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Kristen L. Walker

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The University of Southern Mississippi

“I have beene a reall Actor”: Analyzing the Writings of John Smith Through the Lens of
Performative Documentary Theory

by

Kristen Walker

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Approved by

Luis Iglesias
Associate Professor of English

Eric Tribunella
Associate Professor
Chair of Department of English

David R. Davies, Dean
Honors College

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Introduction

The literature of early America has primarily been read as historical, political, and, occasionally, literary. Yet, as the works of early American writers have been added to the American literary canon, critics and scholars have often overlooked one of their defining features: their dramatic and performative quality. It is worth noting the ways in which the texts of America's colonization have, from the beginning, found themselves easily adapted to dramatic presentations. English writer William Strachey's account of his shipwreck in the Bermudas (1610) and of Jamestown has long been identified as a source for William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). English dramatist Aphra Behn, relying on both first hand and published sources, wrote the early "novel" *Oronoko* (1688) and the play *The Widow Ranter* (1688), the later which was also set in the Virginia colony. Therefore, to read the earliest colonial accounts for their performative potential provides a keen insight into the imaginative and expressive power of these texts.

In this thesis I turn to two of the originating texts of American literature: John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, and *A True Relation*. *The General Historie* was first published in 1624, sixteen years after Smith had returned to England, and *A True Relation* was published in 1608, just a year after Smith arrived Jamestown. These two were not the first or only texts Smith published. During his time spent as a mercenary, soldier, and explorer, Smith also wrote eight other works. These two featured texts, *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation*, present Smith's time as explorer and leader of the Virginia colony. Smith journeyed to Virginia with the Virginia Company of London in 1606 and stayed until October of 1609, when he returned to England after receiving a gunpowder burn. *A True Relation* chronicles Smith's time in the New World,

while *The Generall Historie* expands the time frame of Smith's study from the first English exploration to the New World in 1170 to the founding of New-Plymouth in 1624.

By placing *The Generall Historie*, *A True Relation*, and other of Smith's works within the American literary canon, I seek to show how Smith discusses and attempts to define the New World and his role in it by analyzing his works, and the unique characterizations they produce, through the lens of film theory's performative documentary theory. Like literary genres which can then be divided into subgenres, documentaries are also divided into several different subgenres that all utilize different techniques and set out to achieve different goals. Performative documentary film did not emerge in any particular year, but rather evolved through a combination of different fictional narrative and avant-garde film techniques. Performative documentary theory, the study of performative documentary films, analyzes how these films link personal accounts with historical realities, and allow the subject of the piece to speak out about himself. Smith, in his works, utilizes similar techniques and appears to have comparable goals in the creation of his texts.

What emerges in analyzing Smith's *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation* through the lens of performative documentary theory is a new understanding of John Smith's literary production of not only a unique heroic voice, but also the construction of a developing American character. It may seem unusual at first to use a twenty-first century theory to analyze a seventeenth century body of work. But, performative documentary theory is able to highlight the performative and dramatic nature of Smith's texts in ways that literary theories cannot. There are some limitations to the theory's application as a result of the differences in time and format between an early American

text and film. However, Smith's works contain many similar elements to performative documentaries and benefit from an application of the theory. Performative documentary theory's understanding of the relationship between the author/director and the created media adds to a greater understanding of the complex way in which Smith has crafted his texts. Smith has not just written an historical account of the English colonization of the New World. Rather, he has very consciously crafted texts that carefully present and preserve himself and his role in the settlement of Jamestown in their pages. By applying performative documentary theory to the study of Smith's works, a new, better understanding of Smith's process of shaping his texts is gained. And, in discerning what Smith does in the creation of his texts, allows the reader to appreciate the complex pictures of both Jamestown and the character of John Smith that are presented in them.

Chapter One: Literary John Smith

The works of John Smith have been the subject of literary criticism for many years. The earliest critics had much to debate before Smith and other early colonial writers were accepted into the early American literary canon. First, the argument had to be made that writings by English explorers in the pre-United States New World could be considered American. Second, it had to be decided whether or not these writings, many of which were written as reports of the New World to be sent back home, could even be classified as literature. Both the later question and the ways in which the writings of John Smith preemptively explore American literary themes will be expanded upon later in this chapter. However, it is worth noting that Moses Coit Tyler, with the publication of his book *History of American Literature, 1607-1765* in 1878 began the first serious study of early American literature. Tyler's book, along with a renewed sense of nationalism and a desire to create and define a distinctly American literature, allowed Smith's various works, and other early colonial texts, like those of George Percy and George Sandys, to become part of the early American literary canon. As critics began to focus on the study of colonial texts, they discovered how essential these texts, including Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia* and *A True Relation*, were to the creation of a uniquely American literary history. In drawing new colonists to America, these texts helped create a diverse population, which in turn helped shape the characteristics of early American literature.

Smith's writings served both as an encouragement to potential colonists to move to the New World and as reports back to his investors, encouraging continued investment in the New World. Because the texts were written for these purposes and not specifically

to be read as literature, Smith's narratives do not initially seem to be produced with the intention of being analyzed as literature. Despite that fact, the texts show that Smith wrote with a highly literary consciousness. Literary critics, like Moses Coit Tyler, use this consciousness to explore the literary nature of John Smith's writings. They focus on Smith's self-conscious writing and his creation of a third-person character of himself, John Smith—a character that is to be viewed separately from the author John Smith.

Focusing on Smith's "style," David Read takes issue with the idea that the separation of the author Smith from the character Smith creates an inconsistent narrator throughout Smith's works. According to Read, Smith's *The Generall Historie*, more than any other of his works, presents the most problematic understanding of who the text's narrator is. The reader begins to question just who the narrator is meant to be from the beginning of The First Booke (*The Generall Historie* is split into six books.) This first section covers naval exploration by the English and other European powers from 1170-1603. Smith provides an authoritative, first person description of these explorations and the first settlements of Virginia. However, the fact that Smith did not set sail for Virginia until 1606 presents a problem. One potential explanation for this phenomenon is that Smith could be creating a collective, first person "I" narrative based upon historical accounts of the day¹ in order to establish a consistent "I" throughout *The Generall Historie*. "I intended with two Wherries and fortie persons [...]" (236) a chapter of the First Booke, chronicling a 1585 voyage to Virginia begins. In the first chapter of the Third Booke, which chronicles the settlement of Virginia in 1606, "I" also "referre[s] to

¹ See Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1600)

the Readers consideration” (309). These two “I”s do not seem to be the same narrator, as the names mentioned in both chapters do not overlap.

In *New World, Know World: Shaping Knowledge in Early Anglo-American Writing*, David Read expands upon this idea of the inconsistent narrator. He questions the reliability of the text’s narrator but offers an explanation in the idea that Smith’s work has multiple narrators. Read is not suggesting that different people actually penned the body of work, but that Smith was influenced by the many different socioeconomic classes that existed in the early Virginian colony (21-22). Smith’s writing, therefore, translates as a body of work that was heavily shaped by competing influences. A portion of the Second Booke reads more like a straightforward, factual description of the New World. Smith writes, “the fourth river is called Patawomeke, 6 or 7 myles in breadth. It is navigable 140 myles, and fed as the rest with many sweet rivers and springs” (270). Here, the text seems to draw from European travel writing. Portions of the Sixth Booke, however, seemed to draw more influence from the Spanish picaresque. Like the opportunistic picaro, Smith seizes the chance to escape from his captors when: “I watched my opportunitie to get a shore in their Bat, whereinto in the darke night I secretly got, and with a halfe Pike that lay by me, put a drift for Rat Ile” (628). These two examples show how the influence of different cultural and narrative styles could be the reason for the disparity in Smith’s narration.

