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978-0-521-59454-7 - The Romance of the New World: Gender and the Literary
Formations of English Colonialism

Joan Pong Linton

Excerpt

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Introduction

In books eleven and twelve of *Albions England* (1612), William Warner celebrates Tudor voyagers as builders of England's commercial empire. This celebration is intertwined with a story featuring the medieval traveler Sir John Mandeville as a chivalric knight whose feats abroad win him both fame and the hand of Elenor, cousin of Edward III. Through this double narrative, Mandeville becomes the romantic precursor of Tudor voyagers, especially those who performed "enterprises rare" in service to the "Maiden Empresse," Elizabeth I.¹ Warner is politically astute in mixing romance with an imperial vision. After all, as Stephen Orgel points out, Elizabeth's royal image is deeply invested in a chivalric fiction that defines "the essence of knighthood [as] service to a lady."² Nor is Warner alone in this practice. In *The Discovery of Guiana* (1595), Sir Walter Raleigh presents himself as Elizabeth's knight traveling with a miniature portrait of his beloved queen and showing it to the natives he encountered. Raleigh saw the *Discovery* as a means of winning Elizabeth's support for his proposal to colonize Guiana.³ Although Raleigh failed in his purpose, English commercial and colonial motives clearly find expression in the romance themes of chivalric love and adventure in other worlds.

The interplay between the romance and colonial discourse, which the writings of Warner and Raleigh illustrate, is the subject of this study. This discursive interplay is especially lively because both popular romances and New World narratives were products of print, and had gained currency within a shared nexus of production and readership. The period did not, for the most part, have a clear-cut division between romance and history.⁴ Romances were stories about historical figures and events, and English voyagers and colonists were only the most recent makers of history. To be sure, generic distinctions were beginning to emerge in Tudor literary criticism and historiography,⁵ but the new awareness also prompted self-conscious hybrids such as *Albions England*. The "intermixing" of the "historicall" and "inventive," as the title page advertises it, enables Warner both to claim the authority of historical truth and to

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imagine a hero adequate to England's expanding commercial and colonial horizons.⁶

Indeed, as part of its traditional alliance with travel literature, the romance's popularization of history attests to the period's growing interest in narratives of travel and colonial enterprise in the New World. My focus is on accounts and promotions relating to the early phases of English colonial enterprise in the New World, dating roughly from the last quarter of the sixteenth to the first quarter of the seventeenth centuries. These writings fall under three main areas: piracy and gold-hunting in the Spanish Caribbean, attempts at trade with the Indians, and the discovery and early settlement of Virginia. In negotiating between popular romances and colonial narratives, my goal is an analysis that accounts for both the making of English identity in the New World and the reciprocal effects of colonial experience on the English imagination.

My approach draws on Tzvetan Todorov's conception of "genres in discourse." For him, "the choice a society makes among all possible codifications of discourse determines what is called its *system of genres*." In this light, "literary genres, indeed, are nothing but such choices among discursive possibilities, choices that a given society has made conventional." From a structural viewpoint, Todorov hypothesizes that "each type of discourse usually labeled literary has nonliterary 'relatives' that are closer to it than are any other types of 'literary' discourse."⁷ Thus while the interplay of genres brings together texts produced in different contexts, historicized readings of these texts allow one to shed light on another, and on the ways generic performances inflect ideological practices. Furthermore, as part of a dialogic process, genres are continually changing even as they are being codified and, as such, address readers and writers both in their imaginative constructions of everyday life and in their sense of agency in the world.⁸ This transformative dimension of genres underscores the dynamic relationship between texts and their historical contexts.

From an historical perspective, both the romance and the travel / colonial narrative occupy the crucial early modern juncture at which the values of a new form of patriarchy converged with the motives of an expansive economy. By the 1570s popular romances registered a new emphasis on marriage. In these "marriage-minded" romances, a thematic shift has taken place from the fruitless dalliance of courtly lovers and the endless quests of chivalric knights to marriage as a productive closure to love's labor. The lover is now a prospective husband, and assumes (or compares himself to) the role of knight, merchant, or husbandman who ventures in hopes of spoils, profits, or harvest. This productivity char-

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acterizes what Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin see as a “performative masculinity,” in their words “a recognizably modern model of masculine identity and male dominance” within an emergent form of patriarchy, one based on “narratives of individual performance” as distinct from an older form that was validated by “genealogical narratives.”⁹ The result is a “nascent bourgeois” appropriation of courtly romance which appeals to the social aspirations of readers by presenting a hero who rises socially through marriage and personal enterprise. Not surprisingly, the term “adventure,” associated in medieval romances with chivalric quests, acquired in early modern usage the specific sense of a commercial venture.¹⁰ As England’s commercial horizon expands overseas, the hero of romance typically rejects the court as a place of idle love and frustrated ambition, and embraces adventure as the means to personal fame and gain. In the narrative invention of the New World, the domestic closure that gives husbands mastery of women as property finds analogous expression in promising adventurers the domestication of a rich and feminized land.

