

Popular public opinion on Latin America and its people oscillates[^] between two extremes. We have the happy-go-lucky Mexican Cowboy with his 'sombrero' which ~~xxxxx~~ any decent umbrella should envy for size and colour, and of course, his inseparable 'amigo' the guitar with which he serenades all the young ladies of the neighbourhood. In fact the Hollywood version will have him doing little else except drinking 'Tequila' - a rather exquisite licor made from the Cactus[^] and which is drunk accompanied by a pinch of salt - and of course singing and carousing. This ~~scene~~^{happens} in times of peace, when there is war and that seems to be never very far away, he dons several belts loaded down with ammunition and ~~several~~ tucks two or three guns into big holsters and sets out to battle on horseback only to be shot down in spectacular fashion by some melancholic blue-eyed 'Gringo'. ^{However an otherwise} This attractive figure has its sinister side with a propensity for cruelty and treachery so much that in any moment he can be considered outside the human pale so that his downfall need not be regretted by anybody. At least of all the fun-loving cinemagoers. Decidedly this flamboyant version has been projected over all the peoples who live south of the Rio Grande be they Argentinian 'Gauchos', Caribbean Pirates or Peruvian Indians. There is an emphasis on their colourful clothes, their strange customs and exploits which would make them firm candidates for a top slot in any European Circus. However they are very unreliable peoples, totally fickle, ~~xxx~~ ignorant and prone to any kind of crime which means their elimination can only be the triumph of civilisation.

This of course represents one extreme of the spectrum of public opinion about Latin Americans and it is quite easily to show the falsity of such a vision although that does not mean this popular caricature will cease to exist as its real force is on pre-rational, emotional or sub-conscious level. The other pole of our equation are the sad photos of South American kids living in misery, their mothers with haggard, eye-sunken faces appealing for help. Photos which have become a common feature of most religious or missionary magazines although they also appear now and then in the daily newspapers. It is the Latin America of the tragedies, the victims of hunger, political violence, guerrilla warfare, underdevelopment. A Continent of peoples who for some mysterious reason seem condemned to live on the edge of humanity. What a strange predicament, we could say for a Continent whose wealth continues to

bolster many of the large multi-national companies as it built up the Spanish Empire and indeed the British Empire in the past! Yes indeed we could say, how can we explain that such a continent, a faithful exponent of the Catholic faith, despite its numerous deficiencies on that score; How can we explain ~~xxxx~~ its present state of hopelessness and poverty.¹ Divine Providence could be more benign with some of his most faithful children, we would say although biblical tradition would say precisely the opposite; Those whose lot is a heavy one in this world are closer to God, than those privileged with wealth and well-being.

~~manus~~ There is no easy answer and of course this second, apparently realistic vision of Latin America and its people is exaggerated. Not all Latin Americans are living on the edge of poverty - there is a minority who have an awful lot of wealth so much that they are the envy of well-to-do Europeans or North-Americans. We are not thinking simply of Maradona, the Argentine football star but rather of oil, cattle, coffee or sugar magnates who in association with transnational companies earn veritable fortunes every year which they invest in Europe or the US. Now we have the cocaine kings who seem to be the fastest growing entrepreneur class in this part of the world thanks to the boom of drug sales on the world market. It is scandalous of course as can be clear to anyone that has worked with addicts and it is sad to see so much money been made out of the suffering of others. But there it is - some South Americans have more money in their possession than most of us could imagine.

One good way I thought of interesting Irish people in Latin America without going to any extremes is precisely exploring the ~~ex~~ lives and experiences of Irish people or people connected with Ireland who have become part of South American History. At least we have a common basis on which to build a more realistic vision although I can assure^{you} that this will not be lacking in colour and drama if we recall only the names of some of these people, Madame ~~xxxx~~ Alice Lynch (1835 -1886), Daniel Florence O'Leary (1800-1854), . I will begin by exploring the life and ~~xxxx~~ heritage of one man closely associated with Ireland and Cork in particular and that is Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618).

Sir Walter Raleigh was born when Spanish Rule had been firmly imposed in the New World and as member of the ~~xxxx~~ Court of Queen Elizabeth enviously observed the gold and wealth that her deadly enemy Spain was harvesting in this part of the world. A dedicated navigator he decided to explore ways by which Her Majesty's government could ~~xxx~~ appropriate the ^{TREASURE} ~~gold and silver~~ that the Spanish Crown was transporting to Europe in apparently astronomical amounts.

Raleigh's idea was, which he published by all means possible, that the ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ INCAS retreating from the invading Spaniards to inner Peru - had set up a country called El Dorado whose capital city Manoa would become an extravagant creation of Sir Walter's imagination. The Key for England to enter El Dorado by ^{the back door} going up the Orinoco River. ^{Therefore} Britain should take over and conquer Guayana.

