The queer side of colonial desire is less about possession than about its failures, and less concerned with first contacts than with the ambivalent afterlives and melancholic echoes of colonial encounters. Thus this final chapter begins with a leave-taking: the protracted departure, in 1558, of Jean de Léry’s mission to the French Huguenot outpost in Brazil. Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (not published until 1578, more than twenty years after the voyage) is a novelistic account of how his twenty-two-year-old self, along with fifteen or sixteen other young Calvinist clergymen, undertook—and aborted—the first Protestant mission to the Americas. The text recounts a drama of disidentifications and exiles: the ministers’ drastic falling-out with the governor of the “France antarctique” colony, Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, whom Léry accuses of backsliding into Catholicism; their expulsion from the tiny island fort; their two months’ sojourn on the mainland of Brazil (where the city of Rio de Janeiro now sprawls) among the Tupinamba people; their harrowing return voyage; and the turbulent years of religious war in France between the voyage and the *Histoire*’s publication.

“If It Had Not Been”

On the January 4, 1558, not quite a year after arriving in Brazil, Jean de Léry and his fellow ministers secured permission to board a ship bound for France in the Bay of Guanabara and weighed anchor:
Not, however, without great fear and apprehension: in view of the hardships we had endured going over, if it had not been for the ill turn done us by Villegagnon, several of us, who had not only found over there the means of serving God as we wished, but had also tasted the goodness and fertility of the country, might well have stayed on instead of returning to France, where the difficulties were then—and are still—incomparably greater, with respect to both religion and to things concerning this life.¹

Léry loads down the act of setting sail with negative affects like an intangible cargo: apprehension, regret, and wistful desire for what might have been. His insistence that they were forced to leave overlays constraint on constraint: if only things had been otherwise in the colony, if Villegagnon had not been even more cruel than they could endure, even by comparison to the hardships of the voyage, even in comparison to the state of things in France, then they “might well have stayed on.” But things were not, as it happened, otherwise, and so they did not stay. At this moment, when their mission is irretrievably aborted, the narrative loops into backward-looking digressions pondering the lost, hypothetical futures foreclosed by not remaining in the colony (which would fall to the Portuguese within two years).²

This negative conditional phrasing is used throughout the Histoire d’un voyage to signal a mood of passive regret over what never could have been, because the conditions of its possibility were themselves impossible.

These would-be colonizers’ impossible longings—for things to have been otherwise; for transformation into something they could never be; for possession of something they will never have; for another role to play besides the one in which they have been cast by the material finitudes of history—constitute a mode of desire that I call queer colonial melancholia. It is bodied forth in the text and images of Jean de Léry’s Histoire d’un voyage, as well as in two texts from the doomed English venture on Roanoke Island: Thomas Harriot’s 1588 promotional pamphlet, A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia, and John White’s 1590 coda to it, “The True Pic-
tures and Fashions of the People in That Part of America Now Called Virginia.” Both the French Calvinist text about Brazil and the Elizabethan Anglican one about Virginia are shot through with anxieties of inferiority toward the colonial prowess of Catholic Portugal and Spain. They are powered by thwarted desires for lost and impossible futures. The force of their longing generates fantastical affective models of relation between Europeans and Native Americans, which exceed the logics of linear historical time and biological or sexual reproduction. These unnatural fantasies are queer in that they violate norms of whom and what the would-be colonizer is supposed to identify with, and what he is supposed to desire.

For example, during their sojourn on the mainland, Jean de Léry and the band of unarmed clergymen wander unmoored from the social structures of the French colony. Vulnerable and implicated in unorthodox relationships not only with the Tupinamba people but with the French Catholic (Norman) sailors, some of whom live with the Tupinamba, the ministers occupy a queer position as exiled not-quite-colonizers. The foundational identity categories of nationality, tribe, and religion have failed to hold, and those displacements still bear on Léry as he writes his account years later. Having “tasted the goodness” of the country, an experience Léry consistently figures as one of sensory receptivity, some “several” of the ministers had “found,” in extreme dislocation, an unexpected consonance between the alien land of Brazil and a possible desired self. But it is an impossible desire to sustain, and the “means of serving God as we wished” becomes for Léry one of the lost American love objects left behind on the shore of Brazil.

Thomas Harriot and John White, by contrast, most likely first encountered the Algonkian people of Virginia on the first English expedition to Roanoke Island in 1584. They played leading roles as documentarians of the second, disastrous voyage led by Richard Grenville in 1585. The men of that company had to be rescued and transported back to England by Francis Drake on his return voyage from the Caribbean. Harriot published a quarto edition of his Report to promote the colony to prospective settlers in 1588—too late to accomplish its purpose—after a third expedition, led by John White, unexpectedly landed again on Roanoke after a near mutiny at sea.
Unlike the two previous expeditions, this 1587 voyage was intended to be a permanent settler colony. White returned quickly to England to attempt to deliver supplies to the colony. But due to political complications, including the Spanish Armada, three years passed before he could do so. The 1590 re-publication, in a splendid folio edition, of Harriot’s Briefe and True Report, along with engravings by Dutch publisher Theodor de Bry of John White’s “True Pictures,” was dedicated to Raleigh as the patron of the Virginia venture, in hopes of raising money and support for a relief voyage. But it was again too late for the book to do any good. By the time the edition appeared, White had already embarked on the long-delayed relief voyage. There was no colony to relieve, however. White arrived to find the Roanoke settlement razed and all the settlers gone. Among those lost were White’s daughter and his infant granddaughter, Virginia Dare, whose birth was lauded—and whose disappearance was mourned and mythologized—as the first baby of English descent born on the North American continent. The 1590 folio thus embodies several kinds of belated, wishful, and impossible colonial ambitions between its covers. It contains material from two writers and artists, collected on two successive, failed ventures, and published at a third moment, by a third party with his own agenda, in a futile attempt to materialize a convoluted network of already-impossible national and familial desires.

“That Bizarre Figure of Desire”

By using the term “colonial desire” to refer to the historical force animating these voyage accounts, I am deliberately characterizing both colonial venturing and colonial writing as erotically driven processes, structured by a dynamic of lack, pursuit, and loss. Voyage writing is a fictive and fantastical genre that shares its historical lineage, as well as its dilated quest-and-return plot structure, with romance. It comes into being as a recognizable genre through its deployment of preexisting allegorical tropes of European fantasy. Undercurrents of loss and alienation are written into its material conditions. Long-distance voyaging enacts a double displacement: through the time-warping incarceration of the journey; into the presence of a
civilization far different from the traveler’s own; and then back, into a defamiliarized home country, in which the voyager is irreversibly altered. The encounter with the other is always dramatized as negotiation of identification and difference, attraction and repulsion.

Tales of long-distance travel, thoroughly dependent on presenting an erotics of strangeness for readers’ pleasure, permeate early modern popular culture, beginning with Richard Hakluyt’s famous anthologies: *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America and the Ilands Adjacent unto the Same, Made First of All by Our Englishmen and Afterwards by the Frenchmen and Britons: With Two Mappes Annexed Hereunto* (1582); and *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation: Made by Sea or Over Land to the Most Remote and Farthest Distant Quarters of the Earth at Any Time within the Compasse of These 1500 Years* (1589, 1598–1600), every edition of which included Thomas Harriot’s *Briefe and True Report.* Jean de Léry’s, Thomas Harriot’s, and John White’s accounts were widely translated, collected, and circulated in print. Indeed, both works became volumes in Dutch engraver and publisher Theodor de Bry’s thirteen-volume series *Les Grands Voyages, or America,* published in lavish editions throughout Europe in the 1590s and 1600s in the interest of promoting specifically Protestant colonial ambitions. But exoticized figures of the non-European people represented in these narratives also abound in theater, masques, and public processions, far beyond the readerships of specific accounts. These include the entry of Henri II into Rouen in 1550, which included a mock village of Brazilian Indians, and Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* (1605)—only one of many performances in the Jacobean court to portray racialized others. From the wondrous objects and creatures from Hakluyt described in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), to the peregrinations of identity in later works such as John Fletcher’s *The Island Princess* (1621) and *The Sea Voyage* (1622), colonial desire is consumed in a variety of genres in which fiction and nonfiction, politics and pleasure overlap and double back on one another.

