Articles in Peer-Reviewed Books


This article appears in an edited volume, *The Mysterious and the Foreign in Early Modern England*. I am particularly pleased with this piece not only for its own merits, but because it places my article alongside senior scholars whom I admire: Patricia Parker, Jonathan Gil Harris, and Helen Ostovich.

**Book reviewed by**


Headless in America:
The Imperial Logic of Acephalism
Scott Oldenburg

Toward the end of his Discovery of Guiana, Sir Walter Raleigh writes, “This empire is made known to her majesty by her own vassal, and by him that oweth to her more duty than an ordinary subject, so that it shall ill sort with the many graces and benefits which I have received to abuse Her Highness, either with fables or imaginations.” Raleigh wants to differentiate his travel narrative from the many popular travel narratives that mixed documentary with fanciful fiction. Indeed, throughout the description of Guiana, Raleigh reminds his readers of how careful he is in distinguishing fact from fiction. Raleigh writes, “but my intelligence was far from truth . . . afterwards understanding to be true . . . Many and most of these I found to be true.” Raleigh even ceases listing the names of the islands of the area out of fear that his narrative will look too much like the more fictive travel narratives that had gained popularity in England at the time.

In addition to proving the existence of an Edenic Guiana, Raleigh’s claims to truth were part of a strategy for reclaiming Elizabeth’s favor: “The primary aim of The Discoverie of Guiana,” writes Walter S. H. Lim, “is to convince Elizabeth I of the trials experienced and undergone by the courtier in the service of his queen.” Joyce Lorimer suggests that Raleigh was intent on seeming truthful because he was especially “sensitive to ridicule” and so, “to counter the arguments of those disposed to dismiss his entire enterprise as the product of an over-active imagination, Raleigh pointed out the growing level of French interest in the Amazon.” As Mary C. Fuller has pointed out, however, Raleigh’s claims to truth did not help him avoid accusations of fabrication nor did the genre of discovery in which Raleigh related a non-discovery, the mere hope of a city of gold. Some even suspected that Raleigh had travelled no further than Cornwall, that his “discovery” was no more truthful than any work of fiction written to gain (or here regain) the Queen’s favor. Given that Raleigh never found the City of Gold (El Dorado) he set out to claim, it makes sense that he would be at greater pains to appear more truthful than the average narrator of discovery.
Raleigh, then, writes his narrative to get out from under the gaze of skepticism and disfavor. Such a motive accounts for his efforts to name names, to corroborate information, to dispel rumors that his narrative is largely full of "fables or imaginations." However, as any reader of the Discovery knows, Raleigh included a healthy dose of those "fables or imaginations" in his description of Guiana. Raleigh may well have believed in the existence of El Dorado, but that legendary city is not the only fabulous element in the Discovery. Indeed, the more fanciful parts of the narrative captured early modern readers' imaginations, for illustrations of several wonders mentioned in Raleigh's narrative are featured prominently on the cover of many editions of *The Discovery of Guiana*, yet Raleigh describes such fictive elements as a form of "abuse." Since early modern readers accepted, and even desired this particular form of "abuse," they must have found something valuable and pleasurable in it, a story that they at least wanted to believe in. Whether readers recognized these elements of Raleigh's narrative as myth or fact, the passages about Amazons and the Ewaipanoma—headless people—seem to have been nonetheless important to readers.

Raleigh, no doubt, knew how appealing "fables and imaginations" were for his readers, but for all the fabulous elements in his narrative he is, throughout the Discovery, careful in emphasizing which elements were based on his own observations and which were based on information received from others. Still, if Raleigh wanted to appear truthful, why would he devote more attention to the fantastic headless Ewaipanoma than to El Dorado and Amazons? As will be seen, the headless people of Raleigh's narrative inspired illustrations and found their way into popular theater, while the City of Gold received much less attention from Raleigh's readers. About the headless Ewaipanoma, Raleigh writes,