In my description of a “nascent bourgeois” appropriation of the courtly romance, the term “bourgeois” applies to the textual creation of an ethos for a growing number of persons, largely urban-based, whose social mobility positioned them to negotiate the material changes that came with a developing market economy. My use of the term brings up the long-standing debate on “class” analysis in early modern scholarship, and a brief discussion of the subject is in order. Since Louis B. Wright talked about a middle-class culture in Elizabethan England,¹¹ scholars have questioned the adequacy of the term “class” to the period’s diversity of social estates.¹² Some even wonder if there was a stable and identifiable social group to speak of from which middle-class ideology might have emerged.¹³ While such criticism is valid with respect to social formations, “class” remains a useful category of analysis, if only because Elizabethan writers customarily divided English society into three or four principal groups or ranks according to birth, land, money, and education, and individuals actively sought upward mobility based on these criteria.¹⁴ More important, a logic of social demarcation was beginning to emerge that went beyond the traditional estates. For example, agents in commercial and colonial enterprises were hardly reducible to “the middling sort,” but came from all ranks, including courtiers, merchants, apprentices, servants, and so on, who ventured their wealth and abilities in hopes of economic and social gain.

Such a logic, which I have conveniently termed “bourgeois,” is most visibly elaborated in the period’s marriage-minded romances. Within this imaginary space, social estate specifies the position from which an

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individual acts and speaks as a social agent, while class pertains to social aspirations, one's identification with an ideal social group. In writing *Jack of Newbery* (1597), Thomas Deloney, a "balleting silk weaver" by trade, idealizes the clothier John Winchcombe, a figure of domestic and social mastery far exceeding in wealth and status both the author and the historical figure on which it is based. Such textual making of class identity is, in Slavoj Žižek's view, a name without a referent. It gains social currency when readers, in identifying with it, invest it with their own meanings and reproduce those meanings in their daily interactions and through the printing press. A concept of class thus takes on a plenitude of meanings, and these scattered semantic investments in turn acquire the illusive totality and coercive force of an ideology.¹⁵ From this perspective, individuals as classed subjects are not merely "interpellated" by ideology in the Althusserian sense but also actively create it.

At the same time, it is also clear that figures of mastery such as Jack of Newbery are constructs both of class and of gender. These constructs find cultural and historical grounding in the early modern household, headed by a master whose authority extended both to wife and children and to unmarried servants and apprentices – the latter social inferiors who could aspire, in time, to establish their own households and become masters. As a site of fluidity between gender and class, the household provides a model for a range of social exchanges in which the domestic gender hierarchy comes to underwrite other forms of cultural difference. The effect is to naturalize asymmetrical social relations and thus to sanction the material inequalities implicit in or produced by these relations. Especially in humanist writings, as both Jonathan Goldberg and Lorna Hutson have shown, the household becomes the model and basis for reproducing the ideal state, the embodiment of a powerful ideal of domestic economy that is at once familial and national in its cultural mediation.¹⁶ Such mediation has implications that go beyond English society, when inequalities built into the ideal roles of mastery inform the colonial imagination.

In this connection, my reading of colonial narratives has benefited from Stephen Greenblatt's focus on the anecdote in travel writings as a symptom of larger cultural and colonialist agendas and from Peter Hulme's interest in specific encounters between Europeans and indigenous peoples and the discursive contexts in which colonial ideologies emerge.¹⁷ I bring to this conversation a feminist perspective,¹⁸ one that attends to the ways gender roles and values are built into genre practices.¹⁹ In developing a model of cultural interaction, I find particularly useful the anthropological concept of the "contact zone," which Mary Louise Pratt describes as "the space in which peoples geographically and historically

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separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”²⁰ The concept keeps us in mind of the active role of indigenous groups or persons in the encounters, even though their words and actions are filtered through European accounts.