These narratives stage bodies, objects, and encounters, through the proscenium-like frame of the *Report* or *Histoire,* for the reader’s delectation. The bodies and things, organic and artificial, that
populate the colonial encounter scene function as contact points between the imaginary theater of the European’s desire and the physical reality of the non-European community that the European viewer can see but not understand. European objects too are newly animated in alien settings, magnetizing unexpected affects of identification, wonder, and loss. People and places become objectified. Frantz Fanon characterizes the position of the racialized colonial other as “an object among other objects,” and Roland Greene calls early modern Brazil “an object as well as a place of objects,” which attract, hold, and transmit erotic feeling. These are objects in a psychoanalytic sense—the active subjects of object relations. The texts are objects as well, efficacious things circulated to promote and engender colonial desire. They invite a European audience into an identification with the colonizer protagonist, what he sees, and what he represents. Like the pamphleteers and playwrights of the English and Scottish witch hunts discussed in the previous chapter, Jean de Léry, Thomas Harriot, and John White are mediatizing lived events. They are also a kind of go-between, mediating an affective exchange with their European readers. Their success depends on the affective states—sympathy, ambition, awe, horror—that they incite in the reader. They aim—literally, in the case of Harriot’s *Briefe and True Report*, published to urge readers to become colonial settlers—to bring the reader into the encounter scene.

This literature is, for good reason, usually read with a focus on the functions of wonder, strangeness, and radical difference. A dominant strain of colonial theory that might be called “straight” appears when canonical texts—Columbus’s correspondence and logbooks; Cortés’s *Cartas de relación*; Spenser’s 1596 pamphlet *A View of the Present State of Ireland*—are read for their erotics of difference and possession. Colonial desire in these texts is triumphalist, appropriating and reproductive. It relies on representations of native ignorance to authorize the conquest of the Americas, and on representations of native sexual monstrosity to eroticize it. Scholars in recent decades have generated a rich body of criticism on the complicated work of difference in these texts, attending to the force of European fantasy in shaping their descriptions of other peoples, in order to expose European ideologies of race, nation, gender, and religion.
But I want to expand the affective scope of colonial desire here, from the (fruitful and inexhaustible) project of explicating representations of difference to the no less complicated dynamics of identification, which have attracted less attention.

Colonial writing, with its allegorizing and ethnographic modes of inscription, is not only an object of study in this chapter. It is also a methodological metaobject, in that the dialectical interplay between identification and alterity that governs European colonial discourse also governs the following:

1. The whole history of heteronormativity and anti-homophobic resistance to it, from the sexology of same-sex desires, to the old Freudian line construing homosexuality as an excess of narcissism,\textsuperscript{14} to modern intraqueer conflicts over the politics of personal identities and gendered styles.

2. The ongoing methodological conversation in early modern sexuality studies in which this book intervenes, about the competing values of describing transhistorical continuities of desire versus emphasizing the contingencies of sexual regimes in specific times and places. In fact, the crisis of similitude and difference at the heart of colonial description metaphorically recapitulates the question of how modern readers should approach representations of desire in any text: as subjectively recognizable, or as inaccessibly different—or some other way.

3. Readers’ attitudes toward texts. As Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero have incisively pointed out, the overarching valence of this third dialectic in scholarly reading has tended toward the valuation of difference (mature, rigorous, informed, suspicious, empirically substantiated, politically enlightened) and the denigration of certain pleasures of sameness (naive, narcissistic, universalizing, aestheticizing, reactionary). But, they caution, “the practice of queer theory has taught us that neither alterity nor
similarity is an inevitable conceptual guarantor of oppositional political force, that the construction of desirous identifications can be potentially destabilizing as well as totalizing.”¹⁵ Eve Sedgwick critiques the same assumed political certainties about the work of difference in her call for a “reparative” reading practice grounded in dynamics of identification and need between text and reader, as an antidote to a “paranoid” practice that holds the readerly self apart by suspecting and diagnosing the text, “disavowing its own affective motive and force.”¹⁶

What follows can be understood as an experiment against the liberal faith—enforced by New Historicism’s anthropological stance toward the past and by other forms of empiricism envy (about which I say more in the conclusion)—that more and better temporally and materially specific anatomizations of ideological and historical difference will have liberatory consequences. Instead, proliferating accounts of alterity can neutralize the political energies of the present, by placing faith in the exposure of harmful structural conditions. As is made horrifyingly clear every day at the political moment in which I write, knowledge and exposure do not bring about any certain retribution, especially when spectacular terror is part of the point of state violence.¹⁷ Other methods, other critical affects, and other angles of approach are sorely needed.

My approach to the structure of colonial desire in this chapter is informed by Frantz Fanon’s analysis of the psychosexual effects of racial subjugation in Black Skin, White Masks. Fanon describes the colonial relation as a perverse two-way dynamic of identification and difference in which both the Black colonized subject and the white colonizer are affected, from their disparate positions of power, by a “double narcissism”: a deep investment in being regarded by the other, as well as unconscious longings to be, or to be like, the other.¹⁸ In the violent erotic complex that warps all relations in the colonial sphere, forces of envy, desire, and identification coexist with, and indeed are expressed through, violent enmity. Homi Bhabha describes the white colonist’s inability to abide not being loved: “The frustrated
wish ‘I want him to love me,’ turns into its opposite ‘I hate him’ and thence through projection and the exclusion of the first person, ‘He hates me.’”¹⁹ This is the originary narcissism of colonial identification: a falling in love with the image of the self as a god or conqueror, as the colonist longs to be seen in the eyes of the conquered people, followed by the transmutation of that narcissistic wish into ideations of persecution. It echoes King James VI’s paranoid delight at being named as the devil’s greatest enemy in the world at the North Berwick witch trials. For Fanon, because colonialism makes explicit the impossibility of any objective history, the colonial condition is expressed through psychic and affective registers—dreams, alienation, projective identifications and defenses—the paradoxical motions of “that bizarre figure of desire, which splits along the axis on which it turns.”²⁰ It is also lived through fiction, through the assemblage of representations—including the texts I am reading here—that bear upon and construct colonial subjects. For Bhabha, “it is through image and fantasy—those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious,” that Fanon uncovers the erotic structure of colonialism.²¹ Following Fanon’s insistence on the primacy of fantasy, as well as the queer critical imperative to dismantle poses of unmarked objectivity, I aim here to bring the colonizer’s psyche, voice, and gaze, in all their ambivalence, under the scope of a queer analysis. I want to look not only at the objects of the colonizers’ gaze but also at their acts of looking.²² I take it as axiomatic that however strenuously colonists’ ethnographic descriptions insist on their own facticity, they are loaded with passionate investment. Furthermore, all of their intricate descriptions—as well as their puzzles, secrets, visions, and regrets—are reconstructions of encounters that were already heavily shot through with fantasy.²³

My aim here is to explicate a queer undercurrent of melancholic, overwrought, and overidentificatory affect running through the genre of early modern colonial writing. This is actually a vital element of the form and shape of early modern colonial desire, full stop, that has largely gone unremarked.²⁴ It is not my aim to compile a taxonomy of queer examples as opposed to others that are straight. Rather, I offer these supersaturated texts as a framework for recognizing queer melancholia in other contexts, wherever there are
unexpected eruptions of negative affect, unresolved longings for impossible metamorphoses, weirdly persistent imagined affinities, protracted repetitions of renunciation, and time-bending, uncannily generative modes of relation. Ultimately, I use these melancholic colonizers as an uncomfortable mirror in which to scrutinize our own methods of reading across historical difference, comparing their investments in their bygone love objects to our equally fantasmatic relations with the early modern texts that bear our scholarly fascination and love.

