

Raped By a Virgin:
Construction of Race, Sex, and Sexuality in Richard Ligon's 1657

A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores British conceptualizations of race, sex and sexuality in the seventeenth-century colonial sphere through Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*. Written in 1657, the text is not, in fact, a history of the island, but rather a travel narrative that tells the story of Ligon's journey in Barbados. At the time of its publication, the text was celebrated as a great work of natural history. My investigation, however, focuses on the narrative sequences that describe his interactions with, and observations of, Black and Indigenous women. Richard Ligon was a contradictory colonist—he objectified and sexualized women but was not a rapist; he was a Royalist who described some Black and Indigenous women as even more beautiful than the British monarchs; he participated in the slave trade and advocated for greater colonial investment in Barbados while introducing a colonial tale sympathetic to colonized Indigenous people that eventually took the old world by storm; and he was a shrewd author who concealed erotica in his “true” and quasi-scientific narrative. These complications, however, make him an important case study of the British colonial imagination, particularly when it comes to the bodies of women of color. My purpose in this project is three-fold: by exploring each of these contradictions, I examine Ligon's text in relation to contemporary theories of race, sex, sexuality, and erotica in the colonial sphere, investigate the reasons for the text's absence in academic research, and advocate for its increased inclusion in the field.

Keywords: Richard Ligon; Barbados; colonialism; travel literature; literary erotica; seventeenth-century

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Introduction

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. In 1498, he came to the conclusion that the earth was not just round, but was “like a round ball, upon one part of which is a prominence like a woman's nipple, this protrusion being the highest and nearest the sky.”¹ In 1555, William Towrson voyaged to Guinea, where he wrote that men and women “goe so alike, that one cannot know a man from a woman but by their breastes, which in the most part be very foule and long, hanging downe low like the udder of a goate.”² In 1657, Richard Ligon wrote about Indigenous women in Barbados, explaining that “The young Maides have ordinarily very large breasts, which stand strutting out so hard and firm, as no leaping, jumping, or stirring, will cause them to shake any more, then the brawns of their arms.”³

The very language of colonial expansion is gendered, sexualized, and racialized, and just as colonizers *penetrated the interior* and claimed *virgin lands*, their writing was rife with sexual innuendos and asides. Nowhere is this more evident than in their descriptions of the Black and Indigenous women they encountered, whom they described in anatomical, lurid, and at times erotic detail. I begin this thesis with these examples to demonstrate that this language was long-standing and not restricted to a certain era of colonial expansion, nor was it limited to English-language writing alone. Christopher Columbus is, of course, the seminal colonist of Atlantic expansion: discoverer of “America,” his is the name historically taught first, and the rhyme which began this introduction has heroized and memorialized him. Little is taught about him beyond his world-altering adventure (although contemporary efforts have challenged this narrative), but details of his beliefs, such as the shape of the earth, have not been canonized at all,

¹ R.H. Major, *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus with Other Original Documents Relating to This Four Voyages to the New World..* (Surrey: Routledge), 134.

² In Jennifer L. Morgan. “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulders’ (Williamsburg Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997), 181.

³ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 103.

but rather left largely unacknowledged except in epigraphs. William Towrson is a relative unknown, and his inclusion here intends only to signify the pervasiveness of such language in both minor and historically significant figures and accounts. The third author, however, is an absolutely essential, but oft-overlooked, contributor to the legacy of the colonial project in the Atlantic.

Richard Ligon's travel narrative *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, published in London in 1657 and received with great critical acclaim, is the central text of my research. It occupies an ambiguous place in the history and study of colonialism—because of his relatively compassionate approach to slavery, Ligon is generally understood as one of the “good guys” of the colonial project, even as he objectifies and sexualizes the women he encounters and advertises the island to British colonial investors.

Travel narratives like Ligon's offer a unique perspective into the colonial project: often both biographical and informational, they offer a glimpse into the perspectives of the colonizing authors, as well as an insight into the consumer demands of their readers in the way that the narratives are constructed, and the colonial adventures described. However, studies of this genre, and the colonial project in general, tend to focus on a single narrative: racist and sexist white men colonized foreign lands out of greed and assumed racial and religious superiority; they were abusers and rapists, destroyers of native customs, culture, and language, and messengers who brought to their home countries gross mischaracterizations of the people they observed and interacted with.⁴ I do not suggest that these simplified narratives, and the academic theories that support them, are false, but aim to complicate and expand them in order to develop a more

⁴ Henceforth, when I write about British colonialism I am referring specifically to the colonization of the Atlantic world, although there were, of course, other spheres where this took place.

detailed and nuanced understanding of race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial project, and the public imagination of this monumental endeavor.

The core of my analysis of Ligon's *History* revolves around two scenes. In the first, Ligon describes the mistress of a plantation owner in objectifying and sexualizing terms, yet also emphasizes her agency and sexual power over him. Interestingly, this woman's race is ambiguous, although it is clear that she is not white.⁵ The second scene takes place with two Indigenous young women; Ligon also writes about them in great detail, but then describes a rape—of himself. There is no indication at all that any sexual contact occurred between the Ligon and these two young women. Instead, it is their sheer beauty that transports and enraptures him, yet he memorializes it with “rape” rather than any less violent or sexually charged term. I am interested in exploring this language, and the figuration of being metaphorically raped by the very presence of so-called “virgins,” because I believe that this language indicates a nuance to colonial sexualization of Black and Indigenous women that is not found in more brazen, and more commonly studied and cited, texts.

One such example of this brazenness is Thomas Thistlewood's personal diary, detailing his experience in colonial Jamaica in the 1750s. Thistlewood's colonial exploits took place a century after Ligon's, but his journals are heavily cited as a primary case study in this field of research at the expense of earlier, more progressive, and more representative works such as Ligon's. It is especially useful to consider Thistlewood's text in relation to Ligon's because it is such a pronounced foil, not only because it is a grotesque example of the (sexually) violent

⁵ The question of race in these scenes is significant, though not the explicit focus of my research. None of the women in the two scenes I analyze closely are enslaved, but they are explicitly non-white. At the time of this writing, however, there was active enslavement of both African and Indigenous people, so although these women are free, they are, in the eyes of Ligon and his British readers, enslavable.

colonial mindset, but because its most shocking elements are thematically similar to the parts of Ligon's narrative that I am examining, but differ dramatically in their specific content.

In his diary, Thistlewood documented his habitual rape of enslaved women matter-of-factly, granting it no more or less important than the other contents of his diary.⁶ In his diary, Thistlewood never exhibits any moral hesitation, making his account particularly horrific. Unlike Ligon's *History*, however, Thistlewood's account has been granted a larger space in the historical record, and has been examined more thoroughly and with much more attention to detail than Ligon's narrative. This instinct to keep discussing a text that is so undeniably horrible instead of something more nuanced and complex is understandable, but it must be actively resisted in the field of colonial studies. After all, as Hartman posits in "Venus in Two Acts," "It is too easy to hate a man like Thistlewood; what is more difficult is to acknowledge as our inheritance the brutal Latin phrases spilling onto the pages of his journals."⁷ Thistlewood's diary will be referenced throughout this thesis as not only a comparison point to Ligon's text, but as a reminder of the literary model off of which the theories I will be examining are based.

In my first chapter, I offer a close reading of my primary text, Richard Ligon's 1657 travel narrative *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*. The entire text is long and wide-ranging; as such, I will be focusing only on a few distinct scenes and clusters of descriptions. I also provide a short overview of the British colonization and occupation of Barbados in order to build the historical context from which this narrative emerged. This background, along with the work of scholars such as Karen Ordhal Kupperman who have historicized the text in recent years, will help me piece together the historical significance of

⁶ Heather V. Vermeulen, "Thomas Thistlewood's Libidinal Linnean Project," *Small Axe* 22, no. 1 (2018): 18.

⁷ Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," (USA, Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

History, and advance my case for the text's relevance as an example of the British colonial mindset.

In my second chapter, I put contemporary theories of sex and sexuality in the colonial sphere in conversation, building a robust analytical framework with which to consider the aspects of Ligon's text discussed in my previous chapter. I turn to the work of Anne McClintock, Greta LaFleur, and Kirsten Fischer to facilitate this comparison, which further contextualizes the narrative in the political, cultural, and literary scenes from which it emerged. Crucially, however, applying these theories to Ligon's *History* reveals their shortcomings, and the contradictions and complications that result from this comparison support my argument for a re-examination and expansion of the academic literature on British colonial attitudes about sex and sexuality.