Next unto Arvi there are two rivers Atoica and Caora, and on that branch which is called Caora are a nation of people, whose heads appear not above their shoulders; which though it may be thought a mere fable, yet for mine own part I am resolved it is true, because every child in the provinces of Arromaia and Canuri affirm the same: they are called Ewaipanoma: reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and a long train of hair growth backward between their shoulders. The son of Topiawari, which I brought with me into England, told me, that they are the most mighty men of all the land, and use bows, arrows, and clubs, thrice as big as any of Guiana or of the Oroonokoponi, and that the Iwarawakera took a prisoner of one of them the year before our arrival there, and brought him into the borders of Arrromaia, his father's country: and further, when I seemed to doubt of it, he told me that it was no wonder among them; but that they were as great a nation, and as common, as any other in all the provinces, and had of late years slain many hundreds of his father's people, and of other nations their neighbors. But it was not my chance to hear of them till I was come away; and if I had but spoken one word of it while I was there, I might have brought one of them with me, to put the matter out of doubt. Such a nation was written of by Maundevele, whose reports were held for fables for many years, and yet since the East Indies were discovered, we find his relations true of such things as heretofore were held incredible: whether it be true or no, the matter is not great, neither can there be any profit in the imagination; for mine own part, I saw them not, but I am resolved that so many people did not all combine or forethink to make the report.  

The description of the Ewaipanoma is perhaps the oddest passage in all Raleigh's narrative. Stephen Greenblatt has noted the narrative's affinity with epic, but Raleigh's epic search for the City of Gold and revenge upon Antonio de Berrio are here interrupted by a fantastic digression owing much to the genre of romance, a generic element furthered by Raleigh's description of the river as a "labyrinth." David Quint has observed that such romantic digressions within epics give voice to "Epic's losers" and therefore often bring about a "collapse of narrative." The passage indeed causes problems; regarding Raleigh's claims to the documentary truth of his epic travel narrative and, in that sense, causes a "collapse of narrative," but if epic is, as Quint among others asserts, the genre of empire, how might Raleigh's Ewaipanoma be construed as "losers" given that they are never defeated because they are never contacted? The relationship between the headless people, made so much of in Raleigh's *Discovery* and England's (as
well as all of Europe’s) imperial aspirations, is a complex one which occupies the rest of this article. The headless antecedents of the Ewaipanoma found in other travel narratives, subsequent descriptions of headless people influenced by Raleigh’s *Discovery*, and the fundamental issue of anatomical deformity form a constellation that appealed to early modern Europeans’ sense of a right and duty to conquer, colonize, or otherwise profit from the New World.

Although Raleigh does not invest this passage with his own eyewitness authority, his credulousness marks him as perhaps not a very reliable evaluator of what he is told. By Raleigh’s logic—“must be true because children say so”—one may equally believe in any number of folkloric figures. It may be that the allusion to children was meant to be a wink to the reader, a kind of inside joke regarding the fantastic subject matter commonly found in travel narratives of the period. However, such passages in Raleigh’s narrative do seem to have been received, if not as documentary, then, at the very least, as the most meaningful and interesting element in the narrative: the Ewaipanoma were soon to find their way onto several maps of the Americas; they are portrayed in subsequent editions of the *Discovery*; and, as we shall see, other narratives of exploration of the Americas refer to the Ewaipanoma with no apparent irony. As Gonzalo tells his fellow castaways in *The Tempest*:

Faith, sir, you need not fear. When we were boys,
Who would have believed that there were mountaineers
Dewrapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at ’em
WALLETS OF FLESH? Or that there were such men
Whose heads stood in their breasts? Which now we find
Each putter-out of five for one will bring us
Good warrant of...

Gonzalo, like Raleigh, suggests that repeated reports corroborate the existence of headless men and the like.

Even stranger than the length of Raleigh’s description of the Ewaipanoma is his immediate dismissal of the topic. He writes “the matter is not great,” but he very soon after tries to corroborate the existence of the Ewaipanoma through a conversation “with a Spaniard not far from whence, a man of great travel” who had seen many Ewaipanoma. Lest the reader suspect this Spaniard to be a teller of tall tales, Raleigh assures readers that he is “esteemed a most honest man of his word,” but Raleigh “may not name him, because it may be of his disadvantage.” This corroborating evidence is suspiciously anonymous. If the “matter is not great,” why does Raleigh devote so much time to it, and if Raleigh is at great pains to appear accurate and truthful in his narrative, why even mention what he knows looks like the “fables or imaginations” he tries to avoid? If the names of the many islands seem too incredible to mention, surely the Ewaipanoma are more incredible, and more likely to undermine the perceived, truthful value of his narrative. There are, I argue, several reasons the Ewaipanoma may have been important to Raleigh and his readers.