In articulating a queer form of colonial desire, I am in no way redeeming the Europeans who set out on these voyages of invasion, no matter that they failed. Simultaneously with the melancholic affects I draw out of them, these accounts record an explicit litany of murder, disease, enslavement, and theft, usually by the writers’ more militarized voyage mates. The Tupinamba and Algonkian civilizations they attempt to register in such complex ways were permanently, genocidally damaged by the fact that these French and English men made these voyages. The Brazil and Roanoke texts are two works of propaganda, with nationalist and Protestant colonial agendas—although narrative and representation have a way of escaping their agendas, spilling into the vastly more complicated realms of pleasure, ambivalence, identification, and desire. This is especially so under the shared condition of failure in the circumstances of both texts’ production. Both works are published belatedly, after the fact of the voyages they chronicle; both are intensely invested in tacit agendas that they aim—and largely fail—to accomplish. But even though these particular colonial ventures failed, many others came after them. Much more damage was done, and continues to be done in the present, to the indigenous peoples from whom Europeans stole the Americas. What I am making visible by describing a particular queer affective mode within this larger complex of violent conquest is how queerness can exist alongside that violence, tied up as part of it. I want to confront what it says about queerness, what becomes of queerness, once we realize that texts of procolonial Protestant propaganda are saturated with queer affect. In negotiating the ambivalent politics of queerness in the history of imperialism, I enter here into a conversation about colonial sexuality taking place across periods and areas of study, including the work of scholars such as Elizabeth
Povinelli, Mark Rifkin, and Peter Singal. These thinkers are centrally concerned with the role of sex and desire, including queerness, in colonial relations; with the history of how heterosexuality has been imposed in colonial spaces; and with asking what theoretical energies we might draw from any given set of representations to think other times, other places, and other possible futures. Like the affects of the witch hunt unpacked in the previous chapter, queer colonial melancholia is a structurally queer affective mode that is part of, not opposed to, the apparatuses of power and violence. The European colonizer’s projective, identificatory, and homoerotic fantasies are constitutive of both colonial queerness and colonial exploitation. Acknowledging this must complicate queer politics, removing any certainty of counterhegemonic subversiveness from the registers we call queer. This idea, which Mark Rifkin further explores in indigenous American contexts, is also indebted to the work of Jasbir Puar, whose concept of homonationalism explodes the assumption that queer expression is necessarily opposed to or apart from state violence, pointing out how queerness is deployed toward imperialist ends. Puar and Rifkin insist, in different ways, on the inextricability of queerness from European constructions of race—both of whiteness and of racialized others—in colonial projects. The discursive aims of Jean de Léry’s, Thomas Harriot’s, and John White’s texts are more ulterior and convoluted than any simple agenda of colonial inscription. The models of time and relation they construct are non-linear, nonheterosexual, and utterly fantastical. But the reality we are left to contend with is that no necessary or foreknown politics attaches to queerness, either in the early modern period or today. The melancholic moments of failure and loss in what follows are part of the larger colonial story of conquest, extraction, slavery, conversion, and, eventually, genocide and settler colonialism. Failure does not undo the larger story; it is part of it. Queerness does not necessarily contradict or repair historical violence; here, it is part of it.

Melancholia’s Queer Plot

Jean de Léry’s departure from Brazil is a dilated retelling, more than twenty years after the fact, of a moment of colonial renunciation that
remains laden with unresolved regret. Harriot’s *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* is a text brought into being to deny—and by its denial to ward off—what virtually everyone who ever read the 1590 edition already knew to be the case: the colony fails. For Léry, the pivotal moment of dispossession is behind him in memory, while in the Virginia text the inevitable loss whispers from the near future, despite the narrative’s not yet knowing it has already happened. The colonial projects these texts recount are over, aborted, or suspended in uncertainty. The American encounters they narrate are cut off, foreclosed by the return voyage. The desires they voice, then, are for love objects that are no longer present. In Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), melancholia is a response to loss in the form of painful, protracted identification with the lost love object, which, rather than running its course, endures excessively in time and intensity. Melancholia is the problem of not being able to stop loving an object that is no longer there. Mourning, or normal, nonpathological grief, follows a linear model of time, divided into discrete temporal periods in a unidirectional progression. In mourning, it is clear what happened in the past (what was lost), what one feels in the present, and how the process of detachment will unfold toward the end of the work of mourning: an ego in a normative state of being “free and uninhibited again.” Mourning is thus a plot, with an expected narrative trajectory and end. Its key features are its conventionality and its finitude: “We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful.” Melancholia, however, flagrantly refuses this plot. It refuses the directionality, the timeline, and the telos of mourning; it is not “overcome after a certain lapse of time.” Melancholia has a queer temporality: it goes on for too long; it refuses to progress. Its objects are improper because they are gone. Melancholia persists in its erotic investment in pastness, defying mourning’s goal of an “uninhibited” and “free” ego. It turns in on itself, negating itself in identification with the love object, which is always figured as a regression, a reversal of the heteronormative telos of Freud’s sexual difference plot.

Melancholia is thus a structurally queer erotic mode, connected to queer history by its hidden and unspeakable love objects,
its overly identificatory orientation, its excessive affective style, and its deviant, too-long duration. It provides a language for drawing out the queer qualities of thwarted colonial desire—specifically, the transtemporal reach of its impossible identifications.\textsuperscript{32} Thinking about the temporality of melancholia makes it easy to see its queer shape, its nostalgic (literally, the persistent pain of homesickness) and anachronistic orientation, in the shape of the voyager’s longing for his lost love objects.\textsuperscript{33} Queer subjects have been called melancholic—also immature, arrested, infantile—for the forms of refusal that Heather Love and Jack Halberstam embrace: refusals of forward motion; of prescriptive plots of “growing out of” or “getting over” interdicted attractions; and of the ultimate normative telos of alloerotic, heterosexual object choice.\textsuperscript{34} Queerness also shares with melancholia—and narcissism—its excess of identification and its investment in sameness, in contrast to a normative plot of ideal differentiation.\textsuperscript{35} Yet another of melancholia’s queer excesses is its affect of volubility verging on mania: “insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.”\textsuperscript{36} Melancholia is expressed in intricately spiraling performances of abasement. It transmogrifies feeling low into high performance art. Colonial melancholia thus inheres in both the conditions of the Brazil and Virginia texts’ production (failure, loss, disjunction) and the stylistic features of the writing itself (recursive, nonlinear narrative arcs, repetition, negation, disavowal, hyperbole). In comparing the two works, two distinct orientations of melancholia emerge, both of which voice the affective aftershocks of their respective encounters by bending time and space: longing for lost pasts, in the loss of the Native American others as problematic but gripping love objects, and longing for lost futures, in the lost fantasy of an American self.

The shape of colonial desire in the \textit{Histoire d’un voyage} is insistently focused on the past, the narrative voice shot through with affects of nostalgia, reversal, and belatedness—what I would call an example of melancholic writing. Léry’s persistent longing for the Tupinamba Indian others is troubled by questions of identity and difference; of what to admire and what to condemn; of whom to want to be like—and, impossibly, to be with—in Brazil. His backward-looking tone inverts gendered agency. Forever insisting that he had \textit{no choice},
Léry uses languages of passivity, compulsion, even penetration, construing himself and his fellow ministers as helplessly—and not altogether unhappily—submissive to the other players in the colonial scene. In contrast to the past-obsessed and passive erotics of *Histoire d’un voyage*, Harriot’s and White’s Roanoke text projects its longings into an imagined future, which it attempts conjure into being. “Melancholia” may seem more apt a term for the French memoir than for the Englishmen’s wishful report. But loss, especially in the colonial sphere, is not limited to the past. Unspeakable identifications can stretch across long stretches of time in both directions. In fact, one of Freud’s first moves in “Mourning and Melancholia” is to expand what is considered a loss to include indirect, ideational, even delusional attachments: losses “of a more ideal kind,” where “the object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love,” which we see here in the loss of a potential colonial future.37 Reading the often bizarre evocations of impossible futures in the *Briefe and True Report* alongside Jean de Léry’s backward gaze illuminates a new, queer form of future melancholia, bodied forth in fantasies that confound any natural or heterosexual timeline. The language in which Harriot’s text figures these desires bears scrutinizing in its uneasy relation to John White’s “True Pictures,” in that Harriot’s projective, identificatory future visions are voiced as a fantasy (or as multiple different fantasies) of annihilation. The *Report* deals in tropes of iterated, successive destruction and transformation, which I see as a cancellation of heterosexuality through annihilation, doing end runs around sexual reproduction and linear time.