In my third chapter, I explore the intersection between literary erotica, the colonial project, and colonial travel narratives in particular, providing another lens through which to consider Ligon's *History*. Primarily referencing the work of Peter Wagner, Ronald Hyam, and Mary Louis Platt, I argue that approaching the text with an eye for tropes common in literary erotica at the time reveals a subtle erotic agenda, and that this new perspective not only provides insight into the popular appeal of the narrative, but furthers my claim that it is representative of a more complete range of attitudes on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonized Atlantic world, and thus deserves serious academic attention.

Lastly, in my conclusion I synthesize the work of each chapter, discuss the contemporary implications of my findings, and make the case for their continued study and explicit incorporation into the growing field of colonial studies.

Chapter I: Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*

Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* is critical to the study of British Atlantic colonization. The account, published in 1657 after Ligon's return to England, tells the story of his time spent in Barbados as a plantation manager between the years of 1647 and 1650. It is, however, much more than a travel journal: it is simultaneously a narrative travelogue, engineering manual, investment pitch, and thrilling representation of exotic and unfamiliar lands. It is also the first written account of the story of Inkle, an English trader, and Yarico, a Native American woman who he betrays into slavery, which became the subject of a global blockbuster comic opera in the late eighteenth century.⁸ The mass production of this story encouraged a more liberal attitude towards colonies and colonized people, making his text particularly important for a study of seventeenth-century British colonial encounters and emergent imperial norms surrounding race, sex, and sexuality. While there have been some studies focusing on other aspects of the narrative, few have examined Ligon's relationship with the women he encountered. For example, in Karen Ordahl Kupperman's impressively detailed introduction to the latest reprinting, she massively simplifies Ligon's descriptions of the people he observed and engaged with, describing them only as "the varied people he came to know."⁹ In this chapter, I will examine Ligon's descriptions of the Black and Indigenous women he observed and encountered, focusing specifically on two scenes in which he compares women to European artistic and aesthetic ideals, and describes his powerlessness against their sexual agency.

⁸ In the story, Inkle, a white trader, falls in love with Yarico, an Indigenous young woman, but betrays her and sells her into slavery. While the story was adapted into many forms, the moral and emotional sympathy lies with Yarico, rather than the British colonial figure.

⁹ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, introduction to *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 6.

In order to fully contextualize the writing of this narrative, a short biography of Ligon is in order, as well as an overview of the history of British colonization in Barbados. Born in 1585 as the youngest son of a wealthy British family, Ligon lived in relative comfort in London, but without the secured financial inheritance of a first son. In London, he was involved with elite society before the English Civil War, which took place between 1642 and 1651.¹⁰ Loyal to the throne, when it became clear that the Royalists were losing the war, in 1647 he chose to leave Britain altogether—a common response by those of similar class and political ideology.¹¹ While his choice was voluntary, thousands of other Royalists were sent against their will, and were effectively imprisoned in the Caribbean—a fate coined as “being ‘Barbadozz’d.’”¹² In Barbados, Ligon was “an overseer or plantation manager,” so although he still held a position of relative power, “he participated in the life of the great planters only when invited, and the salary he recommended was a relatively modest one.”¹³ After returning to London in 1650, in 1652 he was thrown in debtor’s prison, though he maintained that he had been cheated by relatives and former business partners. Regardless, his appeals for release were initially unsuccessful, and he finished *A True and Exact History* while incarcerated. Although inconclusive, records suggest that he was released from prison in 1655, and rejoined London high society until his death in 1662.¹⁴

The British frontier in the Caribbean deserves significant attention, but for brevity’s sake I will focus only on the elements most important to Ligon’s experiences there. The first settlers arrived at Barbados in 1627, but the colonial venture was not remotely successful until the end of the 1640s, by which time settler-colonizers had established a sustainable and diverse crop production system. The biggest financial boon, however, came with the development of

¹⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Ibid., 22-23.

¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

sophisticated sugar processing facilities in the 1640s, after which Barbados became the model of a successful colony, and was used as a reference point for other colonial endeavors.¹⁵ In fact, as Kupperman notes, the sugar processing system developed was “the most extensive and sophisticated industrial operations run by Europeans anywhere in the world, and Ligon was the first to describe them.”¹⁶ The strength of this sugar production was such that the Caribbean islands became the most coveted colonial spheres in the Americas—a far cry from their original use as a place for banished Royalists. In conjunction with increased economic prosperity, the slave trade grew substantially during Ligon’s time in Barbados: in 1645, two years before his arrival, there were approximately 7,000 enslaved Africans in Barbados, and by the time he left in 1650 there were approximately 20,000.¹⁷ Ligon briefly references his participation in the slave trade but provides little commentary, although he does include a few descriptions of enslaved people, as will be discussed below. This historical context is significant because it places Ligon, as both an individual actor and as the author of an extremely successful and influential text, within a growing awareness and discourse around Barbados as an increasingly successful colony. As such, this text is not the creation of an ill-at-ease Englishman in foreign lands, but is rather a literary reflection of Britain’s growing imperial might in the Caribbean.

For the rest of this chapter, I will be focusing on some of the most narratively detailed scenes of *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*. The scenes I qualify as narrative in this context are the ones that are more emotionally charged, and explicitly reveal Ligon’s subjective voice and internal thoughts, a stark departure from the rest of the text, which is less emotional and more empirical. This distinction is key to my analysis and argument because the account wasn’t intended to be read primarily as a work of narrative literature, but rather as a

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

methodical and at times purely instructional account, embellished only occasionally by anecdotes and explicitly non-objective observations and reflections. In fact, “[members of] The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge...enthusiastically read and endorsed Ligon’s book, proposing it as a model for the kind of scientific environmental study they wanted to encourage.”¹⁸ For example, he describes the flora and fauna of Barbados, the process of sugar production in great detail (including diagrams of the complex where it took place), reproduces a plantation owner’s log of expenses, including the amount spent on clothing for his servants, and spends an exorbitant amount of time describing pineapples and how to kill and eat a turtle.¹⁹ As such, I believe that his more narratively-focused passages—those that are subjective rather than quasi-objective—deserve particular attention because they are infrequent, and almost always revolve around his sexually charged observations of women.

In this chapter, I work with the text alone, and, given the lexicological focus of my analysis, many of the passages I reference are quoted in whole in order to draw attention to Ligon’s original language. Although subsequent chapters will consider the text in relation to scholarship on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere, my purpose here is to highlight the passages that have gone largely unexamined, but would inevitably have been read by his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers.

At the beginning of his narrative, Ligon shows no sympathy for the slaves he and his fellow Englishmen bought and sold; within the first few pages he writes about “[trading] for *Negroes*, Horses, and Cattle; which we were to sell at the *Barbados*.”²⁰ He does not linger on this aspect of his trade, instead moving on to the more entertaining elements of his journey—what he

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 146-155.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

terms “sea delights”— writing that “there is no place so void and empty, where some lawful pleasure is not to be had, for a man that hath a free heart, and a good Conscience.”²¹ This moment, though brief, is our first indication of the narrative’s engagement with the exotic and “other” world, and his specific use of “lawful” suggests that the laws that govern him—and his readers—in the metropole do not necessarily apply in the Caribbean, thus marking the beginning of his foray into this strange and foreign land.

Ligon is, after all, a gentleman, so establishes his “good Conscience” before going into lavish detail about a woman he meets at a party thrown by a Portuguese plantation owner whom he refers to as the *Padre* [italics in original], introducing her as the *Padre’s* “black Mistress.”²² Ligon immediately goes into lavish detail about the woman’s physique, describing her as “of the greatest beauty and majesty together: that ever I saw in one woman. Her stature large, and excellent shaped, well favored, full eyed, and admirably graced.”²³ This description toes the line between enthused observation and erotica, a line that only becomes more blurred as he goes into greater detail about this woman with whom he’s so enamored:

But her eyes were her richest Jewells: for they were the largest, and most oriental, that I have ever seen... I was resolved after dinner, to make an Essay what a present of rich silver, silk, and gold Ribbon would do, to persuade her to open her lips: Partly out of a Curiosity, to see whether her teeth were exactly white, and clean, as I hoped they were; for ‘tis a general opinion, that all *Negroes* have white teeth; but that is a Common error, for the black and white, being so near together, they set off one another with the greater advantage. But look nearer to them, and

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Ibid., 54. Henceforth this character will be referred to as the Mistress.