Pratt’s emphasis on “ongoing relations” further points to the cumulative nature of the contact experiences, although, as scholars have noted, European travelers often presumed to interpret and understand indigenous peoples upon initial encounter.²¹ This presumed knowledge suggests a narrative construction of experience to which the writers apply their own pre-existing cultural categories and assumptions about the New World and its peoples. In analyzing English travel narratives, Annette Kolodny has pointed to rhetorical strategies that gender the land as feminine. Patricia Parker and Louis Montrose have further shown that this rhetorical gendering is informed by political and economic motives.²² I would extend this gendering to the contact experiences of travelers and colonists, and suggest that these experiences are often couched in the familiarizing tropes of the domestic order and naturalizing roles of the husband. These romance constructs enable Englishmen both to inhabit an unfamiliar world and to project a sense of their agency in it. In this way, gender roles are not merely interpretive but generative: they provide a ready-made hierarchy of relations with which explorers and colonists negotiate a broader range of cultural differences. Such negotiation provides in turn a source of the cultural knowledge that shapes ongoing relations and is reshaped by them.

We can better understand the process by considering gender roles in the romance and colonial narratives as a medium of exchange between England and America. According to Marx, exchange is made possible through the mediation of value, that “contentless thing” which establishes equivalence among heterogeneous entities. Roles are the specific social forms in which human exchange takes place and value acquires specific content. Both in textual and real-life situations, roles are the articulators of social values; they provide the means by which these values are negotiated in the course of exchange, or translated from one context to another. This formulation allows us to see how gender roles in the English romance, and the social values they articulate, can inform the construction of experience in the colonial narratives. To be sure, at the textual level at least, generative elements are inevitably selective in their framing of experience, and the effect is to occlude its full complexity. Analysis must therefore take into account both the generative and the selective textualization of cultural contacts that translate and appropriate America for domestic consumption.

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Whether the ideal roles of the husband hold up to the test of experience is, of course, another question, one which the present study poses as the basis for understanding the reciprocal effect of the New World on the English. My reading confirms the record of early failures, a “troubled colonialism,” as Jeffrey Knapp calls it, that reflects back on the English sense of nation.²³ Specifically, colonial experience rendered in the narratives often contradicts the romance’s constructions of mastery, thus raising doubts about Englishmen’s identity and motives in America. Colonial promotions, on the other hand, tend to gloss over these doubts, and to present the romance of empire as history in the making. As Mary Fuller has already argued, “if the history of those early decades is about any one thing, it is about the ways in which the failure of voyages and colonies was recuperated by rhetoric, a rhetoric which in some ways even predicted failure.”²⁴ By contrast, individual romances, conscious of their own textuality, make unresolved doubts visible in their own fictions. In the process, these texts initiate a reflection on English cultural assumptions, bringing to crisis the contradictions – religious, economic, and political – already present in various ideals of English masculinity. If gender in the romance feeds the colonial imagination, it also functions as a principle of difference, a vehicle of critique, within a colonizing culture.

In advancing the argument outlined above, chapter 1 discusses the emergence of the “marriage-minded” romance and maps its points of contact with the colonial narrative. In subsequent chapters, I examine the romance figures of knight, merchant, and husbandman as familiar models with which Englishmen define their identity and action in the New World. The trajectory taken by these masculine roles roughly corresponds to a chronology of plunder (chapter 2), trade (chapters 3, 4, and 5), and settlement (chapters 6 and 7), although such activities are often interrelated. Many an English commercial expedition turned to plunder when a treasure-laden carrack hove into view, and settling involved trade with indigenous tribes, often to provide necessities for basic survival. I should also point out that while contact with Indians provided the primary source of interest, the English also defined themselves in relation to their Spanish precursors in the New World, who served as both models and adversaries in the narratives. Finally, the colonization of Virginia also drew its lessons from Ireland.²⁵

This is the case with the European scramble for gold and other precious metals in America, which fueled the rivalry between England and Spain. While the conquistadores enslaved Indians to mine the metals, beginning in the 1560s English voyagers to the Spanish Caribbean often preyed on Spanish transport ships and settlements. In retaliation, the Spanish subjected captive English pirates to the rigors of the

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Inquisition. For this reason, Anglo-Spanish rivalry in the New World inevitably translated into a rhetoric of Protestant resistance against the tyranny of Catholic Spain. In chapter 2 I analyze this Protestant rhetoric to show how it employs the gender roles of the romance in celebrating pirates like Sir Francis Drake as knights-errant defending the Protestant empire of Elizabeth. Despite the religious cover, however, the tensions between the spiritual and worldly aims of empire presented a problem for the writers of romance. My analysis here focuses on the first two books of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Spenser expresses Protestant unease about the colonial enterprise; and *A Margarite of America*, in which Thomas Lodge undertakes a veiled critique of empire from a position of Catholic loyalist dissent.