Possibly, Raleigh wanted to align himself with one of the most famous of travel narratives of his day, *Mandeville’s Travels*. This motive would explain his use of that text as support of the existence of the Ewaipanoma. *Mandeville’s Travels* was certainly widely read, having been translated into at least ten languages by the end of the sixteenth century. While it was not until the late nineteenth century that the author of *Mandeville’s Travels* would prove as elusively anonymous as Raleigh’s witness to the Ewaipanoma, it was already a text received as fictive as often as documentary. Aligning the *Discovery* with *Mandeville’s Travels*, then, may suggest Raleigh’s anticipation of fame, but it does not seem to be a very sound approach to ensuring his readers’ credulousness.

There must be some reason Raleigh would devote so much of his narrative precisely that which would call its veracity into question. Attempting to find a reason or reasons places the critic in much the same position as Raleigh in his search for El Dorado, but, along the way, one might be able to come to grips with the ostentatiously speculative and fictive moments which occur in so many early modern travel narratives. That is, the passage on the Ewaipanoma does not readily fit the categories Greenblatt finds balanced in the *Discovery*: “history, speculation on Spanish intentions, anthropological observations, military strategy, topographical description, patriotic appeals, prophecy, and straightforward narrative.” On the contrary, Raleigh’s description of the Ewaipanoma seems purely speculative, suspiciously so since Raleigh simultaneously dismisses the Ewaipanoma as a “matter... not great” but devotes considerable space to it and corroborates it with the tales of children, an anonymous Spaniard, and a text of much renown but questionable authority.

To be fair to Greenblatt’s assessment, the Ewaipanoma may be part of Raleigh’s genuine attempt at accumulating anthropological data, of recording exactly what the people he encounters told him. Neil Whitehead claims that the “trope of the monstrous, used as an expression of alterity, was already present in native thought before the European arrival.” The son of Topiawari, argues Whitehead, may have been projecting the dehumanizing image of the Ewaipanoma onto their rivals along the Caura river. Conversely, Whitehead suggests that the image of the Ewaipanoma may have a basis in fact: the image may be less a matter of imagined monstrosity, as it is perhaps an account of actual “cranial deformation” among the Taruma, a practice used to differentiate themselves from their neighbors. Arthur O. Friel and Raleigh Trevelyan have similarly speculated that the inhabitants
in question may have worn headgear or painted faces on their chests in such a way as to confuse onlookers. It may also be that the Ewaipanoma were an invention of the son of Topiafouri designed to strike fear in the hearts of the European visitors. Such a strategy of misinformation was employed in Europe by Lombards who, when faced with the prospect of war, spread rumors that they were allies with a race of vicious Cynocephali, or dog-headed people. Finally, given the linguistic gap, headlessness may have been a misinterpretation of statements made by Raleigh's informants.

Nonetheless, Raleigh's translation of the image of the Ewaipanoma, with its appeal to the authority of Mandeville's Travels, notes Whitehead, distorts it so that, despite Raleigh's efforts at ethnography, the image resonates more strongly with the European version of accephalism. Even without Raleigh's explicit reference to Mandeville, many of his readers would no doubt have remembered the passage from Mandeville's Travels or other pre- and early modern authorities. To get at how the image of the headless Ewaipanoma may have been full of meaning for Raleigh's European readers, a look at the accephalic peoples, described in texts prior to Raleigh's, is necessary because those earlier texts informed the reading of the Ewaipanoma.

Raleigh explicitly refers his readers to Mandeville's Travels. As he enters the East Indies, the narrator of Mandeville's Travels encounters an island where "the Fadre eteth the Sone, the Fadre, the Husbande the Wif, and the Wif the Husbande." Despite the horror of this initial description of impossible cannibalism, the island appears to have some order and is ruled by a king who "hathe under him 54 grete Yls" inhabited variously by "fowl of grete stature, as Geauntes," "littyle folk, as Dwerghes," "fowl that han Hors Feet," "fowl that ben bothe Man and Woman," "fowl that gon alle weyes upon here Knees," and "many other dyverse folk of dyverse natures." The narrator explains that "in another Yle, toward the South, duellen folk of foule stature and of cursed kynde, that han no Hedes: and heere Eyen ben in her Scholdres." Later, he explains that those "withouten Hedes" and other "Monstres, and folk disfigured" are the progeny of Noah's cursed son, Cham or Ham, who took over all of Asia. As the connection to Ham suggests, accephalic deformity here signifies a cursed or depraved state.