Not only does Read suggest that Smith’s inconsistent narrator was a result of various socioeconomic influences, but also that it stems from a direct result of Smith not being a writer by trade. As a result, Read notes that problems with reliability and competing narrative voices are a natural result of the writing process. Self-conscious as

Smith's writing may be, Read argues that Smith is limited as a writer by his limited literary knowledge. Though Read claims that Smith was not a writer by trade, Smith had already published five works before writing *The Generall Historie*, and would continue to write and publish after that². Instead, Smith's "inconsistent" narrator is indicative that the author is potentially inventing new narrative possibilities. Smith is an explorer, yes, but he is also very much a writer; his literary history cannot be ignored in the analysis of *The Generall Historie*'s narrator.

While Read's analysis may seem helpful to making sense of Smith's complicated narrator, Read underestimates Smith's power as an author and a learned Englishman. Smith's works are dotted with allusions to Greek myths, biblical stories, and historical figures. These references show that Smith's level of education was enough to make him a competent writer. Read fails to understand just how literary Smith's texts are. On a surface level, the sheer volume of books that Smith published suggests his role as a writer cannot be argued against, despite what definition Read gives to the word writer. In this analysis, Read ignores the dexterity with which the author John Smith crafts the separate character John Smith and ignores the literary styles that Smith weaves together in the telling of his New World tales. The full extent to which Smith utilizes these two points is expanded on later in this chapter.

What Read truly fails to explore is found toward the later half of *The Generall Historie*, where Smith's complicated narrator proves truly problematic. Smith does take credit for penning the entire lengthy book, but upon careful observation he appears to

² Smith's published works include *A True Relation* (1608), *A Map of Virginia* (1612), *The Proceedings of the English Colony in Virginia* (1612), *A Description of New England* (1616), *New England's Trials* (1620, 1622), *The Generall Historie* (1624), *An Accidence, or the Pathway to Experience Necessary for all Young Seamen* (1626), *A Sea Grammar* (1627), *The True Travels* (1630), and *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England, or Anywhere* (1631)

give credit to many of the chapters within *The Generall Historie* to other writers. In many of those portions chronicling the history of Virginia after Smith has returned to England (those years following 1614), the mysterious “I” is named. Though the books continue to follow first person narrators, these later chapters end with the names of Englishmen whose stories Smith had taken and published. Portions of the Fifth Booke are credited as “collected out of their Records by N. B. and the relations of Master Pollard, and divers others” (565), and “from a relation of Thomas Sparks, and divers other” (567). Additionally, Smith cites the introduction to the Sixth Booke of *The Generall Historie* as being “from the relations of Captaine Edward Harlow and divers others” (589), and Smith writes it in first person.

To explain the problem of inconsistent narration with the idea that Smith borrowed whole chunks of text from other colonists’ writings could provide a solution if not for the fact that Smith concludes *The Generall Historie* with the words, “John Smith writ this with his owne hand” (631). If one assumes that Smith’s written statement is a simple reassertion of his claim of authorship of the text as a whole, and that the other men named did write the mysterious narrative portions of the book, it still leaves one to wonder how much influence Smith had over the portions he “did not write.”³ That being said, the way in which Smith claims authorship over *The Generall Historie* as a whole suggests he had a direct hand in assuring that the text showed a Jamestown that he approved of.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, one of the ways that Smith best shows his literary prowess is through the creation of a separate, third person character “John

³ In the 17th century, the idea of authorship is still an evolving concept, so while Smith may not have personally written all of *The Generall History*, he is still able to claim ownership of it.

Smith.” To gain a better understanding of Smith’s works, many literary critics have explored the ways in which the writer John Smith is separate and distinct from the character John Smith. David Read has much to say about the differentiation between the writer John Smith and the character John Smith in his article “Colonialism and coherence: The case of Captain John Smith’s *General Historie of Virginia*.” In it, Read argues that the idea of two voices is not limited to the presence of the competing influences of multiple narrators and cultures, but can be explained by viewing the author John Smith as a separate, conscious identity from the character John Smith found in the pages of *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation*. Read theorizes that John Smith, the author, used the fictionalized character John Smith to shed light on the complex relationship between the English explorers and the Powhattan tribe. According to Read, the encounters between character Smith and the native tribes quickly show that Smith, more than any other Englishman, is a master of communication with the native peoples and is trusted by Powhattan’s tribe more than any of his peers. In *The Generall Historie* Smith writes, “hee desired mee to forsake Paspahugh, and to live with him upon his River, [...] and thus having with all the kindness hee could devise, sought to content me: hee sent me home with 4 men” (“A True” 18). He was taken under the guidance of the chief of the Powhattan, who guards Smith from those who would attempt to kill him: “the next day after my letter,” Smith described, “came a salvage to my lodging, with his sword to have slaine me, but being by my guard intercepted” (“A True” 15), and provides every comfort the tribe can offer.

Writer Smith presents the character of John Smith as an English hero to the native tribes who speaks of lavish gifts bestowed upon him by his new acquaintances and also

shows an equal exchange of ideas between the two peoples. Both Smith and chief Powhattan seek to learn all they can about the other's culture, and what profit can be made: "Hee [Powhattan] promised to give me Corne, Venison, or what I wanted to feede us, Hatchets and Copper wee should make him, and none should disturbe us" ("A True" 18). Read tries to shed light on this complicated interaction by questioning the coherence of Smith's work. He suggests that the dual attitude toward Powhatan and the natives stems from a desire to form a complete history of colonial Virginia. Rather than simply showing an all-powerful English version of Virginia's history, Read points out that Smith might have believed that showing various sides of the natives and how they interacted with the English was the only way to have an accurate and complete tale.

Additionally, Read claims that showing such a dual nature of the native population was found in several colonial writings of the time, citing not only Smith but also Thomas Harriot and Sir Walter Raleigh. In his article, Read proposes that this attitude does not seem out of place, for he believes the English did not bring a specific attitude toward the native population with them. Their later stance evolved, he suggests, as a result of interactions with hostile peoples. It is unlikely that the English could have come to the New World without any European-influenced attitude towards the natives, especially considering they were not the first Europeans to interact with the natives. Even if it was only in some small part, it seems Smith would have likely been influenced by both Iberian explorations of the New World, as well as attitudes brought back by earlier English expeditions.

Despite whether Read's assumption is incorrect or not, upon close reading, author John Smith, at times, does seem to manipulate the interaction between the character John

Smith and the native tribes in the English's favor. Smith, in some scenes, holds the upper hand in tradings and dealings with natives. In *A True Relation*, Smith writes: "I shewed him [a native] Copper, which I promised to have given him if he had performed his promise, but for his scoffing and abusing us, I gave him twentie lashes with a Rope" (35). While here the English appear to have the upper hand, there are many other instances throughout the texts where the natives appear in control of the situation. Smith, relating an entreaty by Powhattan to have the English colonists surrender their weapons in *The Generall Historie*, writes: "Captaine Newport gave me swords, copper, cloathes [...] and would send away his gunnes when I intreated him; none doth deny to lye at my feet, or refuse to doe what I desire" ("The Generall" 372). At this moment, Powhattan uses the Englishmen's sense of duty and authority against them by mentioning traditions established with Captain Newport, Smith's superior. If Smith and his men refuse to follow Newport's example, they appear to be undermining the authority of their leader. Powhattan, therefore, has control of this particular interaction.