²³ Ibid., 54.

you shall find those teeth, which at a distance appeared rarely white, are yellow and foul.”²⁴

Later, in contradiction to Ligon’s generalization about the teeth of Black people, however, “she put her gravity into the lovelies smile that I have ever seen. And then showed her rows of pearls, so clean, white, orient, and well shaped...”²⁵ This categorization of the Mistress’ eyes and teeth is objectifying, dehumanizing, and commodifying, but it is also celebratory. Ligon is simultaneously praising her beauty and reducing her to no more than desirable parts so that she is, as such, both the subject and object of his desire. That is, her physical presence attracts Ligon, and he praises her amply, but what he is attracted to is not actually the woman herself, or even her entire body, but rather the bits of her he can categorize. As the scene continues, however, Ligon’s descriptions of her become more nuanced, and later in the party he “awaited her coming out, which was with far greater Majesty, and gracefulness, than I have seen Queen *Anne*, descend from the Chair of State, to dance the Measures with a Baron of *England*, at a Masque in the Banqueting house.”²⁶ The reference to British royalty is telling—recall that Ligon went to Barbados after the Royalist defeat in the Civil War, so this comparison to the throne demonstrates the extent of his enamoration with her, and serves as a challenge to his British readers as he actively counteracts the many other narratives that label Indigenous and enslaved people as “savage” or “semi-human.” Lastly, this scene reveals Ligon’s authorial strategy: he is both eroticizing this woman and proving his knowledge about the inhabitants of Barbados with the detail about her teeth and the implicit reference to other “oriental” eyes that he has seen and is, as such, catering to the scientific as well as the exotic interests of his readers.

²⁴ Ibid., 55.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Right after Ligon's description of her teeth, he takes his description firmly away from the quasi-scientific, writing that "withall wished, I would think of somewhat wherein she might pleasure me, and I should find her both ready & willing."²⁷ The assignment of agency here is crucial: Ligon is not the aggressor or initiator of sexual contact, but hopes that she will "pleasure" *him*. On the other hand, he tags to the end that he hopes she will be "ready & willing," which at least acknowledges the possibility that she might not be—though how receptive he might be to her resistance is unclear, and most likely inadequate. There remains much to be explored about this scene, and it will be frequently referenced throughout the remainder of this thesis, but, leaving this more theoretical examination for subsequent chapters, I will move on to the next narrative sequence.

In a rather sudden reminder of the presence of the entire exploring party, the next instance of this type of narration centers on the British women who were also on the voyage.

"...some passengers... desired leave to go ashore and took divers²⁸ women along with them, to wash their linen. But (it seemed) the *Portugals*, and *Negroes* too, found them handsome and first for their turns, and were a little Rude, I cannot say Ravished²⁹ them; for the Major part of them, being taken from Bridwell, Turnboule street, and such like places of education, were better natured than to suffer such violence; yet complaints were made, when they came aboard, both of such abuses, and stealing their linen."³⁰

Ligon makes his rejection of the potential occurrence of abuse even more clear in his response to a warning by a British officer who recommends that the party leave or prepare for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁸ Diverse.

²⁹ "Ravishment" here is used in a similar manner to the way "rape" or "assault" might be used today. The etymological origins of these terms will be discussed below.

³⁰ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 56.

attack because “he understood divers of [the] women had been ashore, the day before; and received some injury, from the people of the Island, and that it was conceived, [Ligon’s crew] were come Armed to take revenge on those that did the affront.”³¹ Ligon, however, dismisses the issue once and for all, explaining that “we told [the Captain] we had no intention of revenge for any wrong done, and that the only cause of landing, was to see the beauty of the place we had heard so much.”³² The assumption by the Captain that these men are coming to take revenge in response to the assault, or attempted assault, of English women is predictable and plays into the patriarchal structures that have maintained the idea of men defending women in order to preserve their chastity, or seeking revenge against people who harm them. However, the comment about education provides key insight into Ligon’s conception of women’s virtue and honor, and helps explain his lack of concern regarding any abuse they may have experienced. Bridwell Street, where the women on the ship were “educated,” was once the site of a royal palace, but later became the site of a women’s prison, specifically for women who were considered promiscuous or immoral; as such, these women would not have been considered virtuous or of a high class.³³ It is based on this background that Ligon claims that they did not—or rather could not—suffer sexual abuse or violence, because they knew what it was and thus had the foresight and skills to protect themselves. It would seem that the corollary of this idea is that women who haven’t had such an “education” are susceptible to violence and thus need male protection. This, however, is not what transpires in the next encounter he describes, which centers around his interaction with young Indigenous women.

³¹ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 56.

³² *Ibid.*, 56.

³³ Charles Webster, *Health, Medicine, and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 151.

In this scene, Ligon's transition from scientific and observative to semi-erotic narration is seamless; he begins by giving minute descriptions of the spring from which he and his crew are gathering water— "about 60 foot, the Diameter about 20"—before turning instead to the "Nymphs that repair thither."³⁴ He sets the scene carefully, describing "many pretty young *Negro* Virgins, playing about the Well," before singling out two who catch his eye. As in his description of the woman at the beginning of his narrative, Ligon takes a quasi-scientific tone here, describing these girls' body parts one by one as if they were exhibits to be closely noted, rather than autonomous individuals being interrupted by a crew of British colonizers. Additionally, as if trying to prove that he is artistically, rather than sexually, attracted to these girls, he references "*Albert Durer, the great Master of Proportions,*" as well as *Titian, or Andrea del Sarto,*"³⁵ before writing that the beauty of these young girls is in their "softness of muscles, and curiosity of Coloring."³⁶ This presentation of the young women as paragons of western European artistic ideals is clearly celebratory, but also serves to render them with no more agency than pieces of art to be viewed and collected by the very people most likely to be reading Ligon's narrative. Additionally, as in his description of the Mistress, this comparison serves to challenge those readers to reconsider their conception of the Indigenous body, which had been, in many narratives of the time, associated with strangeness or even deformity. In an even more explicit expression of this conflation of humans with inanimate artwork, he admits that "To express all the perfections of Nature, and Parts, these Virgins were owners of, would ask a more skillful pen,

³⁴ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 58.

³⁵ Titian and Andrea del Sarto were both popular Italian painters. Albert Durer was a highly influential German painter and printmaker with a particular interest and focus on human proportions, and he established what he termed "ideal" proportions of the human body. As such, Ligon's reference suggests his belief in both the subjective *and* objective beauty of the young girls he's observing. For more information, see Giulia Bartrum's *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*.

³⁶ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 58.

or pencil than mine,” but cannot seem to help himself, so decides that “a word or two would not be amiss.”³⁷

Wanton,³⁸ as the soil that bred them, sweet as the fruits they fed on; for being come so near, as their motions, and graced might perfectly be discerned, I guess that Nature could not, without help of Art, frame such accomplished beauties, not only of colors, and favor, but of motion too, which is the highest part of beauty...Innocent, as youthful, their ages about fifteen. Seeing their beauties so fresh and youthful, withall the perfections I have named, I thought good to try, whether the uttering of their language, would be as sweet and harmonious, as their other parts were comely.³⁹ And by the help of a Gentleman that spoke *Portuguese*, I accosted them; and began to praise their beauties, shapes, and manners of dressings; which was extremely pretty.⁴⁰

Ligon quickly shifts back to what he would deem more objective and less sexual observations, noting the quality of their hair (“not shorn as the *Negroes*...But in due proportion of length”), body decorations (“some small beads, of white Amber, or blue bugle, sometimes of the rare flowers that grow there”), and clothing (“Petticoats of Striped silk”).⁴¹ In the middle of this description of their clothing, however, Ligon veers into more sexually charged descriptions once more, writing that, due to their clothing, “a great part of the natural beauty of their backs and necks before, lay open to the view, their breasts round, firm, and beautifully shaped.”⁴²

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ Wanton, as used here, likely means “playful,” not “promiscuous,” which is the more common contemporary definition. *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. “wanton.”