Almost every line of Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage* is saturated with queer affective excess, including but not limited to regret, tears, dithering, catty one-upmanship, mockery (of self and others), untoward obsessions with the bodies and practices of Tupinamba men, overidentification, impotence, passivity, loss, ravishment, and submission. Léry’s encyclopedic descriptions detailing the Tupinamba’s clothes, weaponry, music making, food, law, religion, social customs, and language have canonized the *Histoire d’un voyage* as an ancestral ur-text of ethnography; indeed, Claude Lévi-Strauss famously carries with him “that breviary of the anthropologist, Jean de Léry” as
he enters Brazil. Its overwrought comparisons of Brazilian ritual cannibalism to the beliefs of Catholics, who want to “eat the flesh of Jesus Christ” (to “chew and swallow it raw”) are part of the history of Protestantism and French nation formation. The famously ambivalent quality of its moral judgments about Native American versus European customs and values has had a notable afterlife of radical political and philosophical influence. Léry is credited as the major source for Montaigne’s “Des cannibales” and as the co-originator of the cultural relativist idea that native peoples were no more inherently savage than the French. “I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation,” writes Montaigne of Brazil, “from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice.” He says this on the authority of an unnamed friend (Jean de Léry) whom “I had with me for a long time.” There is a strong case to be made that this early, revolutionary relativism—or at least openness to suspending the rigid condemnations of Christian Europe to frame moral comparisons differently—fits within a tradition of protogay radical thought, questioning social norms and revaluing the practices of denigrated others. Carla Freccero has persuasively read Jean de Léry’s ambiguous gender and liminal ethnic, national, and religious positions vis-à-vis the Tupinamba and the other French inhabitants of the colony as belonging to a queer history. All of these agendas are constituted, I think, through the queer affective load that infuses Léry’s bereft, melancholic tone.

Jean de Léry’s backward longing undermines, even reverses, the romance and travel narrative’s conventional telos of homecoming, with its recuperation of proper identities:

So that saying goodbye here to America, I confess for myself that although I have always loved my country and do even now, still, seeing the little—next to none at all—of fidelity that is left here, and, what is worse, the disloyalties of people toward each other—in short, since our whole situation is Italianized, and consists only in dissimulation and words without effect—I often regret that I am not among the savages, in whom (as I have amply
shown in this narrative) I have known more frankness than in many over here, who, for their condemnation, bear the title of “Christian.”

His “regret that I am not among the savages” persists into the time of his writing, pervading the years in between. It carries a touch of slightly forbidden, involuntary feeling; it returns “often,” and unbidden, to trouble his sense of who he is and whom he loves. It must be “confessed” to the reader that something he came to “know” in the “savages” has compounded his disidentification from Frenchness with a persistent affinity for their surpassing rondeur, a suggestively embodied word for frankness or fullness. Whereas the native people in their greater rondeur are capacious—like Orsino’s similarly figured fancy in chapter 2—full, round, receptive, able to hold the nostalgic desire Léry loads into them, his fellow Frenchmen are empty and degenerate, unable to hold any signification at all (paroles sans effect). Léry’s lingering knowledge (j’ay cognue, the same verb used to mean “knowing” in the carnal sense) of this life-changing rondeur between men, across racial and religious lines, has rerouted his affective circuits of identification and alterity. In other words, he wants what he cannot have, he wants it too much, and he wants it because he feels (though no one else agrees) that it is like him, and he like it. This a longing for an impossible metamorphosis in order to inhabit identities and relationalities that are always already foreclosed. It has something in common with tropes of religious conversion—a major locus of early modern anxiety about the allure of non-Christian spaces—but Léry’s Calvinist sojourn is, significantly, not the story of a renegado or apostate. What about those who may have longed to make that break but did not, or could not? The transformation wrought in Jean de Léry is occult and unrealized, lacking the performative marker of the renegado’s conversion. There is no conventional narrative for mourning one’s nonconversion, and no conventional archive for those feelings. They place Jean de Léry in a genealogy of subjects who would have been other than they are, who would have lived and loved otherwise, given the chance in another place and another time.
Léry regrets something he did—leave America—which it was inevitable that he would do. To point out the resonance of this regret with the history of shame-ridden gay desires, we can call Léry’s love for Brazil the “love that dared not speak its name” until after there remained no possibility of its consummation. Like Freud’s melancholic, who can only articulate “I loved him” after the fact, Léry writes years later that he would have loved to have stayed. He compulsively repeats his regret, but it is belated and futile; it comes upon him after he is powerless to reverse it. Jean de Léry cannot mourn the Tupinamba as one mourns the death of a more conventional love, because he never possessed them. Therefore, he desires (impossibly) to retain them through writing. Writing for Léry performs a function akin to imaginative fancy, projecting the force of imagination out into the world in an attempt to furnish forth objects of desire “not present to the senses.” In one of the text’s signal moments of melancholic memory, he claims, “During that year or so when I lived in that country, I took such care in observing all of them, great and small, that even now it seems to me that I have them before my eyes, and I will forever have the idea and image of them in my mind.” Other readers, particularly Freccero, have drawn attention to the spectral quality of the native people’s “quasi-material” presence in this image, and to the way they haunt Léry as figures of history, memory, and violence. Léry attributes this haunting to the intensity of his “curiousness” in looking at them. His attempt to materialize these traces is powered by a still unspent remainder of that pleasure felt in their presence. This is also a deeply identificatory image of incorporation. The field on which these spectral “ideas and images” manifest is inside of Léry, at the crux of his body and mind: “devant mes yeux” and “dans mon entendement” (“in front of my eyes” and “in my understanding”). The melancholic desirer wants to consume his others. His ego “wants to incorporate this object into itself,” Freud writes, “and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it.” Léry keeps the Tupinamba men inside him, part of him, by incorporating their bodies into his writing. As Judith Butler puts it, “What remains unspeakably absent inhabits the psychic voice of the one who remains.”
In the same breath, though, Léry insists on his inability to communicate these visions: “But their gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours, that it is difficult, I confess, to represent them well by writing or by pictures. To have the pleasure of it, then, you will have to go see and visit them in their own country.” These protestations—as to how malaisé (difficult, awkward) it is to represent the Tupinamba, how not easy (mal à l’aise) even to the point of sickening (malaise)—partake in a particular mode of queer histrionics, a self-deprecating disavowal of description marked by insistence on how impossible something is to describe, or how one can’t possibly put words to, or even endure, the feelings it incites. This performative inarticulacy is immediately belied by copious outpourings of affective expression. So it is here; the difficulty of conjuring the Tupinamba does anything but deter Léry. Far from abandoning his reader (whom he bitchily ventriloquizes throughout as spoiled, whiny, and averse to the hardships of travel), he fills twenty-two chapters with exhaustive detail, including a “colloquy” of the Tupinamba language. His devotion to the task is obsessive, compulsive, unstinting. Léry’s queer aesthetic investments are obvious. He loves the technologies of colonial inscription—drawing and description—for their own sake. Conversely, he uses his godly religious mission—indeed, he uses its failure—instrumentally, to place himself on the mainland, closer to the Tupinamba.

The text is all too aware that in the encounter with the Tupinamba, as in melancholia, there remains something unarticulable, “something else besides,” that conventional versions of the plot (of providential travel, of colonial conquest, of mourning) do not contain. That “something else besides” is Jean de Léry’s thwarted transformation into a Tupinamba self, and the ghostly torque it exerts on his narrative voice. In Freud’s words, “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.” Melancholic desire clusters around an unspeakable crux, its objects “withdrawn from consciousness.” Even if the subject is aware of the loss, Freud writes, it might be that his love for that other had some content that he could not consciously articulate. He might know “whom he has lost, but not what he has lost in him.” It is what Jean de Léry has lost in Brazil—that unknown and unspeakable kernel
of secret love and meaning—that persists; for not only were these objects not possessed, they did not leave, either. Léry did.