While plunder remained lucrative throughout the period, the 1580s saw a growing interest in America as a prospective market for English exports, among which cloth was the most important. Chapter 3 argues that domestic and colonial promotions for the cloth trade are in fact narratives of ideal manhood. In England, the history of cloth is one of a progressive male monopolization of the trade which displaced independent female weavers. Deloney's romance, *Jack of Newbery*, justifies this male monopoly as man's domestic mastery over women. In accounts of Drake's landing in California, a parallel mastery emerges in the "civilizing" of "savage" Miwoks through the agency of English cloth and religion. Both narratives define a model of commercial mastery through the subordination of other cultural subjects, Englishwomen and Indians, to the rule of the English commonwealth.

If the sale of cloth was an expressed goal of colonization, its legality became a concern with the 1607 founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in America. Chapter 7 discusses husbandry as not just the material fact of settlement but a georgic ideal of government through cultural reproduction. I trace this ideal in two tropes of husbandry: marriage as an assertion of lawful possession through cultivation of the virgin land, and education as a means of pacification through cultivation of the native soul. Hence the currency of the terms "planting," "planter," and "plantation" for the act, agent, and location of colonial culture. While both tropes operate in Chapman's *Memorable Masque* to align the cultivation of Indian minds with a royal marriage, the georgic ideal finds symbolic fulfillment in the Christian education of Pocahontas and her marriage to the settler John Rolfe. This propriety of domesticity and domestication is structured through a logic of oppositions. Not surprisingly, therefore, indigenous resistance to colonial education is constructed as an attempted rape both in the fiction of Caliban and in the 1622 Indian uprising in Virginia.

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In the roles of the English husband outlined above, the humanist ideal of domesticity comes to underwrite a productive civilizing mission beyond English shores. Such productive masculinity implies the presence of an imaginary female body as an open boundary mediating in the exchange between Europe and the New World. My analysis engages two lines of inquiry: William Hamlin's argument that "representations of savagery and civility derived from early attempts at New World ethnographic description played a substantial role in the thinking of early modern Europeans as they meditated upon the meanings of humanity and civilization";²⁶ and feminist scholarship on the gendered economics of the blazon and other figurations of the female body in defining the ways in which such imagination inhabits a range of colonial power relations.²⁷ This focus on the figure of woman is not meant to dismiss the actual rapes of Indian women, however; the English were sufficiently concerned about such shameful conduct to attribute it to the Spanish.²⁸ Nor do I intend to overlook other forms of exploitation within English society that engendered new masters in the name of domesticity. Rather, I would stress how such practices embodied and articulated the ideals of commercial mastery, ideals that find analogous expression in the context of colonial enterprises. In attending to these analogous developments, my analysis necessarily brings together texts that enact diverse generic possibilities in the production of a shared cultural fantasy. These texts may or may not be related by their reference to an exemplary historical event or set of events; such connection may be convenient, but is not a primary concern. Instead, my approach recognizes analogy as a habit of thought in the period's writings – the basis of a generative logic that discovers not merely the meaning of events but, with it, a motivating structure of desire.²⁹

The desire for commercial mastery motivates the production of the consumer (the mastered) in both domestic and colonial contexts. The process entails a form of fetishism, organized around the sale of "trifles" or fashion goods, and expressed in the language of Renaissance magic. As I explain in chapter 4 the trifle is likened to a talisman or "phantasmic bait" that captivates one's fantasy through the eyes, thus enabling the magus (merchant) to produce desire in his subject (consumer). This trope of "magical consumerism," elaborated through the emergent discourses of eros and science, constructs Englishwomen and Indians as consumers within domestic and colonial contexts. The discourses align the Englishmen with both the affective and intellectual knowledge and the detachment that give them power over others.³⁰ "Magical consumerism" points to a more generalized sense in this period of magic as an intersubjective means of ideological mastery. In the romance figure of

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Prospero (chapter 6), or the colonial figure of John Smith, this magic of mastery provides an “anti-conquest” model for the domestication of natives. Although periodically broken by desperate English campaigns (some led by Smith himself) to force Indians into trading their corn, the anti-conquest policy, sustained by the presumed magic of English mastery, lasted in Virginia until the Indian uprising in 1622.