Raleigh's view was to say the least very controversial and the Elizabethan court was more pleased with the activities of English buccaneers and pirates such as John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake whose attacks on the Spanish Gold Fleet was beginning to bear fruits. However the queen conceded and Raleigh led the first of six expeditions to the Caribbean in 1585. However it was not until an expedition in 1995 that he got into Guyana. In fact he is noted down as discoverer of the State of Virginia as well as Guyana.

Even up to present times Guyana with its capital Georgetown is little known anywhere and if it were not for the episode of Jonestown some years ago with its ritual of mass suicide even less would be known of it. However it was in this country squashed in between the Caribbean and the Amazonic ~~and~~ Jungle nestling the delta of the Orinoco river whose population even today is less than one million people, it was here where Raleigh made so many discoveries some real, some imaginary. On leaving ~~this~~ fleet near the Island of Trinidad, Raleigh convinced a group of Caribbean Indians to bring him upstream the Orinoko. He apparently got as far as Caroni ^{in Venezuela} which is near present day Ciudad Bolívar Guayana. What he had seen was enough to whet his appetite and convince him that he was on the right track. On the start of his journey he saw what he describes as an 'asphalt lake' It was of course oil seepages which were used by the native peoples to impermeate their boats. He saw the use of poisoned arrow-heads. That is weapons dipped in curare which was a very deadly poison. Near

Caroni he swears he met for the first time, men without heads ^{who} ~~and~~ seemed ^{to} to have eyes in their shoulders and their ^u mouths in the middle of their breasts. They are of course the Yenomami indians who have short necks and outside of that have certainly no other ^{RACEY} ~~anomaly~~ in their physical structure. We can imagine then how certain ~~Canibalistic~~ related practices sparked off Raleigh's imagination giving a fascination to the Caribbean Indian which has continued right down to our own days. There is a custom in some groups for instance that after cremating a dead member of the family a kind of beverage is made with the ashes and drunk. Raleigh even meets up with veritable ~~Amazons~~ - women warriors who ~~don't~~ seem to have any husbands. Even today it is very difficult to discern what Sir Walter really saw but his exploits ^{mi} certainly founded the great myth of El Dorado, of the strange things which men will discover penetrating into the Amazonic and Orinoko river basins.

As customary Raleigh an avid collectionist brought back many souvenirs from the ~~New~~ World on his trips! He is generally recognised as the first 'importer' of tobacco and of course potatoes. We all know of his misadventure with the queen when he introduced her to the delights of boiled potatoes.

Returning to England after discovering Guyana, Sir Walter was more interested in returning in a grand expedition to conquer El Dorado than in savouring the tributes he was receiving. That expedition would never come as he planned it. In 1603 Queen Elizabeth died and Sir Walter was imprisoned in the Tower of London as King James I wished to appease the Spanish Throne. Raleigh was now enemy number one of Spain. In fact he was condemned to death but the sentence was left on 'stand-by'.

Undaunted Sir Walter insisted on a new expedition to Guyana and finally in 1616 he was released from prison and set out again for the New World. This time his fortunes had decidedly turned ~~against~~ against him and he met a lot of opposition from the Spanish. His own son who had accompanied him on the trip was killed during the attack he had organized on the town of San Tomé in Venezuela.

He returned to Britain in 1618, was imprisoned once again and on the 29th October of that year at the age of 66 years he was beheaded. However his heritage ^{has CONTINUED AND} ~~undoubtedly~~ that his mysterious vision of South

American has pursued many people down to own day. 'El Dorado' of course never existed nor did the city of Manoa but the German Count Van Humbolt discovered at the begining of the nineteenth century that it was possible to go up the Orinoco river to close on the Brazilian fronteir where ^{it has a tributary} ~~there is~~ a river called the Brazo Casiquiare which ^{also} joins up with the Negro River which in turn flows into the Amazon at the city of Manaus. That discovery meant that it was perfectly ^{feasible} ~~possible~~ to go ^{by boat} from Peru to the Carribbean via the Amazon- Orinoco. However even up to today Humboldt's hope that such a linkage would become the Rhine-land of the New World has remained another pipe-dream.

All told we have a lot to thank Sir Walter Raleigh for and certainly his tragic figure will remain for many years more the great enigma of the Orinoco river.

I must confess I am quite ignorant of the history of Sir Walter's relationship with Youghal except that he lived there for some time. and his house is a national monument. His wandering and adventuour spirit must ^{at least} have felt ^{at} home in Ireland.