many observers.¹⁷⁶ According to Nicholls and Williams, by continuing his denial of the charges against him until the end to his audience, who expected confession, “led many observers to believe – some for the first time – that he had been innocent all along, and that King and state had put to death a loyal Englishman on contrived charges.”¹⁷⁷ The memory and interpretation of Raleigh’s life began to spin out of the control of James and his councilors, who had once again misjudged him. Before James had acceded to the English throne more than fifteen years earlier, the Earl of Northumberland had written to him that Raleigh was “one whome i wishe your maiestie not to loose,” but in rejecting Raleigh this last time James would now bear witness to Raleigh’s ability to “swaye all mens fancies,” this time against the King.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Gardiner, *History of England*, 3:150.

¹⁷⁶ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 88-89.

¹⁷⁷ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 322.

¹⁷⁸ 0 [Henry Earl of Northumberland] to 30 [King James]. *Correspondence of King James VI*, 66-67.

Chapter V

Conclusion: Raleigh's Ghost

Edward Edwards wrote that Raleigh “knew that the writings he had left behind him would someday serve as fuel to that flame” of anti-Spanish hatred in England.¹⁷⁹ His writings would also become meaningful to those who believed in the importance of Parliament as a voice of the people. Indeed, Oliver Cromwell recommended Raleigh's *History* to his son and interpreted the work in a similar way to the Protestant minister and activist, Thomas Scott; both felt that Raleigh's work suggested the use of “extraordinary powers” of men in pursuance of God's justice.¹⁸⁰ However, the appropriation of Raleigh's character by later authors and its transformation into a Protestant martyr among other things, despite accusations of atheism during his lifetime, would be nearly as impactful as his own words. The difficulties Raleigh faced in his lifetime, particularly under the Stuart monarchy, posthumously made him the ideal “agent for the exposure of treachery” at court.¹⁸¹

The Relationship of King James and Sir Walter Raleigh

This examination of the treachery of court politics through the relationship between King James and Sir Walter Raleigh began with my own incredulity at the

¹⁷⁹ Edwards, *The Life of SWR*, 1:711.

¹⁸⁰ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 150-152.

¹⁸¹ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 119.

contradictions between Raleigh's anti-Spanish reputation and his death sentence for colluding with Spain, as well as the conditions surrounding James's release of his prisoner, which both incensed and placated the Spanish. The relationship between these two men – one a charming courtier fallen out of favor, the other a foreign king and pacifist – and the context within which it played out hold the key to understanding the paradoxical events of the early seventeenth century. Over the course of this thesis I have considered Raleigh's strengths and weaknesses; he was a man of great intelligence, who was devoted to his family legacy and to his country, but could be excessively proud and a poor judge of trustworthy friends. Despite his character flaws and his mistakes, he was able to flourish under Queen Elizabeth. With his characteristic confidence, he attempted to offer his council regarding war with Spain to King James upon his accession, not understanding that James hoped to pursue peace. James did not have the chance to experience for himself the usefulness of Raleigh's council because his mind had been turned against him by those he chose to guide his transition to England. A "cradle king," James had grown into his power surrounded by advisors and like Raleigh did not always trust the right people. James was somewhat resentful of being told what to do, yet not decisive enough to make strong decisions that might close off an opportunity. With a combination of desperation and confidence, Raleigh did not suspect the duplicity with which he was confronted after his fatal journey to Guiana. Ultimately, because there was no basis for a personal relationship, not for lack of effort on Raleigh's part, James saw Raleigh as expendable.

In my estimation, Raleigh's greatest threat to the monarchy of James only came

into play when Raleigh was backed into a corner. Though he had presented dissenting opinions in the past, he was not alone in those beliefs and was simply another voice amongst a growing anti-Spanish faction. James had plans to marry his children to princes and princesses on the continent, creating diplomatic alliances and reducing religious tensions in Europe. What he failed to realize was that religious tolerance, especially his plans to marry Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta, was extremely unpopular with many of his subjects.¹⁸² Despite the common objections to the marriage negotiations and Gondomar's threats, Paul Sellin has argued that even if Raleigh had been allowed to live after his second Guiana voyage, James could still have maintained his relationship with his beloved Spain. After all, he writes, with the Thirty Years War brewing in Bohemia and the Palatinate, Spain would have valued England's friendship and neutrality more than Raleigh's life and the destruction of a small outpost in the Amazon.¹⁸³ James's pursuance of Raleigh's execution was a transference of his own guilt in gambling on Raleigh's mine to deliver something more valuable than a Spanish marriage. Though one might consider Raleigh to be a threat to James's reign, the real threat of Raleigh was that after being maligned, passed over, accused, and imprisoned he had decided, in his scaffold speech, to stop playing the game of the courtier and instead to expose what he saw as the injustices he suffered because of his distance from the King and the poor advice of the King's advisors. Raleigh's final act of defiance would prove to be fertile ground for future dissent.

¹⁸² Wormald, "James VI and I," in *ODNB*.

¹⁸³ Sellin, *Treasure, Treason, and the Tower*, 256.