“I Left Some of My Belongings Behind Me”

_Histoire d’un voyage_ is a document of loss. It is also, materially, a document on which loss is performed again and again. The preface recounts the roundabout circumstances of its publication, a story of iterated loss. One manuscript was confiscated by censors from a friend at the city gates of Lyon, “so utterly lost that in spite of all my efforts, I could not recover it.”58 A second text is literally consumed by intra-French sectarian violence when he has to leave all his books and take refuge in Sancerre. Léry laments how his scribal copies “kept slipping out of my hands.”59 Ultimately, it is the first copy, which Léry had thought to be irretrievably lost, that is returned to him in 1576 by a friend who tracks it down. In 1578, when Léry at last publishes the _Histoire_—he is forced to, he says, in order to refute what he sees as the abominable lies represented in André Thevet’s _Cosmographie universelle_, to which he takes strenuous exception in his preface—it is cut off from the events it narrates by decades of religious conflict, including the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in 1572 and the siege of Sancerre in 1572–73.60 By the time of its publication, it is a posttraumatic text. Its memories of the Native Americans are riven by the intervening undoing, in the famine, cannibalism, and atrocity evident in the Wars of Religion, of the boundary demarcating the unthinkable in France. Permeated by loss, it has a propensity to get lost itself. Loss is its repetition-compulsion.61

The narrative itself recounts the ministers’ fateful departure from Brazil as a series of wrenching and absurd calamities. Their much negotiated for and long-awaited ship no sooner sets sail than it is blown back by the wind. Then, not far off from shore, the ship is found to be worm eaten and leaking, already so full of water that the men can feel it sinking. When it is revealed that there is not enough food aboard for the voyage, the ship’s master offers a boat for anyone who wants to return to the colony to wait (perhaps forever) for another ship from France—or build a new one. Six of the purportedly inseparable ministers, including Léry (probably already wracked by regret),
decide to return. They quickly put their belongings into the proffered boat. But then, as the six returning men take leave of the rest,

one of them, full of regret at my departure and impelled by a particular feeling of friendship, put out his hand as I was in the boat, and said, “I beg you to stay with us; for even if we cannot get to France, still there is more hope of safety on the coast of Peru, or on some island, than in returning to Villegagnon, who as you very well know will never leave you at peace over here.”

The overflowing of the other minister’s “regret” and Léry’s investment in their “particular” friendship effect a grand romantic gesture: Léry climbs back into the ship at the last possible instant. Léry is torn by the twinned forces of melancholia—attachment to love objects and the inexorable movement of time—at the point where they cross purposes, through the touch of a “particular” friend’s hand stretched across the space between a ship and a boat on the sea. After more than a year away from France, six months previously at sea, and two months of living on the mainland among the Tupinamba while waiting for this ship to arrive, in this instant, Jean de Léry is out of time. He is caught, between his attachments to the Tupinamba on the shore and to this “particular” friend, in a perverse, nonlinear temporality where time seems to vary its speed. Months of stasis and immobility suddenly run out, sweeping him along—on the strength of his love for another man—into the homeward telos of the voyage narrative. But besides his never-to-be-rejoined ideational love objects, Léry loses some material objects as well: “I left some of my belongings behind me in the boat.” Thus a remnant of Jean de Léry is transported back to the shore to remain in Brazil forever, absent from him but closer to the Tupinamba. Like the repeatedly lost manuscripts, the left-behind belongings indicate an expulsive drive to leave behind remnants and traces of himself in the places where he has been.

But he takes a remnant of Brazil with him too: his “memoirs, most of them written with brazilwood ink, and in America itself.” Fashioned out of the very substance of the land of Brazil, this ur-text stands in for the parts of himself Léry leaves behind, and furnishes
the germ of his melancholic memoir. Identification is lodged not just in the memoirs’ content but in the thing itself—or, more accurately, in how the writing functions as a thing. From its first instantiation as notes and drawings written with brazilwood ink, the writing materializes, over and over, the absent presence of Brazil. Its production and reproduction is an always failed melancholic transformation in which the writer strives to become, if only prosthetically, through his text, what he has lost. If Montaigne can be said to melancholically incorporate a cannibal into his *Essais* as an identificatory figure for a lost ideal of nature, then Jean de Léry incorporates the land of Brazil into *Histoire d’un voyage*.

The transportation of Native American people back across the ocean in the aftermath of the French colony is not a metaphor, however. The colonists at the fort purchase dozens of enslaved captives of the Margajas tribe (whom they regard as enemies) after they are defeated in battle by the Tupinamba (with whom they are allies). Jean de Léry himself buys a woman and her little boy of less than two years old for three francs, allegedly rescuing them from being cannibalized in the Tupinamba victory ritual. He laments, “I had thought to keep the little boy for myself” (for what reasons we can never know), but Governor Villegagnon, that insatiable consumer of human flesh, seizes him “for himself.” In addition to the manuscript of his memoirs and his belongings in the boat, Jean de Léry loses a small child, and he cannot even comprehend the child’s mother’s rage at this. He recounts a conversation (through what medium or translated sign system is unclear) in which he tells the mother he intends to bring her little boy back to France with him. She replies, in one of the only moments in the entire work to ventriloquize an indigenous woman’s speech, that she had hoped her son would escape, rejoin his people, and someday avenge them, but that she would rather her son remain and “be eaten by the Tupinamba than go off so far from her.” Léry’s attribution of this response to the “deeply rooted vengeance in that nation’s heart,” rather than a mother’s abhorrence at being informed her son will be sold across the sea, shows the limits of Jean de Léry’s identification with native subjects. He identifies only with the men, and only in terms of their homosocial/homoerotic customs, bodies, and virtues. The Margajas mother’s defiant speech has no
effect. Villegagnon keeps her son, and Léry matter-of-factly reports that the Frenchmen “chose ten young boys whom we sent to France in the returning ships, to Henry II.”

“ Their Voices Are Still in My Ears”

Jean de Léry’s ecstatic experience at a Tupinamba religious ceremony, in chapter 16, “What May Be Called Religion among the Savages,” is called the climactic moment of desire in the *Histoire d’un voyage*. It is the closest Léry comes to describing himself as undergoing an erotic experience. He memorializes it in one of the book’s many detailed drawings of Tupinamba men’s naked bodies, rendering “a dancer and a *maraca*-player” dressed in their ceremonial ornaments: ankle decorations, feathered headpieces and tailpieces, and the feathered, rattling maracas. This plate also depicts two small animals, a parrot and a monkey, as exotic familiars, accessories and conduits to the men’s enchantments. The maracas are also animate conduits for ineffable forces, Léry says, “So that (as they said) the spirit might thereafter speak through these rattles, to dedicate them to this use they made them sound incessantly.” In a typical iconoclastic simile, he compares them to “the bell-ringers that accompany those impostors who, exploiting the credulity of our simple folk over here, carry from place to place the reliquaries of Saint Anthony or Saint Bernard, and other such instruments of idolatry.” All this language of “impostors” (and of “errors,” and “charlatans” in the chapter heading) is belied, however, by the beauty and attention with which these ceremonial instruments, and the movements and sounds of the men’s bodies in the ceremony, are rendered.

The religious ceremony is an unattainable, forbidden object. Léry and his two companions are warned not to watch and are strictly ordered to listen to the ceremony from the women’s house. They therefore access the experience from a queerly gendered position, surrounded by two hundred women. The ceremony begins with “a very low murmur, like the muttering of someone reciting his hours.” The physical phenomenon of possession that follows, with the participants howling, leaping violently, making their breasts shake, foaming at the mouth, and fainting, “frightens” Léry. What looks demonic,
Figure 4. Tupinamba men dressed for their religious ceremony, with feathered adornments and maracas, from Jean de Léry, *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Bresil* (Geneva: Pour Antoine Chuppin, 1580), 246. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.
however, immediately turns into an experience of the sublime. The song changes into “a harmony so marvelous” that his fear morphs into an irresistible desire to come closer. Despite warnings from the women and an interpreter,

I drew near the place where I heard the chanting; the houses of the savages are very long and of a roundish shape (like the trellises of gardens over here). Since they are covered with grasses right down to the ground, in order to see as well as I might wish, I made with my hands a little opening in the covering. I beckoned to the two Frenchmen who were watching me; emboldened by my example, they drew near without any hindrance or difficulty, and we all three entered the house.70

Over the next two hours, Léry’s voyeuristic desire to consume the spectacle morphs into total surrender and submission as he receives the song at a bodily, sensual level:

At the beginning of the witches’ Sabbath, when I was in the women’s house, I had been somewhat afraid; now I received in recompense such joy, hearing the measured harmonies of such a multitude, and especially in the cadence and refrain of the song, when at every verse all of them would let their voices trail, saying *Heu, heura, heura, heura*,—I stood there transported with delight [*tout ravi*]. Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears. When they decided to finish, each of them struck his right foot against the earth more vehemently than before, and spat in front of him; then all of them with one voice uttered hoarsely two or three times the words *He, hua, hua, hua*, and then ceased.71