A well-read early modern reader of Mandeville's Travels would very likely have recognized the description of the "dyverse folk" of Asia as largely plagiarized from or at least strikingly similar to Pliny's description of inhabitants of Africa who, according to him, "have fallen below the level of civilization." Among these are a tribe that is always naked, Satyrs, "Strapfoot" who crawl rather than walk, speechless "Cave-dwellers," a people who have no concept of marriage but "live with their women promiscuously," and, important for the purposes of this essay, "[the Blemmyae who] are reported to have no heads, their mouth and eyes being attached to their chests." Later, in drawing connections between Africa and India, Pliny explains that the people have in common people "with their feet turned backward," a one-legged people, "a tribe of human beings with dogs' heads," and again "some people without necks, having their eyes in their shoulders." For Pliny headlessness and other anatomical anomalies indicate a lack of civilization, a lack of human social relations. It is possible, too, that both Pliny and the narrator of Mandeville's Travels were drawing on Herodotus, who describes western Libya as populated by "dog-faced creatures, and the creatures without heads, whom the Libyans declare to have their eyes in their breasts." Whether one looks to Herodotus, Pliny, Mandeville, or Raleigh, the monstrous figures appear in largely unknown areas outside of Europe, always on the horizon of "discovery."

It is difficult if not impossible to assess whether early modern readers were credulous of these descriptions found in Herodotus, Pliny, and Mandeville's Travels, but Raleigh seems to be using the dubiousness of Mandeville's Travels to his advantage by situating himself as a new Mandeville. According to Raleigh, Mandeville's "reports were held for fables for many years" until the East Indies came to be better known so that "we find his relations true of such things as heretofore were held incredible." Similarly, implies Raleigh, doubters and nay-sayers will come to trust the veracity of The Discovery of Guiana as Guiana is further explored and exploited. Whatever verification Mandeville's Travels had received is transformed into a promise of verification of Raleigh's claims.

Still, to claim the validity of an encounter (or near encounter) in the New World by referring to an East Indies encounter narrative has certain critical implications. Anthony Pagden's concept, "the principle of attachment," may be of use here. When confronted by the newness of the New World, argues Pagden, early modern Europeans invariably attempted to detach an aspect of the encounter from its context and reattach it to a European context: "nakedness," for example, was frequently detached from its context as a cultural norm in specific areas of the New World and recontextualized in a culture that takes nakedness as a sign of either Edenic innocence or absolute lasciviousness—in either case, a deviation from a European norm and a glaringly wrong-headed interpretation of New World cultures. As Raleigh situates his unique New World encounter in the context of a widely disseminated European's encounter with the East Indies, the Ewaipanoma lose their cultural specificity and come to be associated with the disorder and cannibalism described in Mandeville's Travels. Raleigh's description of the Ewaipanoma discourages readers from understanding the New World encounter on its own terms, that is, as simply new, and instead compels readers to think of the Ewaipanoma (and by extension all encounters in the narrative) in terms of European traditions of monstrosity. That tradition, as has been seen in Herodotus, Pliny, and Mandeville's Travels, associated monsters,
specifically headless people, with cannibalism, a cursed state inherited from Noah's son, Cham or Ham, and a lack of civilization.

However, just as Raleigh's description of the Ewaipanoma was structured by headless antecedents, so the description of the Ewaipanoma came to structure subsequent descriptions of the New World. The text of Captain Lawrence Kemys's 1596 account of the exploration of Guiana is revealing in this respect. Kemys explains that his interpreter “certified me of the headlesse men, and that their mouths in their breasts are exceeding wide. The name of their nation in the Charibes language is Chiparemai, and the Guianans call them Ewaipanomus. What I have heard of a sorte of people more monstrous, I omit to mention because it is no matter the difficulty to get one of them, and the report otherwise will appear fabulous.” Here we have new details about the Ewaipanoma—they have big mouths and are also called “Chiparemai,” and these details suggest that Kemys is not so much following Raleigh as reinforcing his narrative by relating another encounter with a native account of the Ewaipanoma. But Kemys does borrow from Raleigh the narrative strategy of describing the image while worrying about the reader's perception of its “fabulousness,” of combining in Robert Applebaum's words “a rigorous skepticism... with a vigorous credulity.”

In doing so, both Kemys and Raleigh present themselves as acutely conscious of what might go through the skeptical reader's mind, as partially participating in the reader's skepticism. I would go so far as to say that Raleigh and Kemys bring up the potential for interpreting their narratives as fictive so as to dispel such a notion; that is, in anticipating, even co-opting the reader’s objections, they attempt to present themselves as already having gone through a skeptical, scrutinizing examination of the material for the reader.