In Smith's depiction of the power of the Powhattan tribe, he shies away from making his text a stereotypical representation of all-powerful colonists and unintelligent, violent savages. In *American Literature in the Colonial and National Periods*, Lorenzo Sears suggests that Smith's self-conscious writing did more than simply draw upon stock English characters. In fact, Sears states that in his writing, Smith sought to create a lasting fame for himself. Contemporary audiences are highly aware of Smith's "actions," like the classic tale of him and Pocahontas, a story that Smith added to a later edition of *The General Historie*. Sears says this lasting memory has much more to do with the stories Smith wrote down than what he actually did. In writing and publishing his texts, Smith

ensures that there is a tangible record of his adventures that can be passed down and read by later generations. Through his publications, Smith has secured a lasting, written name for himself.

In *A True Relation*, Smith's only reference to Pocahontas is as a messenger sent by Powhattan. He notes: "Powhattan [...] sent his Daughter, a child of tenne yeares old, which not only for feature, countenance, and proportion, but exceedeth any of the rest of his people" (34). However, in the Fourth Booke of *The Generall Historie*, Pocahontas' role is greatly expanded. At the critical moment of Smith's seeming execution, he writes: "Pocahontas, the Kings most deare and wel-beloved daughter, being but a childe of twelve or thirteene yeeres of age, [...] at the minute of my execution, she hazarded the beating out of her owne braines to save mine, and not onely that, but so prevailed with her father, that I was safely conducted to James towne" (440). Whether the memorable story of Pocahontas saving John Smith from death actually happened, or whether it happened but was simply a ceremonial "rebirth" as a member of the Powhattan tribe is debatable. Some scholars believe that the addition of the Pocahontas as savior story was added to *The Generall Historie*, written sixteen years after Smith left Jamestown, to help the tale profit from Pocahontas' popularity with the English nobility. Regardless of the truth of the rescue/ceremony, the fact remains that the inclusion of the story was a very specific choice on Smith's part. The popularity of this specific tale helped Smith ensure that he created a lasting fame for himself by tapping into the popular fame of Pocahontas who had recently died.

Whether writing for fame or profit (or both), in writing fantastic tales of adventure and near-impossible feats of daring Smith has left America with one of its first heroes. In

A True Relation, Smith boasts of great feats like when “a great tree hindred my passage which I cut in two,” (12) and the fact that “some ten pound of bread I had for supper” (15). Additionally, Smith claims that he was not captured by natives until “the king of Pamaunck called Opeckankenough with 200 men, invironed me” (14). Through stories like this, and the now famous tale of his rescue at the hands of Pocahontas, Smith creates a larger than life character. The character John Smith, with his great words and great actions, is a character that lives on through the works of the author John Smith.

The character of John Smith presented literary critics with an interesting figure that seemed to suggest that the author John Smith’s style and content were influenced by several different European sources. In *American Literature in the Colonial and National Periods*, Sears places the origins of the character John Smith in the tales of the knight-errant. The knight errant is a wandering figure out in search of adventure, who often quests in the name of a lady (10). While this does seem to influence Smith, it is certainly not his only influence. Smith’s works also contain many similarities to the Spanish picaresque. The picaresque tells the story of the picaro, a low class rogue who uses his wits to survive in society. Rather than having one central plot, the picaresque is traditionally a series of episodic adventures (Hibbard 394). Both the knight-errant and the picaro would have been literary figures familiar to Smith as well as his 16th century readers.

While Sears offers an interesting idea as to the origins of Smith as a character, he fails to realize both the full potential of his argument and the idea of the character John Smith as a New World picaro. Smith is clearly influenced by both literary figures, but he also adapts them for the New World. Smith’s works are not fully “New World,” but do

begin to take the shape of what is later to be considered a “New World” form of the heroic tale. As the knight-errant quests for a lady, it could be said that Smith’s “lady” is England; however, it could be better argued that Smith’s adventures are done solely for himself, like the picaresque. The author John Smith did come to the New World with a charter from England authorizing the commercial exploitation of the land and its resources, but the character John Smith presents a man with complicated, and at times conflicting, motivations. On one hand, Smith’s actions are significantly responsible for the survival of the colony. During the building of Jamestown, the narrator of the Third Booke of *The Generall Historie* says of the character Smith: “Captaine Smith: who by his owne example, good words, and faire promises, set some to mow, others to binde thatch, some to build houses, others to thatch them, himselfe always bearing the greatest task for his owne share” (314). According to this passage, it is Smith’s leadership and hard work ethic that ensure the English colonists, having just endured a brutal first winter in the New World, survive and are able to establish Jamestown as a viable colony.

On the other hand, the character of John Smith does not just take on one role. While Smith is a colonial leader, he is a picaresque-like opportunist. In the scene immediately following the building of Jamestown, Smith takes advantage of the surrender of a group of natives: “And then they brought him Venison, Turkies, wild foule, bread, and what they had” (315). By recognizing the opportunity to manipulate the terms of the natives’ surrender, Smith secures food that the starving Englishmen desperately need. By borrowing from both the picaresque and the tale of the knight-errant, Smith adapts and appropriates a Spanish form of literature in his account of the New World. Not only do his works reflect a Spanish literary influence, but they also reflect French and other

European influences. Smith is not a provincial writer, but a more sophisticated, cosmopolitan writer whose works become a veritable “melting pot” of literary influences.

In addition to discussing John Smith’s potential literary influences, in *A History of American Literature 1607-1765*, Moses Coit Tyler introduces the idea that Smith holds a unique position in both the Jamestown colony and the collection of colonial writers as a whole. John Smith serves as a bridge between the men of action and the men of letters (25). He both does and writes, serving as a middle point between the lowly soldier and the noble colonial leader. In this, Smith not only presents himself as a hero, but also as an American hero that can transcend class distinction. He is not confined to the upper or lower class, but seems to exist outside of class constraints. He is a colonial leader and a fearless explorer, interacting with both kinds of men and finding himself somewhere in between in the social structure of colonial Virginia.

Smith the colonial explorer, the man of action, and Smith the writer, the man of letters, come together as Smith, the author, obtains lasting fame not through any title or other mark of nobility, but through self-publication. The militaristic Smith, who has fought his way around the known world, humbly states “I confesse, my hand, though able to weild a weapon among the Barbarous, yet well may tremble in handling a Pen” (“The Generall” 203). In this statement, he begins the transition from a man of action to a man of letters. It is not a full transition, though, but a fusion. For Smith, the act of writing down his adventures is a new challenge, a new adventure, like the expeditions of his past. In the introduction to *The Generall Historie*, Smith pens: “[I] have beene bold to challenge them [his adventures] to come under the reach of my owne rough Pen” (203). Thus Smith creates a truly American way of thought—the idea that one is not locked into

a particular class, but can create a new class by combining the realms of letters and actions in his texts, before there even truly was an America. The author John Smith and the character John Smith, combined, present a perfect example of this new class of hero.

In *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Myra Jehlen writes that in addition to creating this New World hero, Smith actually shapes the way in which the New World is viewed by defining it in terms of himself (72). He does not simply describe America, its land and features, and native population. Instead, he portrays it by what land he has conquered and by what natives he has defeated. Through this, Smith shapes America into a land made for the heroic. It is not only a land of opportunity, but also it is a land made for those who would consciously make the most of its opportunity. In writing about the type of man who would do well in the New World, Smith asks “Who can desire more content, that hath small meanes; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, then to tread, and plant that ground hee hath purchased by the hazard of his life” (“The Generall” 152). For Smith, the New World presents a land full of opportunities to be taken. In these opportunities, he finds honesty and truth. “What so truly suites with honour and honestie, as the discovering things unknowne?” (“The Generall” 152) he wonders. As Smith ponders these questions, he ponders the future of the New World, and the type of people that will inhabit it. In his description of the type of men best suited to life there, he describes himself. The character Smith is perfectly suited to life in the New World, and the author John Smith wants readers to be certain of this.