Carla Freccero articulates Léry’s ravishment as “masochistic surrender”; Leo Bersani would call it “self-shattering” jouissance, the radical erotic identification with the other such that the boundar-
ies of self are obliterated. This self-shattering orgasm is, in Bersani’s death-driven framework, a perverse act of resistance, the obliteration of difference in an experience of masculine ritual climax shared with “five or six hundred” dancing men in unison. This “ravishment” is a sensory, ecstatic marker of Léry’s cross-culturally transgressive, homoerotic, and identificatory transformation. It is figured as an affective overcoming and a penetration (“whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears”), using a language of erotic submission and receptivity that reverses colonial tropes of domination and mastery. Moreover, this ravishment also reverses colonial tropes of possession and projective futurity. The erotic opens up a space outside of Léry’s Protestant divine/demonic dichotomy, a sensual distillation of time itself in which his “masochistic surrender” can persist. The voices of the men penetrate him and stay inside of him as melancholic fragments, haunting him for the rest of his life. He does not possess the Tupinamba men, or any part of Brazil. They possess him.

“Manie Strange Sightes”

Thomas Harriot’s *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* and John White’s illustrated appendix to it, “The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in That Part of America Now Called Virginia,” also figure the time-bending reach of queer colonial melancholia—but into the future. Harriot’s descriptions of the Algonkian people’s reactions to and feelings about English bodies and things, and White’s drawings of Algonkian (and ancient British) bodies and customs both stage a convoluted set of affective relations weaving across cultural difference and historical epochs. If Jean de Léry’s lost Tupinamba are revenants of the past in the present, then the bodies and material objects in Harriot and White instead signal the uncanny absent presence of an unsettled future.

The queer colonial fantasies of and around the Roanoke texts have everything to do with the fact that the colony disappears. For one thing, it makes the *Report*’s surreal projections of futurity visible as fantasies that did not come to be. Further, the Roanoke text’s queer appeal to a lost colonial future is avidly taken up, over the ensuing
four centuries, into the racial mythology of the white American settler state. In fact, it becomes the foundational story—with Harriot and White’s Report its central relic—of a constitutively American form of white racial melancholia, articulated through the persistent cultural myth of the “lost colony.” Indeed, I suggest we read A Briefe and True Report retrospectively, back through the fact of the Roanoke colony’s historically uncanny failure—which is, after all, how it was read by virtually everyone who read the 1590 edition. We can then see what Goldberg calls Harriot’s “fantasmatically projective” writing as a queerly futuristic—even speculative—form of melancholic longing. Rather than the loss of a past that can never be regained, it encodes the unmournable loss of a future that all its technologies of inscription are powerless to bring about.

Most of Thomas Harriot’s fairly brief—though not notably true—report, which dates from the first English expedition to Roanoke in 1584, and which is meant to entice prospective English settlers to come to Virginia, is a nakedly aspirational description of goods and products yet to come. Jonathan Goldberg calls the tract “less a catalogue of what is there as what may be there once English agricultural habits are transported”—once, in Harriot’s words, the land is “planted and husbanded as they ought.” Goldberg reads this as an attempt to inscribe onto the American land what Lee Edelman has called “reproductive futurity,” the heteronormative and whitenormative mandate that delimits what the political future is allowed to mean. But what I see Harriot trying to speak into being does not happen through sexual reproduction, or even through human bodies. The fantasies of fertility in Harriot’s catalog are about plant life and something that looks like mineral “life.” Iron, copper, silver, and pearls are curiously vital substances in Harriot’s listing of the fantasy fruits of the land, slipped in alongside civet cats, otter furs, sweet gums from trees, and the oud Harriot includes because it grows in the Azores, “which is the same climate.” Their vitality and the preternatural ease with which they will supposedly be “found”—Harriot repeats this word like an incantation—recalls the famous image from The Travels of Sir John Mandeville of precious gems growing spontaneously from the dew on rocks on a far-flung coast of Ethiopia, free for the gathering up without any labor of cultivation.
Even as he surveys the fortifications of their towns and estimates the army they could muster, Harriot’s narrative is obsessed with communicating (or imagining?) the Algonkians’ feelings about the English. He hopes that they “shoulde desire our friendships and love, and have the greater respect for pleasing and obeying us.” But he isn’t sure. This comes through whenever he attempts to render indigenous people’s desire and affect—for instance, in the short portion at the end of the Report called “Of Such Other Thinges as Is Be Hoofull for Those Which Shall Plant and Inhabit to Know Of; With a Description of the Nature and Manners of the People of the Countrey”—the only section to describe any actual relations with local people. Harriot is passionately invested in how the Algonkian people see him and the English items he has brought into their space. At several moments, he détournes his scientific technologies and his religious equipment into machines for generating cross-cultural pleasure. The godly mathematician and natural scientist tells us that in every town he visited in Virginia, he tried to “make declaration of the contents of the Bible” to the residents, as he saw fit. But despite his best efforts, his forays into evangelism would habitually get a bit out of hand: “Although I told them the book materially & of it self was not of any such virtue (as I thought they did conceive), but only the doctrine therein contained; yet would many be glad to touch it, to embrace it, to kisse it, to hold it to their breasts and heades—and stroke over all their bodie with it.” Over Harriot’s protestations, his Algonkian interlocutors seemed to find great virtue in “the book materially & of it self.” This can of course be read, like several passages in Léry ridiculing a Tupinamba man “in his full Papal splendor,” or comparing the sound of Tupinamba maracas to the bell ringers in saints’ processions, as a mapping of the Protestant voyager’s anti-Catholic iconoclasm onto the New World, equating the Americans’ rituals with those of another suspect other whose form is already familiar. However, this is also a vivid image of all-consuming bodily enjoyment of a material thing. The Algonkians do not perform ceremonial gestures with the Bible; rather, they gratify their senses with it, “embracing it,” “kissing it,” and becoming amorous with it in a style that is certainly not organized around any normative type of eroticism, genital or otherwise. The book functions as an instrument of pleasure, or a
toy. Then, as they “stroke all over their body with it,” it becomes a supplement to a scene of polymorphously perverse, full-body group eroticism. Harriot’s investment in what his Algonkian interlocutors make of him and his book ends up bringing about a surprising eruption of affect between them (who really loves the Bible more?). This moment also reverses the familiar colonial trope in which the European interloper’s wonder at strange things is at the center.

Harriot has an explanation, however. He insists that they are holding the book against their breasts and their heads “to show their hungry desire of that knowledge which was spoken of.” In the few pages devoted to “the nature and manners of the people,” he states that the main point he wants to get across about the “naturall inhabitants” (as he calls the Algonkian), is that they “are not to be feared—but that they shall have cause both to feare and love us, that shall inhabit with them.” But if this is an affective prescription for settler colonialism, it leaves something out. It states that the natives will feel both fear and love, and that the prospective English settlers are not to feel fear. Left unsaid, however, is whether the English are, or aren’t, supposed to feel love for the American people they “shall inhabit with” (or any instruction, really, as to what feelings they are to feel about the people of this “New Found Land”). This unexplained asymmetry, this missing instruction to love or not to love, signals an unacknowledged affective load bearing on Harriot’s stance toward his American informants. Its traces can be seen where the pleasures of identification and desire break through the story the text tells about itself. The reading practice that can probe these cracks and crevices derives from Eve Sedgwick’s enduring articulations of what “queer” means in her essay “Queer and Now”: “What if instead there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with one another? What if the richest junctures weren’t the ones where everything means the same thing?” In the unbridgeable disjunction between the distinct desires and pleasures (unknowable to us) that the Algonkians are expressing with and on Harriot’s book, and Harriot’s own account of what they feel and what they want, we see hints of queer, speculative, melancholic affect—like wishful identification, forbidden fear, or unspeakable love. It is
legible in the junctures where “meanings and institutions are at loose ends with one another,” where colonial rhetoric fails to completely control the meanings it attempts to inscribe onto another culture. There are many such failures in Harriot’s Report, like his failure to account for the erotic and sensory meanings of the book.