In both Kemys's and Raleigh's narratives, the description of the Ewaipanoma is made prominent. Raleigh devotes roughly two pages of text to the description whereas Kemys's text is accompanied by a marginal gloss that draws the reader's attention to the passage. The gloss next to the passage on the Ewaipanoma explains, “They have eminent heads like dogs, & live all day time in the sea. They speake the Charibes language.” Robert H. Schombergck assumes that the marginal gloss was written as supplemental information by Kemys himself. This seems unlikely not only because authors rarely prepared their own glosses, but because this particular gloss seems to run counter to Kemys's fear that his narrative “will appear fabulous.” Moreover, none of the other glosses in the text offer supplemental information as this one does. Given the tendency for the marginalia to be summary and given the echo of “Charibes language” from main text to margin, I suspect that the description of dog-headed people indicates both a printer’s desire for sensationalism and the degree to which prior narratives—like Pliny's *Natural History*, which included a description of dog-headed people—structured the reading of new narratives of exploration. Rather than clarifying matters, as most marginal glosses are wont to do, this note turns the reader’s eye to murky waters: the acephali become cynocephali, a dog’s head is placed on the headless shoulders of the Ewaipanoma.

The author of this marginal note not only buys into Raleigh’s appeal to the authority of *Mandeville's Travels*, but seems to have mistaken one narrative for another, the East for the West Indies. The narrator of *Mandeville's Travels*, again perhaps drawing on Pliny, writes of an island near Java called Nacumera where “alle the men and women of that Yle han Houndes Heads: and they ben cleyt Cynocephali: and thee ben ful resonnable and of gode undirstondyngye, saf that thee worschipen an Ox for here God.” In addition to idol worship, accounts of Native Americans which emphasized nakedness and cannibalism may have reminded early modern Europeans of the Cynocephali who, the narrator reports, “gon alle naked,” and “zif thei taken only many in Batayle, anon thei eten him.” The popularity of earlier travel narratives seems to have dominated the way in which the author of the marginalia read Kemys, and this tendency of reading new texts in terms of previous ones seems to have been prevalent among many early modern readers.

In addition to the disorder that the headless people likely recalled for readers of Kemys's and Raleigh’s narratives, readers might have remembered that in *Mandeville's Travels* the Cynocephali are “fulle riche.” *Mandeville's Travels* emphasizes the enormous wealth of the Cynocephali whose king wears “abouten his Nekke 300 Perles oryent, gode and grete [along with] a Rubye oryent, noble and fyyn, that is a Fote in lengleth, and fyve finges large.” The Cynocephali not only recall the fabulous Ewaipanoma in Kemys’s and Raleigh’s narratives, but the fantastic wealth both Kemys and Raleigh promise but never deliver in their accounts of a search for El Dorado.

The connection between the two missed encounters (one with the Ewaipanoma, the other with El Dorado) are combined in Domingo de Vera Ilargoyen’s account of Guiana, which was delivered to Raleigh in 1594, before Raleigh’s own journey to Guiana, by the priveteer Captain George Popham. Upon seeing the Indians feasting on numerous hens, de Vera investigated where the hens were to be found. He explains the results of the inquiry: “They were brought from a mountaine not passing a quarter of a league thence, where were many Indians, yea so many as grasse on the ground, and that those men had the pointes of their shoulders higher then the Crownes of their heads, and had so many hens as was wonderfull, and if we would have any we should send them Iewes harpes for they woulde give for every one two hens, we took an Indian and gave him 500 harpes, the hens were so many that he brought us, as were not to be numbed. Wee said weoulde goe thither, they told us they were now in their Borrachera and
would kill us, we asked the Indian, that brought the hens if it were true, he said it was most true.” The *borrachera*, or drunken celebration, as described by one Indian, involves “many Eagles of Gold hanging on their breasts and pearls in their eares, and that they daunted being al covered with Gold.” The Ewaipanoma of de Vera’s narrative combine, like the Cynocephali of *Mandeville’s Travels*, monstrousness, brutality, and immense wealth. To ensure that his description of the Ewaipanoma was read in terms of de Vera’s, Raleigh appended de Vera’s letters to the 1596 editions of the *Discovery*. The Indian inforner, of course, could not have known that he had uttered the buzzword of European avarice, gold. The Spanish offered a hatchet for which they were given “an Eagle that wayed 27 pounds good Gold.” Later on that night, de Vera learned that “the Indians with the high shoulders meaned ... to kill vs for our marchandize.” De Vera’s narrative seems to be the source of Raleigh’s belief that the immense wealth of the legendary city El Dorado was located just beyond the explored territory of Guiana. Indeed, de Vera’s letters with their promise of gold and the prospect of undermining the Spanish presence in the Americas seem to have prompted Raleigh’s expedition. For Raleigh, then, the story of a “nation of people, whose heads appear not above their shoulders” and who danced “covered with Gold” was a sign that he was close to his goal. In his imagination the Ewaipanoma and El Dorado were intimately linked by de Vera’s letter. This perhaps explains Raleigh’s emphasis on the existence of the Ewaipanoma in a narrative that otherwise seems strained to avoid “fables or imaginations.” Raleigh, after all, included de Vera’s letters in all of the 1596 editions of his *Discovery*, probably in the hope that his readers would come to the same conclusion he had, that El Dorado was just beyond the horizon where the Ewaipanoma dwelled and that he had served his Queen well in locating it.