Additionally, Smith wants future readers to know his role in the shaping of the New World and wants to assure that he was highly regarded in his time. One way in which Smith does this is through the inclusion of many poems found throughout the

conclusions of *The Generall Historie*'s six books. Every poem refers to the "worthy Captaine Smith," who deserves great honor. The poems, fair literary works in themselves, were written by "great friends" of Smith, many who claim to have served with him either in the New World or in his earlier European adventures. These poems are extremely important for three different reasons. First, they praise Smith for his literary merit in writing *A True Relation* and other texts. Despite the fact that many of the poems' authors were familiar with Smith through his endeavors as an adventurer, they praise Smith as an author rather than an explorer. Second, that the inclusion of these poems further assures a lasting positive impression of Smith to future readers of *The Generall Historie*. If there was any uncertainty as to Smith's reputation by future readers, the author John Smith makes sure there are written accounts in his favor. And third, the inclusion of the poems further underscores the text's literary aspirations. This is no "travel" book, but one that stands on the same footing as other literary productions. The legacy that Smith tries to leave behind is one that confirms Smith, as writer, to be a literary man leaving behind several works of great literary value.

In creating the character John Smith that would vividly be remembered throughout history, John Smith as literary writer shows not only his skill as a conscious author but also as a conscious participator in history. In the analyses of literary critics and scholars noted thus far, one can begin to see just how complex the texts of John Smith are. The connection between Smith's works and the idea of him as a conscious actor in history lies in the character of John Smith that exists within and emerges from the texts he has written. By writing himself as a memorable character, John Smith has established an heroic character—someone set apart from the real John Smith, and that therefore can

be analyzed as a fictional, heroic character. This character is a man of action, an individual who has set out to conquer the new land and make a lasting name for himself.

Chapter Two: Performative Documentary Theory

Film theory is a field of study that emerged nearly three hundred years after John Smith wrote *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation*. It would seem unexpected, and somewhat unlikely, to apply film theory to the study of Smith's works. However, upon closer observation, one sees that film and literature share many similar qualities and conventions. With increasing frequency, film is being analyzed in terms of literary theory. Initially, it would seem this was done with films that were originally literary texts. But, as the theoretical study of film becomes more widely practiced and accepted, the literary study of any film becomes a more common practice (Weddle 1). It is easy to see how film might be studied using different literary theories. Both films and literature have plots, characters, and settings that can be analyzed; and, of course, both rely on narrative. Because of these parallels, this thesis argues that, conversely, literature can be analyzed using certain film theories. To be sure it would be difficult to use voyeuristic theories, lighting theories, or theories that focus on the photographic image of film to analyze literature, but documentary theory easily lends itself adaptable to the study of literature because it provides a vocabulary by which to name and analyze effects produced within a literary text.

Documentary theory is the film theory most applicable to the study of John Smith's works. Phillip Rosen, in his article "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts," argues that documentary films can be viewed and analyzed as a document. Rosen is primarily speaking for documentaries that are of a historic nature, or that cover topics that later become of historical significance. Even so, the article speaks of the power of information gathered in such a documentary—the

firsthand accounts of the events and the visual depictions of important people and places involved with the topic. Because of the potential of information found in documentary films, Rosen argues that they should be viewed as more than simply films, and should have the same value and should be viewed with the same importance as traditional historical documents (59).

With the advent of cultural studies, it is not as necessary to argue for films to be read as “documents.” Cultural studies reads almost everything as a text. What Rosen seems to be really arguing here is for films to be seen as cultural artifacts, rather than simply as “documents” or “texts”: film as a cultural artifact of storytelling and narrative. Documentary film, then, is a mode of “non-fiction” storytelling lending itself to critical and literary interpretation. Using literary analysis allows documentaries, a “non-fiction” means of storytelling, to be read not just as non-fiction but also for the narrative they truly present. (Narrative here, meaning a constructed story, whether fictional or nonfictional.) Though documentary is traditionally viewed as a medium that captures the “realness” of the world, its “realness” can be debated.

The subject of “realness” is something that cannot be avoided when discussing documentary theory. In this thesis, the idea of realness is something that exists on several different levels. For film theorists, and for this thesis as it analyzes in relation to documentary theory, “realness” suggests the world in which one exists—a world uninfluenced by cinematic forces, such as the presence of a camera. In other words, the expectation that the camera captures an objective representation of the world without editing or conscious manipulation—the narrative is real. For Smith, the idea of reality is twofold. First, Smith writes about the reality he understands. It is a “reality” in which

Smith and the other English colonists attempt to control and make sense of their exploration and settlement of the New World. Second, Smith also records a reality that he does not fully process. In this “reality,” the English are often at the mercy of the natives, and struggle in their settlement of the New World. But, these are the moments when Smith’s attempt to write the narrative allows him to process what has happened and reveals more that he can make sense of. As these different interpretations of reality merge and overlay, Smith’s texts become a complex documentary ready to be unpacked through analysis with performative documentary theory.

Direct cinema, the subgenre that most often comes to mind when thinking of documentary film, utilizes the observe-and-shoot approach, but can be challenged on the authenticity of the subjects it captures. Are the subjects truly behaving as they do in their natural, uninterrupted environment, or does the mere presence of a camera lend the subject to adopt a performative attitude? As soon as a camera enters the situation and the subjects are aware of the camera’s presence, it is impossible to claim that what is being captured is one-hundred percent real. While filmmakers of direct cinema documentaries strive for unaltered “realness,” the presence of the camera increases the awareness in a subject of how they “perform” in front of the camera.

Another form of documentary, performative documentary, rather than try to prevent it, embraces this idea of self-conscious performance in front of the camera. In an anachronistic respect, Smith acts as camera in *A True Relation* when the story focuses on Smith and a small group of eight men as they explore the wilderness alone rather than focusing on the colonists left back in Jamestown. The actions of the character Smith become larger than life as he becomes the subject of the camera. Smith writes: “A great

tree hundred my passage which I cut in two” (12). Smith’s super-human strength becomes the focus of the scene and of the storytelling. And, rather than giving credit to the assistance of his men, the character John Smith, under influence of the focus of the “camera,” boasts that the action was done entirely by himself.

Performative documentary, the type of documentary theory that is the focus of this thesis, utilizes the idea of performance in order to shed light on the performative—the artificial and self-conscious presentation of actions that hide their rehearsed or affected qualities—nature of the world. As mentioned earlier, even direct cinema documentary can present a tainted realness as its subjects might, even unconsciously, alter their normal behavior in the presence of a camera. By placing an emphasis on the nature of performance, both through “performances” by the documentary’s subjects and the intrusive “performance” of the filmmaker, performative documentary can force the audience to question the reality of the “real” world (Bruzzi 188). John Smith’s works are filled with moments where performance is evident. He draws attention to the ceremonies of the Powhattan tribe (themselves an act, likely staged as critics have suggested) as well as his own “performances” while interacting with the tribes (his self-conscious manipulation of his presentation before the tribe). Additionally, in light of performative documentary theory, one begins to notice how overtly self-conscious and rehearsed Smith’s narrators are throughout his body of work. Much more analysis of the way in which Smith dramatizes his own actions in his writing will be done in the following chapter.