There are other moments of imaginative bodily empathy between Harriot and his Algonkian others, moments that reverse the poles of identification and difference, or where bodies and things exceed the narratives into which they are being inscribed. Harriot carries to Virginia an array of beautiful and intriguing scientific tools. His narrative describes these instruments as though they are the Englishmen’s wondrous bodily appendages: “Most thinges they sawe with us, as Mathematicall instruments, sea compasses, the vertue of the loadstone in drawing yron, a perspective glasse whereby was shewed manie strange sightes, burning glasses, wildefire woorkes, gunnes, bookes, writing and reading, spring clocks that seeme to goe of themselves, and manie other thinges that we had.”84 One received interpretation of this scene would say the tools are used to “dazzle” the indigenous people with Western power and knowledge.85 But that is not entirely what is going on here. The instruments are not functioning as technologies, but as things of wonder and ornamental allure, which attract indigenous desire and conduct it back to the Englishmen. These things facilitate a two-way circulation of interlocking pleasures, in which the Englishman enjoys looking at the Algonkians enjoying looking at his instruments, which he also enjoys. The imputation of divine, not human, art to the tools reenchants them and reverses, if only briefly, the teleological time of scientific progress. In the Native Americans’ eyes, familiar technologies, like “the vertue of the loadstone in drawing yron,” regain some of their magical and alchemical valence. A “perspective glasse” shows not the world around it but “manie strange sightes,” and incendiary tools like “burning glasses” and “wildefire woorkes” become wondrous explosions.

I am assuming that, as Jonathan Goldberg has suggested, “what is recorded as if spoken by the natives may well be in part a European fantasy.” Harriot’s extensive ventriloquizations of the natives
must therefore, like a witchcraft confession, amount to a “hybrid text” of “complicities, accommodations, projections, mistranslations.” However, given that multivocality, Harriot’s projection of his desire for friendship and love onto his Algonkian interlocutors is both utterly constitutive of the violent narcissistic projection that Homi Bhabha describes, with how quickly the colonizer’s wish, “I want him to love me,” transmutes into “I hate him,” then into “He hates me,” and at the same time a queer, melancholic desire. This is not only due to the intensity of Harriot’s investment in other men. The desires in the Report belong to the history of queer affect in that they are routed through erotically enchanted material objects. The fantasy body that Harriot constructs for himself and the Englishmen in the eyes of the other is a dazzling metamorphosis, a potent, disassemble-able machine body of brass, glass, and iron that seems to “go of itself,” arrayed with fire and “strange sights”; it is a body that would be irresistible as an object to identify with and desire.

By any normative standards, the Algonkians are using the scientific instruments and the even more erotically laden book (a Bible!) “wrong” in multiple ways. Yet they are enjoying them on their own terms, making and transmitting pleasures that reach us, four centuries later, and despite what the colonial narrator says about them. These improvised pleasures, as well as their public yet secret character, recall the acts of queer identification performed by the proto-queer readers that Sedgwick theorizes in “Queer and Now.” Sedgwick remembers that as a child, “the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival.” Such objects unaccountably capture, focus, and facilitate the desires of those who feel an attraction to them, who need and use them in ways that others do not. Though the social and cultural stakes are completely different, in the Algonkians’ hands, scientific instruments and the Bible become objects of communal pleasure and affiliation—a wonderfully literal iteration of “objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us.”

The mystery, of course, is mutual. I am not simply comparing
the Virginian Algonkians, investing their conquerors’ tools with ineffable, lost meanings, to imperiled queer children (though Harriot represents them as both polymorphously infantile and erotically suspect). It is Thomas Harriot, actually, who is acting the role of Sedgwick’s queer child, investing this site where (as Sedgwick puts it) “the meanings didn’t line up tidily with each other” with “excessive and oblique” meanings that focus his excess of “fascination and love.” Harriot makes a performative effort to impose the codes “most readily available” to him, claiming the instruments made many of the natives say that “if they knew not the trueith of god and religion already, it was rather to be had from us, whom God so specially loved, then from a people that were so simple, as they had found themselves to be in comparison of us.” This is not only a fantasy of Native Americans admitting their inferiority (although it is that). It is also a fantasy of perfectly knowing how one is seen by the other. These scenes of fetishistic embodied pleasure enact a different directional erotics of colonial encounter: the gazing and the wonder flow backward, from the Native Americans to the English. The Algonkians do not appear to be in any way altered—Christianized or scientifically enlightened—by Harriot’s normative readings of their gestures. Rather, Harriot is instead hailed into an Algonkian erotic economy of wonder and sensory delight by their uses of his objects. Whatever we cannot know of the Algonkians’ beliefs, we register their “hungrie desire,” which is obviously not delimited by “that knowledge which was spoken of.”

“Invisible Bullets”

One thing Harriot imagines the Algonkians to imagine, or desires them to desire, is a system of spectral, supernaturally potent bodies for the English colonists—bodies that are projected into queer, apocalyptic future relations of love and violence. This vision is by far the best known passage in the Report—indeed, so well known that it is almost transgressively passé to return to it “once more, with feeling”: the story of the spectral violence that the Algonkian people theorize being committed against them. This bizarre anecdote purports to archive the Algonkian people’s hypotheses about the unexplained
disease that follows the Englishmen around, killing them in enormous numbers:

There was no town where we had any subtile device practised against us, we leaving it unpunished or not revenged (because wee sought by all means possible to win them by gentlenesse) but that within a few dayes after our departure from everie such towne, the people began to die very fast, and many in short space. [ ... ]

This marvelous accident in all the countrie wrought so strange opinions of us, that some people could not tel whether to think us gods or men, and the rather because that all the space of their sickness, there was no man of ours knowne to die, or that was specially sicke: they noted also that we had no women amongst us, neither that we did care for any of theirs.\(^93\)

Harriot follows this with series of mystical, violent, and decidedly unheterosexual theories he imagines the Algonkians to hold as to what order of beings the Englishmen are, and how they can inflict remote and delayed death.

First, the Englishmen are construed as undead ancestors. “Some were of the opinion that wee were not borne of women, and therefore not mortall, but that wee were men of an old generation many yeeres past then risen againe to immortalitie,”\(^94\) like revenant zombies, Christ, or the sleeping kings of European national mythologies. A second theory imagines the English as harbingers of a mystified future, a ghostly advance party: “Some would likewise seem to prophesy that there were more of our generation yet to come, to kill theirs and take their places, as some thought the purpose was by that which was already done.”\(^95\) These men yet to come, though, are imagined to be the Englishmen’s invisible lovers and servants, and they are imagined to be already there, moving spectrally among the more conventionally visible-bodied people, or doing the Englishmen’s deadly bidding from the future: “Those that were immediatly to come after us they imagined to be in the aire, yet invisible & without bodies, & that they by our intreaty & for the love of us did make the
people to die in that sort as they did by shooting invisible bullets into them."96 Others, Harriot reports, think the Englishmen may kill “without weapons,” or “that we shot them ourselves out of our pieces from the place where we dwelt, and killed the people in any such towne that had offended us as we listed, how farre distant from us soever it was”97

These ventriloquized images have been read in numerous ways, including Stephen Greenblatt’s influential reading of the “invisible bullets” as an “eerily prescient” prefiguration of modern germ theory.98 Jonathan Goldberg, however, objects to the post hoc ratification of the telos of European conquest that is enacted when modern critics read this vision as a kind of Algonkian precognition of their own genocide, a move he calls a “making-acceptable of the Algonkians as our ancestors, as those who testify to their own disappearance and replacement by us.”99 Goldberg underscores how a teleological model of historical time shores up colonialist fantasies, in which European acts of domination and genocide are construed as natural or inevitable. Goldberg cautions us instead to sit with the “multiple and conflicting openings toward a future that Harriot’s text cannot control,” insisting on the “irreducibility of this trope to a singular historical trajectory.”100 It is crucial to keep in mind that these visions, whatever communications he thinks he has had with Algonkian people, are Thomas Harriot’s—that the text “may offer a version of Western horror even as it asks the natives to articulate it.”101