Raleigh’s use of the Ewaipanoma as a sign of the proximity of El Dorado, however, seems to have been lost on his readers. The Spanish letters appended to his narrative bolstered his opponents’ claims that Raleigh never left England; that is, the similarities between his narrative and those of the letters Popham seized in 1594 allowed for the belief that he had in fact plagiarized the journey. Still, many of the texts prior to Raleigh’s that mention headless people do seem to have contributed to the fascination with the Ewaipanoma: from the earlier texts readers may have associated the Ewaipanoma with exotic, unexplored lands, extraordinary violence, a fallen state, a lack of civilization, and immense wealth.

More important than how *Mandeville’s Travels* and other such texts structured early modern readers’ experience of Raleigh’s *Discovery* is how the Ewaipanoma become such a prominent aspect of the text in subsequent publications. A 1599 map of the Guiana region, for example, features just beyond Guiana at roughly the center of the map, two Ewaipanoma. Two translations of Raleigh’s *Discovery*, one in Latin and the other in German, feature illustrations of the Ewaipanoma by Theodore de Bry and Levinus Hulsius, and numerous scholars claim that the aforementioned passage from *The Tempest* and Othello’s description of “The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / [Do grow] beneath their shoulders” (1.3.143–44) are attributable to Raleigh’s influence. Raleigh’s description of the Ewaipanoma, rather than the City of Gold, seems to have resonated most strongly with the reading public.

The image of the Ewaipanoma, then, does not seem to function exclusively as a sign of proximity to El Dorado in these subsequent representations, but proximity in general is important. John Gillies argues that in the early modern period distance and difference were intimately linked. In *Mandeville’s Travels* and Pliny’s *Natural History*, the number of marvels increases with the narrator’s distance from his home. Especially in *Mandeville’s Travels*, it is as if Europe were the center for normative civilization and all other cultures were somehow deviations from the “human.” Insofar as Raleigh is attempting to portray himself as the good courtier, the Ewaipanoma indicate the distance he has gone for his Queen. Following Gillies, Applebaum suggests that these figures exist at the limit of human knowledge of geography, as markers of the infinite possibilities of the terra incognita, what he calls “anti-geography.” Raleigh seems to make such use of the Ewaipanoma, placing them at the horizon of his expectation of the City of Gold he cannot quite locate, and this certainly seems to be the case with the 1599 map which features the Ewaipanoma at the edge of the explored area.

Acephali, cynocephali, and so forth stand not only at the edge of the blank spots on the map, however, but at the border of natural categories. Saint Augustine, for example, is confounded as to whether to believe that “certain men with no necks, who have their eyes in their shoulders” and other “monstrous races of men described in pagan history were descended from the sons of Noah.” In short, Augustine wants to know what constitutes the category “human.” Despite his promise of resolving the question, Augustine sidesteps the issue, declaring “if such races do exist, they are not human; or, if they are human, they are descended from Adam.” The narrator of *Mandeville’s Travels* believed that they were definitely human but of the “Generacion of Cham,” the cursed son of Noah; that is, in *Mandeville’s Travels*, acephali are human but of a substandard type. Pliny more subtly attempts to present a continuum: he begins by describing the isolationist but fully human Gamphasantes, then the Blemmyae who lack some human anatomy, and then the Satyrs who mix the human with the clearly nonhuman. In any case, acephali were understood to be difficult to categorize as fully human.