Though not exclusive to any form of documentary, the act of editing a documentary film also takes away from its sense of the reality of the “truth.” The editing

process lends itself to the whims of the filmmaker. What portions of the “reality” recorded must be sacrificed in order to create an interesting film (Bruzzi 153)? Editing further removes the end product that is a completed documentary film from a “true” depiction of the subject, even though being completely unbiased through the direction of a filmmaker is hardly possible. An edited film is one that not only has been manipulated in order to make a film that will be appealing to audiences but also, especially in the case of performative documentary, has the emotional tone the filmmaker desires for his documentary—a tone inserted by the filmmaker though perhaps not inherently present in the filmed subject.

It is revealing to read Smith’s works with this idea in mind. Smith, the author claims that his works are “real,” but this still leaves one to wonder if any key moments in the settlement of Virginia were left out or heavily altered by him in order for *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation* to have the same impact the texts currently do. Some scholars say that these particular texts were heavily edited by Smith’s publisher, leaving one to wonder just what the true story of the settlement of Virginia was (Lemay 41)⁴. *A True Relation*, and *The Generall Historie*, as well as his other texts, can be read as early American examples of documentary-esque literature. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Smith asserts that what he writes is a truthful account of the history of Virginia.

⁴ English explorer George Percy wrote in 1607 about the colony between supply shipments, “Thus we lived for the space of five months in this miserable distress, not having five able men to man our bulwarks upon any occasion.” In 1611, Captaine De-La-Ware writes back to London that, “such a coldnesse and irresolution is bred in many of the Adventurers that some of them seeke to withdraw those paiments, which they have subscribed towards the Charge of the Plantation, and by which that Action must bee supported and maintained.” Explorer Henry Spelmen, in a 1613 letter, writes of a time when, “Capt Smith at that time [*saying*] repliende litell [*yet*] but after- ward [*wrought*] conspired with the Powhatan to kill Capt weste, which Plott tooke but smale effect, for in ye [*interim*] meane time Capt Smith was Aprehended, and sent abord for England.”

Regardless, the creation of the separate, third person character John Smith shows the directorial hand of the author John Smith present in his works. Like a documentary director, Smith hides behind his “product,” assuming a position of objectivity when he actually has a very conscious hand in shaping his story.

That the root word of performative is performance can evoke negative connotations of a “fake” documentary emphasizing the performance aspect of the film does not mean that the scenes are scripted. Rather, theorists place a strong emphasis on the “performances” present in the documentary in order to achieve a number of different ends; though most commonly in this genre of film, it is done in order to bring about empathy from the audience to the film’s subject. The performance in performative documentary films is often used not to fictionalize the story or create content where none exists but to get “to the truth the filmmaker is searching for” (Bruzzi 154). This truth may still bring to mind images of fictionalized reality; but again, for performative documentary, this is not the case. Performance, in this case, is not the process of acting on a scripted piece of material but, as stated earlier, capturing the performances that are created as a result of the presence of the camera.

The idea of performance also includes directed “performances” –ways in which the filmmaker leaves his mark on the film. Smith, in *A True Relation*, begins to show his directorial and editorial hand when the English colonists catch natives in the act of stealing some of their supplies and weapons. The author Smith writes that the character Smith “pursued them with five or sixe shot, and so chased them out of the Iland,” and that when the Indians saw that the Englishmen had overcome them, they “were so submissive, and willing to doe any thing as might be [...] to be friends” (30). While the

inclusion of the fact that the Indians stole from the English initially presents the natives as able to best the colonists, the author Smith directs the focus of the rest of the scene on colonial dominance. Once the English discover the Indians' treachery, Smith edits the passage in such a way that leaves little doubt that the natives had any power to stop the colonists' revenge. Additionally, Smith changes the audience's interpretation of the events and recasts the Indian's role by editing the passage to show that the Indians' own nature has changed—they are no longer violent, but have become submissive and obedient.

Performative documentary can stand at a balance between highly realistic fiction and “real” documentary (Bruzzi 190). That is not to indicate that performative documentary is fictional. Rather, it can allow a filmmaker to do several things that he is incapable of doing while strictly adhering to the direct cinema style. First, it can allow the director to fill in the gaps present in his “true” documentary footage. This may include staged B-roll footage, or recreations of scenes that were either unable to be filmed or took place before the filmmaker began to shoot his subject. The use of “fill in” footage is just one of the many methods of film technique that mark the style of performative documentary. Point of view shots help remove the idea of the camera as a static fly-on-the-wall observer and increase the feel of the performative presence of the filmmaker. Flashbacks and freeze-frames also call attention to the filmmaking and highlight some of the differences between performative documentaries and traditional direct cinema documentaries⁵.

⁵ Additionally, the inclusion of music, though not used only in performative documentary, serves perhaps a larger role in this type of documentary film. Music in performative documentary is used to highlight the emotional impact the filmmaker is trying to create.

Again, it would be anachronistic to suggest Smith is using (or would have conscious knowledge of) film techniques: however the point here is to understand Smith's textual techniques using the vocabulary of film theory. In other words, Smith uses similar techniques in *The Generall Historie* when he, in first person narration, recounts moments that happened in the English exploration of Virginia both before and after he himself was present. Smith claims that these portions are just as true as the ones he was present for. "What toyle we had, with so small a power to guard our workemen adayes," (309) the narrator of the Third Booke of *The Generall Historie* says. One may think the narrator here is Smith, because Smith was present in the New World during the time frame of the Third Booke. However, several lines down, the narrator adds, "Now Captaine Smith, who all this time [...] was restrained as a prisoner" (309). By filling in his personal story with true accounts of other narrators, Smith, in essence, is using the literary equivalent of B-roll footage to fill out the story and show a more complete account of the colonization of Virginia.

Unlike direct cinema's "point the camera and observe" method of recording "realness," performative documentary focuses on bringing out the emotional and subjective material present in the recorded subject matter. Performative documentary does not adhere to the idea that objects have one definite meaning. Rather, it plays with the thought that objects carry many different unique, emotional connections, and memories for each person. These films draw upon the emotional and subjective ties people have with objects, places, and situations in order to create more of an impact with their audiences. Smith plays with his audience's emotions with the inclusion of the Pocahontas story. Pocahontas, who was beloved by the English, had died eleven years

before the publication of *The Generall Historie*. The inclusion of her story, then, drew upon the English's fond memories of Powhattan's daughter and, through its emotional impact, came to shape and define the Smith story and legend.

Performative documentaries are not created simply to inform. They play upon the notion that knowledge—for instance, the knowledge about a particular subject that the film shares with its audience—is not something abstract, or a generalized way of thinking, but rather something concrete that is based upon personal memories and experience (Nichols *Introduction* 131). Performative documentaries are often created very subjectively, and are aware of their subjective nature. Filmmakers of this particular genre of documentary seem to have no qualms about not approaching their subjects with a strict unbiased objective viewpoint. In doing this, the films bring out a stronger emotional response in their audiences. Performative documentaries ask audiences not to merely observe them, but to feel something about the subject, be it positive or negative. While it is true that the subjective impact of the filmmaker can have some sway on the emotions felt by the audience, these films still hold to the idea that different people have different emotional ties with various objects and places. Therefore, performative documentaries aim not so much for audiences to feel a particular way about the subject of the film but that they feel strongly about it. Perhaps the portions of the texts that Smith makes the greatest emotional impacts in are during the narrators' interactions with the native peoples. Smith subjectively manipulates the presented interactions between the Englishmen and the natives primarily in the English favor, though there are some exceptions. There is some tension, then, between what the traditional way in which performative documentary films try not to control what emotional response is felt toward

the subject, and the clear bias in favor of the English that Smith presents. Again, the inclusion of the Pocahontas story clearly shows how Smith is using it to capitalize on the audiences' emotional predisposition to that story and the somewhat recently departed "Indian Princess." However, though Smith tries to control his audience's emotional response towards his text, he can never fully control it, especially during scenes where he presents the natives as having the upper hand over the English colonists. Smith's inability to fully control his audience's response allows his texts to retain this same feeling of objective responses as traditional performative documentaries.