In more or less visible ways, the ideals of mastery discussed above inhabit the colonial narratives side by side with details of colonial affairs and current events. Thus the ideals are being articulated even as they are being tested by experience in specific and ongoing contacts. When experience falls short of the ideals, however, English assumptions and motives come into doubt. For instance, the ideal of commercial mastery belies the fact that while the English commodity, cloth, did not sell in Virginia, the Indian trifle, tobacco, was turning the English at home into consumers, into “civil savages,” as they were called. Chapter 5 examines the cultural fiction invented to explain these commercial setbacks. In this fiction the figure of woman mediates in the fragile distinction between civilized and savage economies of consumption, between the tobacco trade and cannibalism. This gendered mediation came into practice with the marketing of Virginian tobacco in England, by which planters were “made men,” and Englishwomen were exchanged for tobacco when they contracted to be wives in the colony.

If the trifle tobacco makes visible the fluidity of the English self, the staple corn reveals a crisis of self-valuation within a colony that seemed, from its early years, unable to organize its priorities for survival. The traditional notion of a fixed social order, already undercut by England’s developing market economy, proved totally inadequate to the challenges of a new environment. Nor was the problem helped by the colony’s organization as a commercial enterprise and a unit of military defense. Chapter 6 takes up the crisis of self-worth and survival in two colonial episodes. The first is a dispute over provisions during “the starving time,” the colony’s first winter, that led to the deposing of its first president, Edward Maria Wingfield. The second concerns the factional rivalry arising from opposing policies on the treatment of Indians that led to the wounding of John Smith and his eventual departure. I approach this crisis through the projected inconstancy of Indians who were drawn into the factional rivalry through the trade of corn, and who made the most of their mediating position.

Applied to Indians, the term “inconstant” is hardly innocent, especially in view of its traditional uses as a topos of femininity in the romances that encodes an opposing logic of masculinity as a fixed essence. In chapter 6 I juxtapose Shakespeare’s self-critical rendering of

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the trope in *Troilus and Cressida*, specifically in the heroic posturings in the Greek and Trojan camps, to the rivalry between colonial factions in Virginia. In their analogous and problematic applications to women and Indians, I also trace in each a self-fulfilling prophecy when Cressida and the Algonkian chief Powhatan turn out to be agents in their own rights. As Troilus discovers, a trade-like war fought in the name of woman becomes a system of competitive exchanges in which men's worth is ultimately defined by the inconstant value assigned to women. Likewise Smith, in his war-like trade with the Powhatans and Indian tribes – an activity often accompanied by force and campaigns of terror – finds that he does not fix the price of Indian corn or the value of English manhood.

As the trope of inconstancy illustrates, the uses of stereotype mark a critical turn in the interplay between popular romances and colonial narratives. The deployment of a stereotype in a narrative enables one to substitute fantasies about others for critical reflection on one's own construction of meaning. This non-reflection is most pronounced in the colonial promotions, whose aim is to recruit investors. It is often characteristic of colonial narratives, as they purport to be eyewitness accounts or "true reports" of events. By contrast, a romance that foregrounds its own interpretive strategies is more likely to be critical of its stereotypes. The result is to unleash what Homi Bhabha sees as the "ambivalence" of the stereotype, that "by acceding to the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defence) of that position of mastery."³¹ What lies at the heart of inconstancy is Troilus' fear of betrayal by Cressida, whom he has betrayed. The fear of betrayal may likewise be a subtext in some of the colonial narratives treated in the following chapters. For the four mythological heroes most frequently associated with the period's travelers to the New World are Jason, Theseus, Aeneas, and Odysseus: inconstant lovers to the mistresses of their travels because they would be true husbands.

Perhaps the most powerful stereotype to emerge from the period's colonial discourse is the figure of the resistant native as rapist – a figure which had since then acquired special resonance within various histories and locations of colonial culture. In its early modern renderings, the stereotype draws on both the romance traditions of the wild man and travel accounts of cannibalistic tribes which, lacking the skills of agriculture, resort to raiding neighboring villages, eating the men, and raping the women. The stereotype explains the civilizing force of husbandry as the basis for an understanding of property and of civilized exchanges such as trade and marriage. This genealogy of the failed savage rapist, which Shakespeare both evokes and challenges in the anagrammatic