³⁹ Beautiful; attractive.

⁴⁰ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 59.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Ligon's enthusiasm in this encounter is striking: he has firmly stepped away from scientific observation and into a descriptive ecstasy, and the goal of his narrative at this juncture seems no longer to be to entertain an objective discourse, but rather to indulge his sexual desires under the weak guise of honorable and intellectual observation. His efforts to speak to these young women are reminiscent of his efforts to make the mistress smile so that he could see her teeth; in this case, he gives the young girls "*English spirits*" and "a piece of silver and silk Ribbon," but eventually admits defeat, writing that they didn't have "the confidence to speak, but in mute language, and extreme pretty motions, showed they wanted neither wit nor discretion to make an Answer."⁴³ One final extended quote closes this scene and is, I believe, the epitome of the contradictions and blurred lines between the scientific, sexual, and erotic in the narrative.

I thought I had been sufficiently armed with the perfections I found in the Padre's Mistress, as to be free from the darts of any other beauty of that place in so short a time; but I found the difference between the young fresh beauties, and those that are made up with the addition of State and Majesty: for though they counsel and persuade our loves; yet young beauties force, and so commit rapes upon our affections.⁴⁴

The use of "rape" here is fascinating and disturbing, and warrants closer investigation. The contemporary definition of rape as sexual assault has been in place for centuries—the Oxford English Dictionary cites the first instance of such usage in 1425.⁴⁵ However, another definition of the term was also in use at this time: "To take or seize (something) by force," first used in 1387.⁴⁶ Lastly, there is a third and now-obsolete definition of rape: "to transport with

⁴³ Ibid.; Hereafter, these two young women will be referred to as "the women by the well."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.vv. "rape."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

delight, to enrapture.”⁴⁷ Although some ambiguity could arise from these multiple definitions in other texts, Ligon’s use of the term here is clear: although his use of “force” nods to the violent and sexual definition of “rape,” the fifteen-year-olds are not actually sexually assaulting him, nor are they approaching him, let alone in a violent manner. What they are doing, however, is enrapturing him—their beauty is such that he is a victim, albeit a happy and willing one. There is, however, an undeniably sexual element of his use of “rape” here, making it clear that whatever real or imaginary relation he has with these young women is sexual in nature, at least in his mind. Recall here, as well, the idea of agency explored in the scene with the mistress, when Ligon writes about her “pleasuring” him. In both cases, the gendered and racialized hierarchy that might be expected in colonial history and literature is reversed: the Indigenous women hold sexual power over the white male colonizer.

Ligon clearly anticipates some negative reaction to this scene, because he immediately begins defending himself, recognizing that readers “will think it strange, that a man of my age and gravity should have so much to do with beauty and love.”⁴⁸ However, he provides three defenses. Firstly, he is not attracted to the young women sexually or erotically, but simply because he appreciates art; secondly, he had been at sea for so long that anything looks beautiful; and lastly, he was bound to be enraptured by something because the land was so “beautiful and lovely [that he] could not but secretly harbor in it the spirit of love, a passion not to be governed.”⁴⁹ This defensiveness is fascinating because it suggests that Ligon did have some awareness of the optics of this scene, as well as knowledge of the marketability and economic potential of this narrative. The fact that he still included it, however, suggests a trust that any

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, ed. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 6. Ligon was 72 years old at the time of the text’s publication.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 61.

discomfort his readers might have would be counteracted by the thrill of this interaction and that, as it might be termed today, *sex sells*. Lastly, as he did with the Mistress, Ligon compares the beauty of these two young women to the British women “made up with the addition of State and Majesty,” once again highlighting the extent of his enamoration with them, as well as his more liberal attitudes towards the bodies of non-British people.

Of all the instances of interaction between Ligon and Indigenous girls and women, the scenes with the mistress and the women by the well are the most developed and sexually charged. They are not, however, the only times he describes the women he interacted with and observed. For the sake of both thoroughness and brevity, I will quote each such instance below without performing an in-depth analysis as I have done for the previous scenes. Notice, however, the continuation of trends outlined in the previous scenes, as well as the complicated interaction between sexualization, objectification, and quasi-scientific documentation in his descriptions.

About slaves, Ligon writes:

Chaste they are as any people under the Sun; for, when the men and women are together naked, they never cast their eyes towards the parts that ought to be covered; and those amongst us, that have Breeches and Petticoats, I never saw so much as a kiss, or embrace, or a wanton glance with their eyes between them.⁵⁰

About enslaved Black women, Ligon writes:

...these women are faulty; for I have seen very few of them, whose hips have been broader than their shoulders, unless they have been very fat. The young Maids have ordinarily very large breasts, which stand strutting out so hard and firm, as not leaping, jumping, or stirring, will cause them

⁵⁰ Ibid., 97.

to shake any more, than the brawns of their arms. But when they come to be old, and have had five or six Children, their breasts hang down below their Navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost down to the ground, that at a distance, you would think they had six legs.⁵¹

About Indigenous women, Ligon writes:

[The] women have very small breasts, and have more of the shape of the *Europeans* than the *Negroes*.⁵²

About “an *Indian* woman, a slave in the house,”⁵³ Ligon writes:

[She] was of excellent shape and color, for it was a pure bright bay; small breasts, with the nipples of a porphyry⁵⁴ color.”

Ligon uses every observation of Indigenous or enslaved women as an opportunity to describe their bodies in a confluence of objectifying, sexualizing, and celebratory narration, rendering them simultaneous objects to be ogled at, and agentic colonial subjects that can force, enrapture, and even rape white men. It is this tendency that makes the text especially important for scholarship on colonial race, sex, and sexuality, not due to its contradictions alone, but for the way it challenges the common assumptions applied to this era—that women of color were always, and inherently, no more than objects to be abused and traded among men.

⁵¹ Ibid., 103.

⁵² Ibid., 106.

⁵³ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁴ A shade of purple.

Chapter II: Theoretical Frameworks of Race, Sex, and Sexuality in the British Colonial Sphere

In this chapter, I will explore existing academic work on race, sex, and sexuality in the seventeenth- and eighteenth- century Atlantic colonial sphere to investigate the way Ligon's narrative intersects with, and at times directly contradicts, leading theories of the era's conceptions and (re)productions of these themes. Contemporary popular dialogue often assumes an element of chastity and conservatism to this era, but that is not the complete story. In his 1970 text *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault writes that in the seventeenth century "sexual practices had little need of secrecy...it was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will."⁵⁵ This context is key to understanding the publication and popularity of *A True and Exact History*: although it was largely billed as a scientific text, the references to nudity, pleasure, sex, and sexuality explored in the previous chapter likely would not have been entirely unfamiliar to his readers. As such, *History* is not significant just because it references these themes, but because the way Ligon presents them contradicts and complicates theories of race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere.

Histories of colonial sexuality tend to focus on the most overt and violent examples, such as Thistlewood's notoriously graphic diary, giving rise to theories that emphasize pronounced gender and racial hierarchies, most typically represented as the (white) male adventurer penetrating the feminine racialized interior. Ligon's relatively mild *History* does not quite match this schema, so has been sidelined in the growing field. However, that it does fit within some of these preeminent theories make the moments in which it deviates all the more significant. Given

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. (New York: Random House, 1990), 3.

the text's circulation and canonization in early transatlantic English literature, this sidelining is unlikely to be accidental or due to no more than a historical oversight; none of the sources I discuss even reference Ligon, but do reference far more obscure texts that fit more neatly into their historic and theoretical frameworks. These scholars could not have helped knowing about Ligon, but seem to have explicitly left him out of their scholarship on colonial sexuality, perhaps because of the narrative's complexity and the difficulty of assigning it a specific genre classification. By examining Ligon's text in relation to these theories, I will demonstrate not only what can be gained by its inclusion in academic research, but its importance to the British imagination of the colonial sphere.