To return to Gillies’s equation that distance equaled difference in the
early modern period, the early modern fantasy that acephali, cynocephali, and similar deviations from known beings existed in the New World affirmed the notion that Native Americans were somehow further from human status than Europeans. That is, if the Ewaipanoma stand at the border of the human, their neighbors, the other tribes in and around Guiana, are fairly close to them in terms of distance and difference from a European norm, whereas Europeans are, according to this imperial fantasy, literally and figuratively oceans apart. The texts that informed early modern readers’ reading of the Ewaipanoma and their neighbors, then, associated headlessness not only with violence, chaos, and wealth, but also with a group of beings of dubious humanity and therefore questionable rights.

As Whitehead points out, the image of acephali symbolized alterity for both the Europeans and the son of Topiawari. In its distortion of normal anatomy, the image denies a group of people humanity or at least a level of humanity. Indeed, some three hundred years later, when confronted by a patient who envisioned his father as having no head, but with “facial features on the abdomen,” Sigmund Freud suggested that while the image has mythological antecedents, the intention was to debase the patriarch.53

While I am tempted to put Raleigh on the analyst’s couch, I wish here only to suggest that a similar debasement of a people is at work in the recurring image of the headless people be it Pliny’s Blemmyae or Raleigh’s Ewaipanoma.

The dehumanization of the inhabitants of the City of Gold is important for Raleigh and his readers, for it makes conquest much less complicated. This takes the rhetoric of vagabondage, which sought to compare Native Americans to landless peasants, a step further, according to James Boon. He finds in descriptions of New World inhabitants the idea that Native Americans were vagabonds may have limited Europeans’ perception of Native American property rights, but the association of Native Americans with the subhuman made empire even easier.54 Raleigh and others could relish the ambiguity Augustine found in descriptions of headless people, for it provided a serious stumbling block for theological or moral objections to the destruction of a civilization for the sake of profit. Only humans had the right to property, after all, and one need not negotiate with nor justify the killing of sub- or nonhumans. The image of the Ewaipanoma offered up a fantasy of an uninhabited and rich place in the New World where no competing land claims existed—not that actual land claims led Europeans to cease their colonization of the Americas—but the fantasy may have helped rationalize conquest in the minds of Raleigh and others who objected to the “Black Legend” of Spanish bloodlust.55

More important than the implication that the inhabitants of the New World were somehow less human, and therefore less entitled to natural rights, early modern notions of acephalism relate to the idea of the head as the seat of rational thought, as that which restrains bodily instincts, hence the current phrase “losing one’s head” as describing someone who has momentarily lost control of rational faculties. Much worse than “losing one’s head,” however, is never having had a head in the first place: the image of headless people conjures up the idea of a people without restraint or the ability to reason, and many of the accounts of the Ewaipanoma as brutal, ready to kill those they traded with, and so forth reinforce the image. This provides yet another reason for the appeal of the image of headless people in the Americas. From the imperialist or colonialist point of view, if the inhabitants of a desired piece of land lack rationality, one can more easily explain away their humanity or fantasize that colonization will be a great benefit in that it will bring the advances of European rational thought. Keeping in mind Gillies’s formulation of distance relating to difference, it must be supposed that for early modern readers, the rest of the tribes of the Americas were more similar to the Ewaipanoma than they were to Europeans; the Ewaipanoma, after all, are presented as representative figures on the cover of the Discovery and several maps.

The individual body, moreover, stands in as a symbol for the larger political body. As Jonathan Gil Harris has shown, “writers of the period conceived of social structure and process through the prism of the human body.” Thomas Hobbes, for example, anatomizes the Commonwealth: “by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE, in Latin CIVITAS, which is but an artificial man; though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body; the magistrates, and other officers of judicature and execution, artificial joints; reward and punishment, by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty every joint and member is moved to perform his duty are the nerves, that do the same in the body natural.” Likewise, in his own political treatise, Maxims of State, Raleigh writes, “for that commonwealths (as natural bodies) are preserved by avoiding that which hurteth the health and state thereof, and are also cured by contrary medicines.” In fact, in the preface to The Discovery of Guiana, Raleigh writes, “whatever kingdom shall be forced to defend itself may be compared to a body dangerously diseased, which for a season may be preserved with vulgar medicines.”