Even before Raleigh's death, James and his Privy Council had discussed the publication of a declaration regarding Raleigh's crimes and punishments in an effort to circumvent any accusations of legal misconduct, similar to Raleigh's 1603 trial. James had appeared magnanimous for sparing the lives of Raleigh and others in 1603, but he was not so lucky in 1618. The unfortunate delay in putting out their *Declaration of the Demeanour and Carriage of Sir Walter Raleigh*, allowed manuscript accounts of Raleigh's final speech to begin circulating and undermined the government's attempt to control the interpretation of his crimes and demise. Furthermore, because the *Declaration* responded in part to avowals Raleigh had made in his scaffold speech it seemed to reinforce and add legitimacy to his statements.¹⁸⁴ The *Declaration* exposed private conversations Raleigh had had with men he assumed to be friends, claimed justice had been done despite the convoluted circumstances, and generally oversimplified the criticism of the proceedings. Nicholls and Williams claim that it was "read widely as an admission of error and miscalculation."¹⁸⁵ If James had hoped to silence a malcontent by quickly and quietly executing him, his misjudgment of Raleigh's ability to charm his audience and his commitment to his own legacy proved him wrong. Though he maintained the trust he had built with King Philip III, James was not so fortunate to maintain his relationship with his subjects.

¹⁸⁴ Beer, *Raleigh and His Readers*, 98.

¹⁸⁵ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 328.

Walter Raleigh's Ghost

Once Raleigh had been removed physically from political life only his words remained to speak for him and the authority of those words would be continue to be shaped and reshaped by his readers.¹⁸⁶ In the decades following Raleigh's death, his scaffold speech would commonly be published prefaced by letters he had written to the King, his wife, and Secretary Winwood, and a transcript of his 1618 arraignment. The speech would be followed by a poem Raleigh supposedly wrote on his last night, touching on themes of injustice. Together, Anna Beer claims, the "challenge to Stuart notions of justice is made explicit," transforming his private words into fodder for public discussion.¹⁸⁷ Thomas Scott's *Vox Populi*, published anonymously in 1620, had aimed its vitriol at James's "appeasement of the Spanish, epitomized by the execution of Raleigh."¹⁸⁸ In the search for its author, a Captain Thomas Gainsford came under suspicion and was arrested in November 1620. Along with a copy of *Vox Populi*, another seditious pamphlet was discovered in his home titled *Vox Spiritus or Sir Walter Rawleigh's Ghost*, which opposed "the Spanish marriage of Prince Charles" and urged "aid for the King of Bohemia." This pamphlet was never published and only four manuscript copies survive.¹⁸⁹ The specter of Raleigh would eventually find a larger audience as the memory of his life began to fade into legend.

¹⁸⁶ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 329.

¹⁸⁷ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 94-95.

¹⁸⁸ Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 120.

¹⁸⁹ Mark Eccles, "Thomas Gainsford, 'Captain Pamphlet'," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 265.

Two incarnations of Raleigh's ghost appeared after the Spanish marriage negotiations had failed once and for all. Perhaps the most famous appearance of Raleigh's ghost was in Thomas Scott's 1626 *Sir Walter Rawleighs Ghost, or Englands Forewarner*. Much like *Vox Populi*, Scott again focused on the villainous Gondomar, who this time, while delighting in his handling of James and English policy, was terrified at the sight of Raleigh's ghost and "fell downe flat to the earth vpon his face." Raleigh is described, armed in silver, and

in his right hand he brandished his sword, which was an instrument that had beene euer fatall to Spanish practises, and had not the edge beene taken off by this Foxes subtilities, I perswade my selfe (by this time) it had neere made a new conquest of the West Indies; in his left hand he seemed to carry a cup of gold filld with blood, which blood he sprinkled, some vpon Gondomar and some vpon the ground....¹⁹⁰

Laden with symbols of English strength and bemoaning the near English conquest in the New World, Raleigh's ghost frightened Gondomar into confessing his manipulations of King James and the motives of Spain. This pamphlet uses not only the memory of Raleigh's demise at the hands of the Spanish and their supporters at court, but incorporates his ethereal presence as a tool to argue that only Raleigh "would have been strong enough to save" England from Spanish treachery and aggression.¹⁹¹ Raleigh's ghost in the 1631 *Rawleigh his Ghost Or, a Feigned Apparition of Syr Walter Rawleigh, to a friend of his, for the translating into English, the Booke of Leonard Lessius (that most learned man) entituled, De Prouidentia Numinis, & Animi immortalitate: written*

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Scott, *Sir Walter Rawleighs Ghost, or Englands Forewarner* ('Utrecht': 1626), 10-11.

¹⁹¹ Sean Kelsey, "Scott, Thomas (d. 1626)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. David Cannadine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/24916> (accessed February 3, 2017).

against Atheists, and Politicians of these dayes, as the title suggests, had a different purpose altogether. The translator claimed that Raleigh, who was here depicted as an authority on religious conformity, was used in order “to make an obscure translation more profitable,” and Anna Beer questions whether the translator was referring to the “profit” of reader or himself.¹⁹² Regardless of the intention, it seems clear that Raleigh’s ghost achieved a fame beyond what the man himself had attained and apart from the actions and beliefs of his lifetime.

The posthumous Raleigh, throughout his many textual reincarnations, was exposed as a victim of royal high-handedness, an influential author, and an early proponent of exploration and empire that would soon become a major part of English policy. His strengths were countered by weaknesses that were also exposed, for instance his “frailty” at being “a courtier with more modest family assets and resources.”¹⁹³ This frailty can be seen in Raleigh’s desperate attempts to cling to the life he had created under Elizabeth and in his fantastic proposition to mine gold in Guiana. Had he come from wealthier, more respectable stock Raleigh might not have been so bold in his actions and may have recovered from his political missteps and had James’s vision for England been more English, he may have found a wise councilor and faithful servant in Raleigh. In the end, Raleigh’s voice of dissent would continue to haunt the reign of the Stuarts, as well as royal injustice, for centuries after his tragic death, until the monarchy’s vision for England became more aligned with that of its courtiers, councilors, and citizens.

¹⁹² Beer, *SWR and his Readers*, 123-124.

¹⁹³ Nicholls and Williams, *SWR: In Life and Legend*, 340-342.

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