Given the spatial nature of colonial efforts, research on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere must start with a discussion of geography. As Foucault explains, sex was often relegated to this "other," and "if it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere... The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance."⁵⁶ Although he fails to consider the interaction between sex, sexuality, and colonialism, I believe that what Foucault deems "elsewhere" could extend to the colonial sphere as well, a distinction particularly relevant to the travel narrative genre. Expanding on this point, in her 2018 book *The Natural History of Sexuality in Early America*, Greta LaFleur writes that in colonial texts "vice, and sexual vice in particular, is represented quite explicitly as a spatial problem."⁵⁷ As such, she suggests that conceptions of sex in the colonial sphere were not simply an extension of conceptions of sex in Britain, but were developed into powerful tools of colonialism that were wielded by—and occasionally against—settler-colonizers.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Greta LaFleur, *The Natural History of Sexuality in Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018, 8.

LaFleur's book, which explores the scientific, and subsequently social, development of early colonial perspectives on sex and sexuality, is a natural extension of Foucault's text, and serves as a key starting point for understanding Ligon's *History* in the context of the colonial project. One of her key claims is that conceptions of sexuality were intrinsically tied to race. She writes that "thinking about sex was frequently articulated through an idiom of racial or ethnic specificity," and that individual habits "provided a framework in which both sexual trespass and racial difference could be explored."⁵⁸ In the case of Ligon's *History*, race is certainly explored in the sexually charged narrative sequences about the Mistress and the women by the well, where the characteristics of the individuals he is interacting with are meticulously noted, but he also uses the opportunity to make assertions about, for example, the teeth of all Black people. LaFleur's statement about sexual trespass, however, is more difficult to apply directly to Ligon's text. Of course, the entire colonial endeavor is an act of trespass, and in the scene with the young women, for example, Ligon is certainly geographically trespassing and his descriptions are undeniably sexual in nature, but it is difficult to ascertain who is doing the sexual trespassing. From a contemporary perspective, the easiest, and perhaps automatic, answer is that Ligon is the trespasser. However, applying our modern sensibilities to this scene runs the risk of missing the crucial nuances previously explored because, in Ligon's telling, it is the young Indigenous women who are sexually trespassing onto a white male body—or, rather, a white male mind. Although this divergence could be dismissed as a mere anomaly, I believe it reveals an alternative approach to the understanding of race, sex, sexuality, and colonized people assumed to be standard in the seventeenth-century.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 116.

Closely associated with the idea of sexual trespass is lust which, as LaFleur explains, almost always revolved “around the bodies of women and people of color.”⁵⁹ This focus on types of bodies was not confined to travel narratives, and made its way into social and cultural understandings of race and sex; additionally, the “sheer repetition of specific types of stories, especially when these stories showcase and at times sensationalize the same questions about human difference” were incorporated into practices of “natural historical writing.”⁶⁰ Once again, however, this theory is complicated when applied to Ligon, because he does not repeat these stories. This exception would be unremarkable but for the fact that *History* was wildly popular, hailed as a premier example of the “natural historical writing” LaFleur focuses on, and originates the Inkle and Yarico story, which contradicts the more conservative views of colonized people at that time, and in turn ended up being so reproduced that it inspired a large-scale shift in the narratives of white-Indigenous relationships.⁶¹

Another key source in the investigation of colonial conceptions of race, sex, and sexuality is Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (1995). As a foundational premise, McClintock argues that “gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise,” and that a key factor of “Western imperialism [was] the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women.”⁶² One of her most significant contributions to this realm of study is her investigation into the fantastical nature of the colonial enterprise, and she writes that “long before the era of high Victorian imperialism, Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination—a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶¹ See Frank Felsenstein’s *English Trader, Indian Maid*.

⁶² Ibid., 7, 3.

fears.”⁶³ This idea of the Americas as “porno-tropics” is essential: the colonial sphere was not only the site of imperial expansion, but became a site of erotic liberation, in practice as well in print, that could not have been so freely engaged in within the metropole.

McClintock expands on the element of fear she includes in her definition of porno-tropics, writing that the feminization of land (i.e. virgin territories) “betrays acute paranoia and a profound, if not pathological, sense of male anxiety and boundary loss” on the part of the colonizers, who find themselves far from their homeland, and a distinct minority among unfamiliar colonial subjects.⁶⁴ Although Ligon does not refer to fear in his feeling of powerlessness against beautiful Indigenous and Black women, I imagine that the idea of such powerlessness was one that sparked fear in British readers, who may have felt that the imperial grip was loosening if white British men could no longer hold their own against Black and Indigenous women.

Like LaFleur, McClintock also strongly emphasizes the strictly geographic element of colonialism, positing that the physical proximity of colonizers and colonized formed a “dangerous and contradictory liaison—between imperial and anti-imperial power; money and sexuality; violence and desire; labor and resistance.”⁶⁵ Additionally, she asserts that “female figures were planted like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the contest zone.”⁶⁶ This idea about ambiguity applies well to Ligon’s *History*, especially in his interactions with the Mistress and the women by the well: there is linguistic ambiguity in his attempts to communicate with the women, artistic ambiguity in the nature of his descriptions of them, sexual ambiguity in his erotic desire and weakness, and even material ambiguity in his

⁶³ Ibid., 22. Although unrelated to my research and not the topic of her studies, McClintock’s problematic conflation of “European” with *Western* European in this quote fails to address the brutal colonization of Eastern and Southeastern Europe, perpetuating the othering and dismissal of these European states.

⁶⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

effort to attract them with gifts of English goods. As such, the combination of the fear and paranoia of male colonizers, the “porno-tropic” nature of the colonized world, and the ambiguous borders between Europeans and the “other” paint a much more nuanced version of the colonial experiment than the strict colonizer-colonized relationship otherwise assumed, a nuance particularly evident in Ligon’s text.

Furthermore, McClintock argues that imperialism took “haphazard shape from myriad encounters with alternative forms of authority, knowledge and power.”⁶⁷ These three facets—authority, knowledge, and power—can be found in Ligon’s *History* on both a micro and macro scale. On the micro-level, Ligon demonstrates his authority and knowledge in his quasi-objective descriptions of the people of Barbados,⁶⁸ but appears utterly powerless against the beauty of the women he encounters, despite his theoretically greater position of power as a white male in a colonized land. On the macro scale, however, Ligon asserts his knowledge and authority in the very title of the narrative (*A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*), and the text’s popularity and appeal points to its power and lasting influence on British perspectives of the colonial endeavor.

Lastly, McClintock ties together the conception of both virgin land and virgin girls and women, writing that “within patriarchal narratives, to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason.”⁶⁹ To be sure, this theory applies well to colonial literature in general, and certainly to the colonial project, but, once again, does not quite account for Ligon’s text. In his description of being raped by figures that McClintock and other theorists would otherwise consider the inherent victims of oppressive male sexuality, he upends the traditional gender and race hierarchy, once

⁶⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

⁶⁸ This also applies to his many descriptions of flora and fauna throughout the text.

⁶⁹ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 30.

again challenging not only the preeminent theories of sexuality and colonialism, but also the more conservative and oppressive colonial narratives of his time.

Kirsten Fischer joins this discussion in her article “The Imperial Gaze: Native American, African American, and Colonial Women in European Eyes,” in which she focuses specifically on the literary production of narratives of sex, sexuality, race, and colonialism. She pays particular attention to the idea of “savagery” in colonial interactions, explaining that “erotic images of Indian women could create a ‘dilemma for a male colonist, as expression of the erotic may signal his own lapse into savagery.’”⁷⁰ Considering the sexually charged nature of Ligon’s descriptions of the Mistress and women by the well, it becomes evident that Ligon actively contradicts the association between Indigenous women, eroticism, and savagery. Instead, not only does he liken them to British royalty, but he displays his own artistic sophistication in his detailed and celebratory descriptions of their bodies. Fischer also writes specifically about the first encounters between colonizers and the colonized, writing that “colonists ogled scantily clad Indians, fantasizing about native women as sexual objects, and produced minutely detailed descriptions of their physical appearance.”⁷¹ This aligns precisely with Ligon’s descriptions of the Mistress and women at the well; they are detailed and undeniably sexual, and his fantasies of interacting with them, though unsuccessful, were nonetheless potent enough to be recorded and published.