Despite the feeling of objective responses, performative documentary theory does have some limitations in analyzing Smith's manipulation of his audience's emotions. Smith does not appear to be fully in control of his audience's response because he is not in control of his own responses. Unlike the documentary filmmaker, Smith is recording a subject he does not fully understand in an environment he does not completely comprehend. Smith writes *A True Relation* just a year after arriving in Jamestown; that time frame, coupled with the fact that he is writing as the development and exploration of the New World is happening, denies Smith the luxury of approaching his subject with a full comprehension and emotional understanding.

The director's hand can often be seen throughout the mise-en-scene of the film. Direct cinema, in contrast, strives to completely eliminate any trace of the filmmaker's presence, even though it is impossible to completely remove the director's hand from a film. Before the rise of performative documentary theory, some theorists argued against this directorial "invasion" of the film, citing it took away from the "realness." As has been discussed earlier, performative documentary theory argues that "truth" (true

realness) is impossible to achieve, and therefore embraces the idea of a visible presence of the filmmaker. This convention of performative documentary draws somewhat from the narrative-film auteur theory. It is the idea that a film holds the specific mark and style of a director who has full creative control over it. In performative documentary, this directorial control is easy to see, as it is the filmmaker's decision as to what is filmed and what portions of the raw footage make it to the finished cut of the film. Additionally, the subjective and emotional tone of the film is perhaps the most noticeable marker of the director's influence on the film (Bruzzi 197).

While Smith does show his mark and style throughout the pages of *A True Relation* and *The Generall Historie*, it would be too simple to say that Smith's writing fully displays this convention. Whereas a performative documentary director has full creative control over his work, Smith is unable to maintain such control over his environment. It is this lack of control that helps shape Smith's texts into the works of literature that they are, but prevent them from being able to be completely explained by this performative documentary convention.

Though the emotional manipulation found in performative documentary films provides a conceptual explanation of Smith's works, another relatively new convention better interprets Smith's auteur presence throughout his texts. It is the idea of the filmmaker as a performer-director. This label might initially be misleading, as it seems to indicate that the filmmaker is both the director and the subject of his film, but this is not the case. The idea of the performer-director is a filmmaker who both directs and directly interacts (on or off-screen) with his subjects. He may interview his subject on screen, interview them with a voice heard audibly off-screen, or provide voice-overs throughout

the film. The act of performing-directing arose as new documentary filmmakers sought less formal and less traditional ways to discover the truth of their subjects (Bruzzi 198). Though this is a rather new convention of performative documentary, John Smith can be seen to utilize very similar techniques in his works. While character John Smith may be a somewhat fictionalized version of the author Smith, his inclusion and active participation in the story shows Smith as both an author (director) of the story and a performer.

The final convention of performative documentary theory is also one that is often shared with traditional, direct cinema documentary. In his article “ ‘Getting to Know You...’ Knowledge, Power, and the Body,” Bill Nichols says that many documentary filmmakers attempt to use their film to point to a larger social issue (181). Because so many documentaries have, through their subjects, drawn their audience’s attention to larger social issues, audiences have been trained to look for a larger social commentary in documentary films. In addition to absorbing the initial message and idea a documentary is trying to convey, audiences also seek a larger connection to and a meaning behind the subject and the study of these films. This is not such a difficult process if audiences can find something familiar in the film. But what happens, Nichols asks, if the viewer cannot find anything familiar—if they cannot relate in any way to the subject or to the filmmaker?

In such cases, performative documentary can either greatly help or hinder the understanding of the film. Performative documentary can greatly increase the audience’s feeling of accessibility and their ability to relate through the emotional tone of the film. If the audience can understand and grasp on to the emotions the filmmaker brings out through his work then the familiar emotions allow for an understanding of the film’s

overarching social message, even if the viewer has trouble connecting to the source material or relating to the director. Contrastingly, if the audience cannot relate to the emotions that fill the film they are watching, it further keeps them from being able to access and understand the larger social issues that are being referred to in the film.

Perhaps the larger social issue Smith's works seem to be pointing at is the role of the English in the New World. Smith accomplishes this by focusing the lens of the story on himself, and in the process creates an archetypal Englishman in the New World.

As this chapter has tried to show, performative documentary theory lends itself applicable to the study of the works of John Smith. This particular film theory strikes the balance between fictional reality and documenting "realness," similar to what Smith's texts try to do, thereby providing a vocabulary with which to better analyze what the writing produces both factually and fictionally. In the final chapter of this thesis, the conventions of performative documentary theory as outlined above will be applied to the analysis of Smith's *The Generall Historie* and *A True Relation* and will be studied in great detail.

Chapter Three: Applied Analysis

The dramatic and performative nature of Smith's texts can now be seen to readily lend itself to analysis through the anachronistic lens of performative documentary theory. The new understanding of Smith's literary production it lends provides a keen insight into the imaginative and expressive power of Smith's texts. Using the ideas presented by studying performative documentary theory, one can begin to see the different layers of performance in the texts. On the surface is the character John Smith, who serves as an actor and as a director of events of the Virginia colony within the texts. Below that layer is the author John Smith, who serves as both the "documentary" director and the camera as he creates and organizes the story of the English colonization of the New World. Exploring these layers of both the character John Smith and the author John Smith allow the reader to understand the complexity of the ways in which Smith exists in and outside of his texts.

As frequently observed by critics and readers alike, among the most distinguishing (and complex) features of Smith's *The Generall Historie* is the presentation of Smith, himself, in the third person. From the beginning, Smith is the actor in his own narrative. He is a character of the author John Smith's textual creation (presented in third person) that is introduced in the first chapter of this thesis. It is easy to see how "John Smith" emerges as an exaggerated character in a portion of *The Generall Historie*. Smith, the writer, describes a small expedition Smith, the character, made with Master Robbinson, Thomas Emry, and a few Indian guides. Upon finding himself and his party betrayed by their guides, Smith, as writer, describes the following:

...finding he [Smith] was beset with 200. Salvages, two of them hee slew, still defending himselfe with the ayd of a Salvage his guid, whom he bound to his arme with his garters, and used him as a buckler, yet he was shot in his thigh a little, and had many arrows that stucke in his cloathes but no great hurt, till at last they tooke him prisoner. (316)

Recounting his own experience from a seemingly detached vantage point, Smith heightens the drama while claiming objectivity. Providing graphic detail, accounting the number of arrows, etc. the narrator does not provide a stable vantage point; he is both in and out of the event. Moreover, as narrator Smith continues to describe this attack by the Indians, it eventually takes all two hundred of Openchankenough's men, as well as a quagmire, to bring the character Smith down. It is worth noting that the number of Indians increases by the next paragraph to three hundred (317).