The human body is the model by which Raleigh and his contemporaries conceptualized society. Invariably the head figured metaphorically as the locus of proper rule, and the appearance of a monster or a bodily deformity could signify a problem in the body politic. Thus, rebellions were often characterized as a “many headed Hydra.” By the same token, the body politic of the improperly led or anarchic state was sometimes described as
headless. This point is emphasized in John Knox’s 1558 The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women. According to Knox, God

hath set before our eyes two other mirrors and glasses, in which he will, that we should behold the order, which he hath appointed and established in nature: the one is the natural body of man, the other is the politic or civil body of that commonwealth, in which God hath appointed an order, that the head shall occupy the uppermost place. And the head hath he joined with the body, that from it doth life and motion flow to the rest of the members. In it hath he placed the eye to see, the ear to hear, and the tongue to speak, which offices are appointed to none other member of the body. The rest of the members hath every one their own place and office appointed: but none may have neither the place nor the office of the head. For who would not judge that body to be a monster, where there was no head eminent above the rest, but that the eyes were in the hands, the tongue and mouth beneath the belly, and the ears in the feet. Men, I say, should not only pronounce this body to be a monster: but assuredly they might conclude that such a body could not long endure. And no less monstrous is the body of that commonwealth where a woman beareth empire.62

A body politic with “no head eminent” and its “mouth beneath the belly” evokes an image not unlike that of the Ewaipanoma, and if the social structure is a microcosm of the body of its members, then the body politic of the New World may have been thought of as anarchic or headless, like the Ewaipanoma who became the central image associated with Raleigh’s narrative. Of course, Raleigh was not looking to revive Knox’s antifeminist rant, but the image of the headless Ewaipanoma certainly suggests the European perception of the disorderly society Knox feared, one in which the carefully regulated gender and class system of Europe simply did not apply.

Part of the imperial fantasy of acephali in the Americas is that the Native Americans, who might otherwise complicate colonization, lived in a headless body politic; they were “headless” literally and politically. This is in part why Raleigh attempts to bring about admiration for his “great casique of the north,” Elizabeth I, by showing inhabitants a miniature of her head.63 Raleigh supposed that Elizabeth could institute a proper body politic for the Americas. As with the dehumanization of the native, the idea that the Ewaipanoma lacked governance paved the way for the legitimation of conquest. Thus, the image of the Ewaipanoma appearing on the title page and held up as representatives of Guiana in subsequent publications of Raleigh’s Discovery invites particular colonial-imperial fantasies of justified, even much needed, conquest.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests that the monstrous, in which the acephali are included, emerge as “an embodiment of a particular cultural moment” and are produced by the psychological mechanism of projection.64 The Ewaipanoma are certainly no exception. Whether they are a creation of the son of Topiawari or not is immaterial, for they took on a life of their own in the European imagination, mentioned in popular plays and appearing on maps and books. But as a product of projection, they reveal something about the colonial imagination of Europeans and the rhetoric they used to legitimate conquest. Bartolome de Las Casas, in his description of the forced labor Bahamians were put to, explains, “their backs come out in great salt sores, so that they look more like deformed monsters than men.”65 In his long descriptions of colonial cruelty, Las Casas reveals the nature of this kind of projection, for the monsters of European travel narratives are the products of a European imagination set on conquest. The monster is not the Native American in forced servitude whose body suffers as a result of exploitation, but the imperialist who brings that social relation about, who in turn projects his own monstrous quality onto those he exploits. As the colonizer displaced one group of humans, he displaced onto them his own inhumanity, brutality, and lack of civil behavior. For Raleigh to make this fiction work for his readers, however, he had to claim his narrative as documentary rather than fiction, truth rather than “fables and imaginations.”

NOTES

2. Raleigh, Discovery, 396, 418.
3. Ibid., 383.
7. Raleigh, Discovery, 444.
10. This possibility was suggested to me by Professor Phillip Collington of Niagara University.
13. Ibid., 445.
15. Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions, 34.
19. Ibid., 114.
23. Sir John Mandeville, The Viage and Travaille of Sir John Maundeville which Treateth the Way to Hierusalem; and Other Maruayles of Inde, with Other Ilands and Countries. (1725; repr. London: J.Davy Printers, 1866), 201. Throughout I shall be referring to this text by its shorter and more common name, Mandeville’s Travels.
25. Ibid., 203.
28. Ibid., 5.8.46.
29. Ibid., 7.2.21–24.
32. For an extensive discussion of early modern Europe’s fascination with “monsters,” see Mark Thornton Burnett, Constructing ‘Monsters’ in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
38. Ibid.
39. Qtd. in Raleigh, Discovery, 473–74.
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