Finally, Fischer argues that there were two primary ways that Black and Indigenous women were depicted in the colonial setting: she writes that “[s]ome Europeans imputed to sexually available Indian women a mercenary nature; others described them as innocents in a precivilized Eden.”⁷² In the scene of his “rape,” Ligon does not suggest that the young women are mercenary, although his categorization of their body parts, like his descriptions of the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 7.

⁷² Ibid., 6.

mistress, suggests that although he does not do so, there is potential to commodify them. Instead, he considers them more akin to “innocents in a precivilized Eden.” While he certainly grants them innocence, however, the classification of foreign and colonized land as “precivilized” in this case is more complicated. Although the interaction itself takes place in a classic idyllic scene—pretty young women by water—much of the text is spent on the sophisticated sugar processing technology created and successfully implemented on the island. And, given that British people oversaw the plantation and enforced the work of enslaved and paid laborers, there was likely a sense of intellectual superiority and greater civilization, although it is not discussed in the narrative. Fischer does, however, write that “despite the derisive tone in many accounts of Indian women, a great deal of admiration also infused colonial depictions of their bodies... in the context of a European gender hierarchy, Indian women could be idealized and denigrated at the same time, without contradiction, while reasserting the European male viewer’s sense of superiority over the object of his gaze.”⁷³ Of all the theories explored in this chapter, the first part of this argument comes the closest to describing Ligon’s descriptions of the Mistress and the women by the well, but the second part leaves much to be explained. In the two descriptions of women I have focused on, Ligon never suggests any superiority over them, and is instead completely powerless against their bodies. However, this deviation highlights the uniqueness and importance of the text, in that it challenged the norms of colonial representation and imagination in the British metropole. As such, although Fischer’s theories do not entirely explain Ligon’s *History*, they are essential to understanding not only its uniqueness, but the significance of its lack of conformity to the typical representation of colonized lands and people.

In this chapter, I have used scholarship on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere to examine Ligon’s *History* from a theoretical perspective. That the narrative is not entirely in

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

line with these theories does not mean that it is too much of an outlier to study, nor do I intend at all to suggest that these theories are without merit. However, using the text to explore, compare, and critique the work of these theorists has not only added a significant counterexample to their arguments, but has demonstrated both the uniqueness and importance of Ligon's *History* in the way that it disrupts and complicates their claims. In fact, the model of colonial sexual engagement developed by Ligon illuminates the contradiction and complexity of the sexual fantasies inherent in the colonial project, forcing the conclusion that British colonial rule was not just a matter of violence and aggression, but included subtle and nuanced coercion, countering our expectation of brutally hierarchical and [sexually] invasive colonial rule.

Chapter III: Literary Erotica in the British Public Imagination of the Colonial Project

In my previous chapters, I have conducted a close reading of Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History*, and have joined the conversation on race, sex, and sexuality in the early British colonial sphere. In this chapter, I will outline the existing scholarship on sexual freedom and opportunity in the British imperial expansion, explore the relationship between British literary erotica, travel, and the concept of the "other," and briefly discuss the travel narrative genre itself, specifically addressing the way it engages in the conceptualization of sexual exploits abroad. Each of these topics will be considered in relation to Ligon's *History* in order to further contextualize its relationship with consumer interests beyond the purely scientific, demonstrating that the text is an early example of the very distinct intersection between erotic and travel literature and further asserting its significance in the study of British constructions of these themes.

Some of the ideas presented in this chapter are reminiscent of theories explored in the previous chapter, but I believe their inclusion here is appropriate because it demonstrates their validity, in that the authors come from different fields, yet have reached similar conclusions about the role of race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial project. Furthermore, this relevance to Ligon's text serves to accentuate the significance of the narrative, and its contribution to, and complication of, these ideas. Additionally, a number of these theorists suggest that the trends they're mapping started significantly after the publication of Ligon's text, but they nonetheless provide extremely relevant analytical frameworks for my investigation into the narrative, indicating that the themes tracked in these academic studies originated earlier than their posited start-date, and that Ligon's text was a forbearer of colonial attitudes and perspectives that would only be more widely adopted over a century later.

In his book *Empire and Sexuality*, Ronald Hyam argues that the entire project of British colonial expansion would not have been nearly as successful as it was “without the ease range of sexual opportunities which imperial systems provided.”⁷⁴ Like LaFleur, he emphasizes the lawlessness of the colonial sphere, explaining that “Among some white traders and hunters there was ‘a partial equation of frontier life...with sexual freedom and indulgence...a no-man’s land in terms of moral conduct.’”⁷⁵ Although Ligon was not a trader or hunter, I do not believe that such perspectives could reasonably have been restricted to those roles alone, but were shared by colonists and explorers, as well as the general British public. This moral freedom is clearly reproduced in, for example, Thomas Thistlewood’s diaries, as described in the introduction: although his cruelty and immorality cannot be attributed to being in foreign lands alone, the practical and emotional ease with which he carried out and documented his serial rapes would likely have been more difficult in Britain. As always, however, in Ligon’s case this is much more complicated. Ligon certainly exhibits some desire for sexual indulgence in his hope that the Mistress will “pleasure” him, and there is an element of sexual freedom in the extent of his attraction to the women by the well, but at every turn he emphasizes his morality, good conscience, and weakness in the face of the women’s beauty. However, it would be inaccurate and irresponsible to disregard the element of sexual opportunity in his narrative and the way that it may have attracted readers—after all, the account was intended to be engaging and enticing as well as informative, and served as an advertisement for further travel to, and investment in, Barbados.

Regarding the intersection of British literary erotica and [colonial] travel, Hyam explains that tales of sexual encounters were not relegated to colonizers alone, and were extensively

⁷⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. (Manchester; New York: University Press, 1990), 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

reproduced in the form of British literary erotica. In fact, he writes that “it can hardly be an accident that all the classics of British erotic literature were written by men who were widely traveled inside and especially outside Europe.”⁷⁶ While Hyam posits that this took place in the eighteenth century, I believe that Ligon’s narrative demonstrates that it was already forming in the seventeenth century. After all, his text was critically celebrated as a prime example of natural scientific writing, and while it could not be read without the sexually-charged narrative sequences, its primary audience was scientifically-inclined elite men who, trusting the narratives of traveling elites, could engage in what today we might call “armchair tourism,” which satisfied their curiosity about exotic and faraway lands while they celebrated empirical knowledge. However, these travel narratives were almost never purely ‘scientific,’ but rather incorporated erotic references and themes.

In his book *Eros Revived*, Peter Wagner makes this connection explicit, writing that a key factor of the success of ‘oriental tales’ and erotic literature was “their similarity with the pornographic novel, both formally and thematically. Invariably, the tales figure a narrator reporting from the viewpoint of a voyeur...If one adds to this the location, frequently a ‘nowhere land’, the step from the erotic oriental tale to the pornographic novel seems to be a short one indeed.”⁷⁷ Given its scientific intent and reception, I do not believe that Ligon’s *History* can or should be wholly classified as an erotic work, but the extent of his observations and descriptions of women’s bodies, as well as his overt references to sex, indicate a blending of styles—erotic and travel literature—motivated by his own erotic imagination, the standard style of these types of narratives at the time the text was written, an appeal to the less scientifically interested of his readership, or any combination of the three.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁷⁷ Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988), 208; In this case, “oriental tale” equates to “colonial tale.”

To illustrate this point, I present an additional source to examine side-by-side with Ligon's *History*: Richard Head's *The English Rogue*, published in 1666, a mere seven years after *History*.⁷⁸ The text was written as a satire and served as a warning about the consequences of immoral conduct, so comparison with Ligon's *History* must be approached with care.⁷⁹ However, I believe that such comparison is appropriate because the similarities between the texts reveal Ligon's engagement with erotic literature—even if that literature is satirical— further demonstrating his genre-bending engagement with educational, enticing, and erotic storytelling.