Such an elaborated sequence allows the reader to see how the author Smith becomes a separate figure from the character Smith, who performs near inhuman feats, constructing a heroic version of himself in the process. It would seem highly unlikely that the real Smith would be able to put up such a fight against the Native Americans when outnumbered as much as the passage describes. In turning the character Smith into a heightened version of himself, the author John Smith also begins to create a larger than life, almost mythic version of the explorer in the New World. As discussed in Chapter One, Smith creates a new figure: an heroic explorer who makes his fortune in the process of conquering the New World. By exaggerating his actions, the author John Smith turns the character Smith into a new, New World archetype.

Despite the fact that the story is clearly enhanced in the telling, it is important to remember that the author Smith claims these events as fact—he claims to author a “general history.” The reader must then see this portion as a real event that has been affected by the lens of the director (author). Before the lens and the director are themselves analyzed though, the reader must first understand the importance in viewing the character Smith and how he relates to the rest of the text. Specifically, what the character Smith shows the reader is the relationship between the adventuring Englishman and the Indian antagonist. In relation to the antagonistic Indian figure, Smith’s New World archetypal explorer must continue to conquer; in order to fully conquer the land, the explorer must overcome and tame the Indian.

Despite the need for the explorer to overcome, the passage noted above must end with Smith being captured because that is really what happened and, after all, Smith claims his works as factual accounts of the exploration and settlement of Virginia. It is what happens in the process of being captured that is open to interpretation. The character Smith is a strong, independent man who will fight until the very end. He tries to present himself as a colonist that cannot be bested by the Indians, as is evident through their interactions in the rest of *The Generall Historie*. The character Smith in this surprise attack by the Indians must then be one who fights back with every ounce of his strength and cunning. It would take two hundred men and sinking sand in order to capture the Smith that is presented in the pages of these texts.

The character Smith takes on a more complex role when one begins to look past the heroic, yet captured character to the next layer, that of a pre-captured Smith as a director. However, leading up to this moment, he is not yet the “film” director as

mentioned in the previous chapter, but still the character Smith, “performing” the events described on page. On the one hand, he directs the actual colony (and its administration) as a captain and sometimes governor of the Jamestown colony; and, at the same time, he directs the events that happen throughout the colony. One such event occurs in the Third Booke of Smith’s *The Generall Historie*. The narrator describes how Smith, in charge of the company, orders his men to build up the settlement at Virginia and search for food as they find themselves without food and under the constant threat of Indian attack. Smith orders a blockhouse and a garrison to be built, and the church to be repaired and restored. These buildings were meant not only to protect the colonists from unfriendly Indian attack but also to provide a base for trade with friendly Indian tribes. In addition to building, Smith directed that land be used to farm crops and animals bred so that the colonists might have food (390).

On the other hand, Smith directs the readers’ experience (and interpretation) as well. It would seem in just reading this small portion of Smith’s direction that he is presented as a clever and wise administrator of the Jamestown settlement. But, being a realistic, performative documentary tale, Smith’s role as director is shown to be much more complicated than that. In a letter to his men, director Smith reveals that rumors were spread that he intended to starve his men due to his reliance on Powhattan and that leader’s men for food. Smith contradicts these stories and claims that the colony’s hardship truly lies in the idle nature of its inhabitants. Smith writes: “But dreame no longer of this vain hope from Powhattan, nor that I will longer forbear to force you, from your Idlennesse, and punish you if you rayle” (“The Generall” 391). Next he gives the ultimatum that, with the building and planting done in order to assure stores for the

future, if the colonists wish to survive through that season, they must actively gather the wild crops that the Indians have shown them themselves.

This directorial Smith is shown to be less of an adventurer than the character Smith, and more a strict, commanding ruler. He rules this way, one would assume, in order to assure the survival of his men and his colony. These accusations of idleness and the way in which Smith deals with his men appear to connect to the personality of the character Smith in that the director Smith demands the same level of independence and self-reliance that he himself commands. In the scope of the documentary tale of *The Generall Historie*, this positive, albeit harsh presentation of the performer-director Smith expands upon the idea of the independent explorer. In order to survive in the New World, the explorer must constantly discover and conquer. This Smith, already a New World figure, demands that his men display these same character traits. Smith writes that, “these things [prosperity in the New World] may bee had by labour and diligence” (“The Generall” 616). With this attitude in mind, the performer-director Smith will not tolerate men unwilling to work hard for their place in the New World.

The story is not limited to a positive-only portrayal of Smith the performer-director. Several pages later Smith’s men are reported to be “exclaiming against Captaine Smith, that they mortally hated ere ever they saw him” (397). Though the character Smith may see himself as noble commander, the story reveals that he does not always have the respect and love of his men. The passage discussed above is not included only to maintain the “realness” of the story, but also to complicate the portrayal of the character Smith when he takes on the added role of administrative director of Jamestown. Here Smith allows the reader to see a complete picture of him as the performer-director, and is

further distanced from the author John Smith. Though Smith's men did not always like him, this performer-director Smith is the leader his men need, and continues to fight for the survival of the Jamestown colony despite his men's opinion of him. Through the inclusion of this layer, Smith redefines what it means to direct the actions of the settlement as its administrator; he is also performing and self-directing his role in the story of the colonization of Virginia.

Smith moves from character to director of the character as this analysis moves to the third layer of the role Smith plays in his telling of the story of the English settlement of the New World. In this layer, Smith is both the director of the tale as well as the documentary camera. It is perhaps easiest to see Smith's directorial hand at work throughout both *A True Relation* and *The Generall Historie* as he includes what is now the famous tale of his interactions with Pocahontas. It is important to realize that many scholars believe that the Pocahontas tale was not originally included in Smith's first version of *The Generall Historie* but added later because of the popularity of Pocahontas with the English court. The inclusion of her as a recurring character in the larger history shows Smith's (as the camera, director, and here, editor of a performative documentary-type text) conscious decision to alter the inclusion of certain events that may or may not have happened exactly as recorded within his works.

Pocahontas first appears in *A True Relation* as a young ten-year-old girl who serves as a messenger between her father Powhattan and the English colonists (34-35). There does not seem to be any indication from this mention of the romanticized savior-princess that was later to steal the hearts of the English. Instead, she appears as another among many named Indians who interact with the Jamestown colonists. The version of

Pocahontas that modern readers are more familiar with appears in *The Generall Historie*. She first saves Smith by throwing herself over him as Powhattan prepares to brain the English captain (321). This is one of many scenes Smith records without fully understanding what is happening—a moment of “truth” which the director Smith cannot control. Most likely, this ceremony was not meant to really kill Smith but to symbolically kill him in order for him to be reborn as a member of the Powhattan tribe.

Regardless of the original intent of the ceremony, the inclusion of Pocahontas saving Smith seems to be done in order to appeal to the popularity the Indian princess had with the English. Pocahontas appears again in *The Generall Historie* once more saving the life of Smith and his men. In this story, Pocahontas risks her life in order to warn the Englishmen of an impending attack by Powhattan and his men (374)⁶. Smith purposefully includes multiple instances of Pocahontas acting in this archetypal role of the virgin native who is willing to sacrifice herself for a colonial explorer. (This figure can also be seen in the writings of Cortez.) Whether these two stories actually happened or not, the fact that they were included shows the nature of Smith as a director. He directs the camera to focus on moments that appeal to his audience, shows the positive nature of the relationship between Pocahontas and the Englishmen, and shines a light on himself, taking some of the luster of Pocahontas’ celebrity for himself.

An understanding of the three roles of Smith in relation to the text allow for a richer analysis of Smith’s works using the conventions of performative documentary theory. One such convention is the inclusion of “fill in,” or B-roll footage to help enhance missing pieces of the story being told. Smith uses this technique throughout *The Generall*

⁶ This incident is said to have taken place in 1607. Pocahontas was kidnapped by the English in 1613, five years after this story took place and Smith left Jamestown.