One scene in *The English Rogue* is strikingly similar to the well scene in Ligon's *History*. Just as Ligon writes that the young women at the well are “virgins,” Head writes that the three women he is observing are “maidens (as I suppose).”⁸⁰ He also describes their clothing and the way it leaves parts of their bodies exposed for viewing, writing that “they go naked to their middles, where the better sort are covered with a fine transparent taffaty or dainty lawn, which by a cunning device is so made to open, that as they pass along, the least air discovers all, to all men's immodest views.”⁸¹ Even more significantly, he too discusses sex and sexual agency, writing that “Sitting down amongst [the women], they entertained me with as much civility as they were endued withal, and courted me after their amorous fashion,” and that he “dallied with [one of the women] so long, till that lust conquered my fancy,” before he was interrupted.⁸²

Head is not nearly as passive here as Ligon is in the well scene, but, instead of assigning himself agency in this encounter, he splits it three ways. At first, he writes that the women

⁷⁸ The complete title of the text is *The English rogue described, in the life of Meriton Latroon, a witty extravagant Being a compleat discovery of the most eminent cheats of both sexes.*

⁷⁹ This satirical nature of the text is made explicit in the title page, which warns readers to “Read *but don't Practice: for the Author findes, They which live Honest have most quiet minds.*”

⁸⁰ Richard Head, *The English Rogue* (London: 1665), 270. In this context, “maidens” is synonymous with “virgins.” *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. “maiden.”

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*; This interruption is a warning against sodomy, and involves a “Goat-Devil” who assaults Head but, by the end of the scene, has his testicles cut off.

“entertained” him which, like Ligon, suggests that they are the agentic actors, rather than he. Next, he takes agency as he “dallie[s]” with one of the women, but the verb indicates a flippancy in his engagement with her, as he clearly treats her as no more than an object to be played with and then left behind.⁸³ Finally, he gives agency to lust itself in the way that it “conquered” him. This last claim is highly reminiscent of Ligon’s defensive explanation of his attraction to the two young women as being based on their beauty according to Western artistic ideals, and may also point to the moral agenda of the Head’s text, although there are no immediate consequences to his engagement with the women so the moral lesson is unclear.

However, this scene differs from Ligon’s well scene in one crucial way: Head also compares these Indigenous women to British women, but unlike Ligon, who describes the women in the two central scenes as even more beautiful than British royalty, he writes that “one of [the women] was the handsomest that I had ever seen in those parts; though not to be compared, for form of face, with the homeliest kitchen-stuff wench in London.” Additionally, he nods to their presumed lack of civility when he writes that they enticed and flirted with him “with as much civility as they were endued withal.”⁸⁴ Ligon, who can speak no ill of the Mistress and women by the well, challenges his readers by suggesting that colonized people are not “savages,” whereas Head implies here that they lack enough “civility” to truly “entertain” him, and thus risks no offense to his British readers who might balk at any suggestion that they are anything but superior to Indigenous people in colonized lands.

The comparison between these scenes is crucial to understanding the way Ligon’s *History* occupied a literary and social location beyond the scientifically-oriented travel narrative it has been billed as in its limited academic analysis. Furthermore, that Head’s *The English Rogue* was

⁸³ For a complete breakdown of the historic use of “dally,” see *Oxford English Dictionary* online, s.v. “dally.”

⁸⁴ Richard Head, *The English Rogue* (London: 1665), 271.

written as a satirical warning against immorality and yet still holds some similarities to Ligon's well scene is evidence of Ligon's genuine, albeit subtle, engagement with tropes of pornographic literature in order to attract additional readers, or to provide titillating commentary to keep his otherwise scientifically-inclined readers engaged.

Such themes were not, of course, found in all British literature of the time, but were specific to erotic literature and, more importantly to my analysis, travel narratives. In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Louis Pratt suggests that "Travel books...gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized."⁸⁵ Ligon's *History* certainly engages with some of these themes, particularly the element of familiarity—recall that the complete title of his work is *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, which not only asserted his own authority on the subject, but also gave readers the confidence that if they read something that was "true and exact," they too became experts on the island. Other aspects of the text, however, complicate Pratt's assertion about the "ownership and entitlement" assumed by elite readers of colonial travel narratives. While other such narratives do contribute to, and subsequently enforce, this oppressive colonial attitude, Ligon's formulation of sexual agency once again challenges expectations and assumptions of what a colonial narrative should be, and the purpose it serves. This counterexample to Pratt's statement serves not to dismiss it, but only to point out that there were other models of colonial narratives that complicate such a blanket statement and provide a more accurate and complete perspective on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial project.

⁸⁵ Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

Pratt also explains that travel narratives were to be “perused with pleasure by the scholar and the man of taste.”⁸⁶ This describes Ligon’s *History* well: through the guise of a travel narrative, he transports what would otherwise be morally unacceptable sexual discourse into mainstream literature, allowing his sophisticated and morally conscientious gentleman readers to keep up appearances as they engage with these erotic themes. This is, ultimately, the significance of the erotic elements in the narrative: Ligon manages to cater to the scientific, consumer, and sexual interests of his readers through a merging of tropes of travel narrative and literary erotica, submerging the erotic content in a scientific, economic, and quasi-objective narrative.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Ligon’s *History* is significant not only in its appeal as a sexually provocative, informative, and “scientific” travel narrative, but in its connection to literary erotica, and the way that erotica and the colonial project influenced and were influenced by each other. This connection helps explain its popularity and effect at the time of its publication, as well as for many years after. More importantly, however, I believe it helps illuminate the reason that the text has been largely neglected in this area of study: because of its ambiguous genre and the difficulty of analyzing the text from only one theoretical framework, it has simply been left out. That it occupies this ambiguous space, however, is yet another reason it should be studied more thoroughly, because it provides a more nuanced and complete view of colonial attitudes about race, sex, and sexuality. In short, given that Ligon was operating outside the realm of easily identifiable genres, the colonial mindset towards race, sex, and sexuality evinced by his narrative becomes more clear: colonized women were not just objectified and commodified, nor were they just sexualized and fantasized about in the white male imagination. Instead, their unwitting role in the colonial project was a conglomeration of all three: they were described in great detail and commodified based on individual body parts, sexualized but not

⁸⁶ Ibid., 86.

necessarily victimized, and occasionally assigned sexual power and agency over the British men who ogled at them.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have conducted a three-pronged analysis of Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*. First, I touched on Ligon's biography and the history of British colonization in Barbados before performing a close reading of the text; next, I explored current scholarship on race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere and how it relates to Ligon's text; finally, I considered how the narrative interacts with British literary erotica and other examples of travel narratives in order to help explain its widespread and cross-genre appeal. In each chapter, I have demonstrated the uniqueness of *History* and the crucial insights into the colonial project it reveals, and as such the importance of its incorporation into the continued scholarship in this field.

This project was born out of a fascination with the specific etymological choices Ligon makes when describing Black and Indigenous women. Throughout my research, however, it has become clear that the text is much more than an odd historical relic. Instead, it is a dramatic synthesis of historical narrative trends, as well as a harbinger of more progressive attitudes about race, sex, and sexuality in the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century British colonial sphere. That the text has not been included in existing academic studies of this time period, however, belies a discomfort with the nuances and complications of the narrative due, I believe, to the fact that it does not fit so easily into the more familiar "evil colonizer" narrative.

Of course, Ligon's *History* did not originate the sexualization and commodification of women, nor did it introduce the tradition of blaming women for men's sexual fantasies and abuses. What it does do, however, is defy classification: it is too sexual and erotic to be a

traditional colonial travel narrative and too scientific to be an explicitly erotic travelogue, but falls somewhere in between.⁸⁷

Genre categorization can never be wholly objective, and even contemporary scholarship is sometimes at odds regarding key traits of any given genre. For example, in *Sex and Sexuality in Stuart Britain*, Andrea Zuvich posits that “for the literate in Stuart Britain, there were many travel books full of thrillingly exotic lands and peoples.”⁸⁸ Meanwhile, however, Mary Louise Pratt writes that by the early nineteenth century, travel narratives were viewed as “on the one hand, a trivializing preoccupation with what [Humboldt] called ‘the merely personal,’ and, on the other, an accumulation of scientific detail that was spiritually and esthetically deadening.”⁸⁹

There are also significant challenges to establishing criteria that classify texts as erotic. In *Sex and Literature, vol. 1*, John Atkins writes first that erotic literature “is not necessarily a *genre* of its own but a part of the total literary pattern” but later provides a “rough definition” of erotic literature as “writing about sexual activity and sexual organs that is read by many or few non-specialist members of the general public.”⁹⁰ Zuvich contradicts Atkins’ focus on the general public, writing that “the average person wasn’t literate enough to read erotic literature,” but seems to work within distinct genre boundaries when she explains that “the erotic literature of the time also contained a good deal of content that may reasonably be considered the stuff of the average Stuart-era man’s nightmares—for example, scenarios involving impotence and inability

⁸⁷ While I have defended this argument more abstractly in my examination of Ligon’s text under theoretical frameworks, it emerged quite naturally from my reading of many other travel narratives and erotic texts of Ligon’s era. These texts include John Lawson’s *A New Voyage to Carolina* (1709); Richard Hakluyt *The Principal Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589-1600); Thomas Hariot’s *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Virginia* (1589); Girolamo Benzoni’s *History of the New World* (1857); Theodor de Bry’s *Grand Voyages* (1591); John Heckewelder’s *Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nation* (1818); Richard Head’s *The English Rogue* (1665), and Michel Millot’s *The School of Venus* (1655).

⁸⁸ Andrea Zuvich, *Sex and Sexuality in Stuart Britain* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 141. The Stuart era took place between 1603 and 1714.

⁸⁹ Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 121. Alexander von Humboldt was a German polymath whose prolific works told the stories of his adventures in South America from 1799 to 1804.

⁹⁰ John Atkins, *Sex and Literature vol. 1* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970), 11, 12.

to satiate a woman's sexual desires."⁹¹ As such, although the limited scholarship on Ligon's *History* unequivocally classifies it as a travel narrative and I have suggested that it contains unmistakable traces of literary erotica, it can most accurately be described as neither one nor the other, but a combination of the both. The varying perspectives of these scholars demonstrate the impossibility of forming a precise definition of travel literature and erotica as distinct genres, but there is clearly some overlap between the most common tropes of both classifications. Ligon's *History* resides in this overlap: not quite one or the other, it inhabits the space between the two, forming a micro-genre of its own.

Ligon's *History* also emerged at a time of great political change. Although the monarchy was dissolved at the end of the English Civil War in 1651, the secular government it established was short-lived, and the Restoration Era, beginning in 1658—only a year after *History*'s publication—and ending in 1660, was marked by “those circumstances that made necessary and possible a return to monarchical government” and can be considered “as an uneasy, brief settlement within longer-term political negotiations among Crown, Parliament, Church, and people.”⁹² Adding even greater significance to this return to a monarchical form of government, it must be remembered here that Ligon was old enough to have experienced both monarchical and parliamentary forms of government, and was a staunch Royalist who traveled to Barbados in an act of self-exile, and as such this political shift would have been a validation of his political ideology. In conjunction with great political changes, the Restoration Era was also marked by a shift in literary norms: in his book *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660*, Nigel Smith outlines the shifting genre classifications and literary traditions, explaining that “genres

⁹¹Andrea Zuvich, *Sex and Sexuality in Stuart Britain* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2020), xvi, 26.

⁹²Gerald M. MacLean, introduction to *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration*, ed. Gerald M. MacLean (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

fell to bits in the 1640s [and] failed to achieve their aims.”⁹³ Additionally, John Morrill suggests that “as the most fixed and daunting structures of the external world—monarchy, Lords, Church—crumbled, so the internal pillars of thought crumbled. Men were freed to think hitherto unthinkable thoughts.”⁹⁴ The combination of these two factors meant that new literary standards had yet to be established, and were thus, to a certain extent, up for the taking. Ligon takes advantage of both these opportunities, offering a new and subversive model for the travel narrative, and colonial perspective itself, as well as providing license to his readers to think “unthinkable” —that is, sexually explicit—thoughts under the guise of reading a scientific travel narrative.

Lastly, the social context from which Ligon’s *History* emerged was one of shifting and blurred lines, as the Libertine movement of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, characterized by “a tendency towards debauchery, the abandonment of morals, and a proclivity of hedonistic excesses of the flesh,” was on the rise just as *History* was published.⁹⁵ Aged seventy-two at the time of his text’s publication, it is unlikely that Ligon was part of the young guard pushing for this change, although it is possible that he adopted libertine ideologies but kept his text more conservative for the sake of marketability. Regardless, considering the text from a Libertine perspective provides yet another dimension of analysis, and leaves Ligon’s narration in a perplexing position: his lustfulness and desire for carnal satisfaction are reminiscent of the libertine hedonistic lifestyle, yet his retreat into moral defensiveness belies a discomfort with his own desires, a salesman’s knowledge of his perhaps less liberal audience, or a combination of the two. It could be reasoned, then, that Ligon occupies a precarious space on the very cusp of this movement, and thus was able to engage with both sides in his text. On the other hand, he could

⁹³ Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 3.

⁹⁴ John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution* (London; New York: Longman, 1993), 19.

⁹⁵ Andrea Zuvich, *Sex and Sexuality in Stuart Britain* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword History, 2020), 134.

be offering an alternative to otherwise morally-unconcerned libertines—go to colonized lands, where you can indulge your sexual fantasies without entirely sacrificing the moral values maintained in the metropole. And, when you find Black and Indigenous women valuable enough to objectify and sell and too beguiling to resist, it is not your fault, but theirs.

The three elements explored here point to yet another aspect of the text's importance: just as its contents occupy an ambiguous intersection between different genres and literary norms, the environment into which it was introduced was one of blurred literary, political, and social standards. As such, Ligon broke the norms of travel narratives and erotic literature at a time of relative instability in Britain, and just as social, moral, and political tides were shifting, in his "true and exact" text he simultaneously provided reassurance to his elite British readers that the imperial project was stable, fed the public imagination of exotic foreign lands and people, and challenged some of the colonial assumptions and expectations of his readers.

I have illustrated the way Ligon defied the norms of travel and erotic literature while simultaneously bowing to consumer interests, and in doing so have made the case for the interpretation of his *History* as a work of great significance to the study of race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere. I must return, however, to the moments that inspired this project: Ligon's descriptions of the Mistress and the women by the well. In simultaneously objectifying, sexualizing, and commodifying these women, he gives readers partial permission to conflate sexual and capitalist advances, while also granting the women so much power that their mere presence can rape his mind. Although his position—and the position of his readers— as white, male, and British makes him the historic victor, his characterization of his own weakness in the face of these women's power releases him, and his fellow colonists, from any guilt regarding

such lustful attraction to Black and Indigenous women, and of the sexual violence of the colonial project.

Moving to the present, we see the legacy of this mindset in, for example, victim-blaming in cases of sexual harassment and assault, and the persistent focus on aesthetic signals as a proxy for sexual availability. Perhaps less immediately evident is the way we are still contending with the voyeuristic aftermath of the colonial project. For example, stylized “vintage” t-shirts that read “I SLEPT ON A VIRGIN... island” can be bought on Etsy and eBay, brand-new versions are available on Amazon, and a page for the design on a t-shirt manufacturing company tells me that, at the time of this writing, “**Other people want this.** Over 170 people have this in their cart right now.”⁹⁶ This is not a passive interest—in monitoring the page for five minutes, I have seen that number rise and fall, from a minimum of 153 to a maximum of 437. The existence of these shirts from the 1970s is striking in and of itself, but the active demand fifty years later demonstrates something much more profound: we are still mired in, and reckoning with, the flagrantly sexual effects of the British colonial project.

Richard Ligon’s *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* was not, of course, responsible for the course of British expansion in the Atlantic world, nor is it the only text that provides us a glimpse into the conceptions of race, sex, and sexuality in the colonial sphere. Instead, its significance lies in the details. The truly unique way Ligon writes about lust and agency in his interactions with Black and Indigenous women absolves the colonizer figure of guilt or responsibility. The way these scenes create a liminal zone between tropes of travel narratives and erotica allows for a combining of geographic, religious, political, and sexual conquests into a single colonial venture. And the way that Ligon remains in that liminal zone to excite, challenge, impress, and educate his readers demonstrates the shrewd calculations of an

⁹⁶ “St. Croix Usvi Shirt Funny I Slept on a Virgin Island.” Tee Herivar, August 4, 2020.

author appealing to an audience, and a puzzling, contradictory, and at times uncharacteristically progressive mind at work. That there is only limited critical attention paid to Ligon and this text has been an error in academic judgment, and I believe that renewing focus on the narrative is not only essential to completing the historical record, but is our responsibility as we continue to unpack our colonial inheritance.

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