Historie. The first book of *The Generall Historie* is told in the first person, as is the rest of the text. This is not a problematic issue until one realizes that the years the first book covers are 1492 to 1606. Smith did not come to the Jamestown colony until 1608. *The Generall Historie* is Smith's tale of the English settlement of Virginia, but if Smith was not there to witness those first years of exploration, how is he able to accurately provide a first person account of those events?

The technique Smith uses here is the same as using B-roll footage in a performative documentary. He fills in the years he was not physically present in Virginia by using portions of accounts by other English colonists. These authors include James Rosier, an English clergyman and explorer of Maine; John Brierton, an adventurer and chronicler of a 1602 expedition to the New World; and Thomas Harriot, an English scientist who traveled to Roanoke Island with Sir Walter Raleigh. The use of many different authors would lead one to assume that *The Generall Historie* would read as a conglomeration of many different styles of narration, but this is not the case. Smith's hand appears to have heavily edited these supplemental portions. In editing, he would not only have chosen the portions of the Virginia story he wanted told, but, in true directorial fashion, he edited these accounts in order for the collected pieces to read with one consistent voice throughout the six books that make up *The Generall Historie*. Despite the inconsistencies in narration that many critics describe (as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis,) in *The Generall Historie*, the narrative does read as consistent, if a little confusing when one begins to question who is meant to be narrating each portion of the text. The work that Smith puts in to the editing of this text, by the inclusion of accounts taken from other authors, shows how literarily self-conscious he was in the creation of his

text. This conscious behavior becomes even more visible when analyzing the text in its entirety using the vocabulary of performative documentary conventions.

The next trope that is found in Smith's texts is that of emotional manipulation through subjective writing. Smith spends most of his texts writing about different native peoples and his encounters with them. The English would have been familiar with the barbaric "Sauvages" of the New World, so the writer John Smith's stories would have played with those preconceived notions. There are many instances in the text where the natives do fall into the stereotypical savage villain role. The Third Booke of *The Generall Historie* recounts an instance where there was an, "opportunity to the Salvages to surprise one George Cassen, whom they slew" (316). The book also describes another time when, "Master Russell brought us in newes that we were all betrayed: for at least seven hundred Salvages well armed, had invironed the house" (377). What these two stories show is a version of the natives that the English explorers were expected to encounter. They were uncivilized non-Christians and were expected to behave in this way as per the tradition of tales of natives brought back by earlier explorers. As the villainous natives attack, the author Smith uses these two stories to make other pleas to his readers' (including the English authorities') support. By calling the natives "well armed," Smith shows that he and his men need better supplies in order to properly defend themselves.

As Smith continues to ask for better supplies for his men, he plays to the English idea of the European explorer who is able to best the natives he encounters. Smith, in *A True Relation*, describes the way in which he punishes an impertinent Indian: "I gave him twentie lashes with a Rope, and his bowes and arrowes, bidding him shoote if he durst," (35). By showing the English dominance over the Indian tribes, Smith continues to

appeal to the emotional expectations of his British readers. They expect to be portrayed as the dominant culture, especially in the “Sauvage” New World, and so, for many portions of his works, Smith writes to those expectations.

Smith, however, does not only present the Native Americans as violent and easily manipulated but also complicates the English ideas of the Indians. He shows the cultural complexities of the Powhattan tribe as he spends time with them and observes their ceremonies. “Their religion and Ceremonie I observed was thus.” Smith writes in *A True Relation*, “three or foure dayes after my taking seven of them in the house where I lay, each with a rattle began at ten a clocke in the morning to sing about the fire” (19). Smith continues to describe the ceremony in great detail. What is interesting about this passage is that Smith does not write this as subjectively as one would imagine. He records the events that happen in a very matter of fact, documentary way. Smith, as director, seems at this moment to not be fully in control of his narrative “camera.” It is included in this chapter’s discussion of the subjectivity of the texts precisely because it does not read as subjectively as one would assume. Instead it expands the narrative Smith presents by playing against the English notions of what the Indians are by showing them as a people group with a rich cultural tradition. Smith, in expanding the narrative through a somewhat objective depiction of the natives, presents a more “real” depiction of the world surrounding the Jamestown colony.

Conclusion

Throughout his texts, Smith claims a true, realistic portrayal of the events of the settlement of Jamestown. Despite his claims, as has been shown throughout this thesis, Smith, through manipulation of events, emotions, and throughout the editing process, very consciously shapes his presentation of reality. The character John Smith performs in a world that is equal parts historical Jamestown and a heightened version of the colony. This convergence of Smith's textual Jamestown with its historical counterpart is what makes *A True Relation* and *The Generall Historie* such rich texts and Smith, as the performer and "director," such a complex and fascinating figure.

Analyzing Smith's works with the anachronistic vocabulary of performative documentary theory allows for a greater understanding of the complexities of the "real" Jamestown and the version of himself that Smith presents. Performative documentary theory allows one to see the ways in which Smith has created a separate identity in the character John Smith and a heightened version of the Jamestown colony from their "real" historical counterparts by filtering the truth of the colonization through Smith's "directorial" lens. By recognizing that this filter is present, one can better begin to sort through what is historical fact and what has been embellished for the page. Analyzing Smith's embellishment allows one to see not just how the story differs from historical fact, but draws attention to the craft with which Smith created the character version of himself as well as the heightened "reality" of the Jamestown colony.

Smith is a complex and very self-conscious writer. He deftly shapes the idea of the New World as a place for men who are willing to work hard and make the most of opportunities. Additionally, Smith creates a character version of himself that fully

embodies the characteristics of this New World man and ensures that in the pages of the texts, he is remembered as a key figure in the settlement and survival of Jamestown.

Smith also manipulates his audience's response to the stories of Indians, and expands the ways in which they are presented in English texts, both positively and negatively. In this manipulation, Smith crafts an expanding idea of how natives and their interactions with the colonists can be presented and understood.

Performative documentary theory expands the way in which Smith can be read as an expert craftsman. He has shaped not only the words on the page, but also the ways in which Jamestown, himself, and the larger idea of the English role in the New World is understood and remembered by both his contemporaries and future readers. Smith shapes his presentation of the character Smith and the story of Jamestown fully aware of what he is doing. Analyzing Smith's works through the lens of performative documentary theory allows one to understand just how self-conscious Smith is. This new awareness of Smith's skill in writing and developing his world allows for a richer appreciation for all that Smith does in the pages of his texts.

Smith, as both author and character, cannot be studied without taking into account the ways in which his story has become fictionalized and turned into legend. Conversely, Smith's narratives must also be considered for the historical information they provide. Using performative documentary theory provides an understanding of this multifaceted and legendary "reality" that Smith has uniquely shaped and helps unpack the many layers that make up his reality. As one begins to analyze these different layers that performative documentary theory sheds light on one can, again, begin to fully understand all that Smith has done in the creation of his texts. Through the unpacking of these layers, this thesis

has complicated the understanding of Smith as a conscious author and shaper of the “reality” of the colonial world. Future studies of Smith and his works must now take into account that Smith can be viewed as a multifaceted character, captain, “director,” and author who is fully aware of the ways in which he shapes the perception of himself and Jamestown. And, though performative documentary theory might be a twentieth-century convention that seems out of place as the basis for study of two seventeenth-century texts, it complicates future readings of Smith by forcing the reader to accept the fictionalization and manipulation of the events presented in the pages of his texts and also to appreciate what kind of New World perception Smith has created in his telling of the story of the English colonization in the New World.

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