I want to focus on the European fantasies, as well as the Algonkian nightmares, that are bodied forth in these hyperpotent specters of futurity. What I see in this series of visions is not “ontological confusion,”102 but the text’s staging of a succession of ontologically specific, diachronic, uncannily generative relations between the Englishmen and the Algonkians—that is to say, a set of queer spectral genealogies that posit alternatives to both sexual reproduction and linear time. The visions Harriot posits are structurally queer in that they cast the Englishmen as ancestors or descendants, in cyclical, reversed, and nonlineal kinship relations to the Algonkians. They are temporally queer in that they traffic in visitations from the past and future, and sex and violence that can travel across time. And they are also, in no small part, sexually queer. Having noted of the first
Roanoke expedition “that we had no women amongst us, neither that we did care for any of theirs,” the Algonkins see the English as a sodomitical, gender-undifferentiated race of men who reproduce with one another. There is surely literal homoerotic content to what the Algonkins “note” about the Englishmen, although it remains totally uninterrogated by Harriot (as well as by most scholarship on early modern colonial narratives). The all-male colonial venture—a space of homosocial incarceration, like all sea voyages, with the added dislocation of landing in a completely alien world—is a certain site of actual sex between men, in many and varied probable configurations. While we cannot recover further meanings besides the deep, deep strangeness that the Algonkian people impute to the first Roanoke party’s homosociality, it spurs them, as Harriot has it, to imagine new, quasi-human bodies, sexualities, and ontological statuses for the English voyagers. Both the Englishmen’s potent lethality and their invulnerability to the sickness are connected to a fantasy of their unnatural, untimely, womanless generation; they are “not borne of women, and therefore not mortall.”

This language about men who are not born of women, and the question of what their uncanny generation enables them to do, will not stay buried in Harriot’s report. It is famously reanimated onstage—through a chain of circulation, reading, diffusion, and citation that we can never recover—in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (c. 1606), in the witches’ slippery prophecy that “none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.79–80). Macduff, who was “from his mother’s womb/Untimely ripped” (5.7.45–46), disproves Macbeth’s assumption that he is invincible, and calls into question the link between “of woman born” and the category of the human. Macduff derives his special lethality to Macbeth from the same liminal, questionably human phenomenon as the Englishmen in Harriot’s fantasy: unnatural birth. The Englishmen’s immunity to the strange death visited on the Algonkians, however, transmutes in *Macbeth* into a special vulnerability for Macbeth only to Macduff, who is seemingly fated to kill him. The witches’ prophecies sit pointedly alongside Harriot’s Algonkian predictions as a foretelling of a “history that will be,” in that the ontological status of the witches and their statements—whether
they are describing foreordained events, or spurring Macbeth’s actions through suggestion and desire, or neither, or something else—is a central and undecidable question raised by the play. One facet of Harriot’s vision that is illuminated by reading it retrospectively, in light of its revenant echoes in *Macbeth*, is that the ontological statuses and consequences of the events Harriot describes—along with the status of the interpretations he attributes/concocts about them—are anything but decided. In a way that is easier to see because it is a play, and not an ostensibly “True Report,” *Macbeth* speaks directly to the “the multiple and conflicting openings toward a future that Harriot’s text cannot control.” All save the last four hundred years of that future is, of course, still the future, and still undecided. Nikolas Rose theorizes his historiography of biopolitics (an often uncanny narrative of annihilation and generation involving invisible forces and liminal forms of life) as a history that would “not so much seek to destabilize the present by pointing to its contingency, but to destabilize the future by recognizing its openness,” thereby “demonstrating that no single future is written in our present”: “It is important to recognize that we do not stand at some unprecedented moment in the unfolding of a single history. Rather, we live in the middle of multiple histories. As with our own present, our future will emerge from the intersection of a number of contingent pathways that, as they intertwine, might create something new.”

Though in light of the play’s ending the witches’ prophecy (like Harriot’s) takes on a perverse retroactive truth effect, the scene in which it is told to Macbeth—act 4, scene 1, on the heath—presents a complex phantasmagorical tableau that (like Harriot’s text) enacts not only multiple and contingent histories but also multiple intertwinnings of identification, desire, and kinship across time. I see the four apparitions shown to Macbeth by the witches on the heath (the “Armed Head,” the “Bloody Child,” the “Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand” and finally, “eight Kings and Banquo, last with a glass in his hand”) as another queer genealogy founded on spectral, unnatural historiography and asexual reproduction, to place alongside Harriot’s Algonkian nightmare theories. Even as Banquo is conjured as the father of a line of kings, supposedly the play’s ultimate image of
reproductive futurity, each iteration does not replace the last but rather appears alongside it, looking exactly like it, so that the apparition is not a model of diachronic royal succession but of a compressed, phantasmatic temporality where kings seem to infinitely multiply themselves (with a glass that shows “many more” iterations—like Harriot’s “manie strange sightes”) in a way that looks more like asexual splitting or budding than Oedipal succession or sexual reproduction. In my view, Macbeth’s apparitions have more resonance with the mechanism of queer colonial melancholia driving Harriot’s Report than anything found in more topical early modern plays of colonial encounter or sea voyaging (such as Shakespeare’s The Tempest, which is mainly invested on the side of reproductive futurity).

It is no accident that the undecidedness of history and futurity in both of these texts is cracked open by their twinned evocations of an uncanny outside to the telos of natural reproduction and birth. Both patrilineal sovereignty and settler colonialism are dependent on reproduction, and both are existentially threatened by the infinite ways it can fail or go awry. Reading Macbeth’s portentous and ontologically unreliable specters alongside Harriot’s convoluted, queer ancestor visions makes more visible the extent to which colonial anxiety is tied up in the problem of reproduction. Moreover, a queer historical practice of reading texts in light of their afterlives reveals that both texts are haunted by an absence or failure of reproductivity—a lost child. Just as the possible indeterminate or dead child to whom Lady Macbeth has “given suck” is the substrate for Macbeth’s proliferation of spectral and bloody children, the lost white baby, Virginia Dare, has haunted the reception and afterlife of the Roanoke text since its first publication, becoming the locus for centuries’ worth of accumulation of racialized colonial melancholia. Indeed, Harriot’s account of Roanoke—with its womanless, out-of-time killers, its canceled reproductive agenda, the lost colony it was supposed to save, and the spectral child suspended in memory, whose absence seems to drive the whole delusional, bloody undertaking—can be read as a kind of alternate, Bizarro World Macbeth. Macbeth’s untimely, usurping ambition, Macduff’s not-of-woman-born potency, and the witches’ maleficent destruction are all wrapped up in the English colonists’ failed and fruitless colonial violence. The pamphlet’s vi-
visions of space-time-bending congress and spectral, queer kinship relations are placed in the mouths of the Algonkian people, who appear as cryptic, oracular others, rather than spoken by witches. Yet it is the Englishmen who appear to the Algonkians as supernatural, non-gender-differentiated beings (as Banquo says of the witches, “You should be women/And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so” [1.3.46–48]) whose instruments show “manie strange sightes.” And the Algonkians are also endowed with qualities of the tragic king’s vulnerability to an uncanny foe not “borne of women,” as it is their futurity that is being “wrenched with an unlineal hand” (3.1.63) away from them.

The strangeness in these visions brought out by juxtaposition with Macbeth can be used to counter the prophetic critical gloss it has taken on in the settler–colonial present. To that end, I want to offer a new, antiteleological reading of the second vision, the fantasy of a coming race of men “in the aire” who are from the future yet already invisibly present, men “come to kill them and take their places.” This fantasy bespeaks a queer model of descent and a queer drive toward annihilation, not reproduction. Though the men of air seem as uncannily automated as zombies, this is not precisely an “Algonkian ‘Night of the Living Dead,’” as Greenblatt dubs it. The men of air are not back from the dead; they are not yet alive. Like a phalanx of sprites or ghostly familiars, they seem erotically enslaved to the present Englishmen, whose telepathic “intreaty” to kill they obey “for love of us.” But what has conjured them into this moment from their own time? What call did they hear? What bonds of identificatory love between men, stretching across history, were they hailed by, binding them to those who came before? They can almost be read as queer descendants called back by historical love and debt to defend their gay ancestors, except that instead of antiretroviral drugs and tales of liberation, they bring the plague. They are queer descendants, but on the side of genocide.

The Algonkian “phisitions” read a corroborating material explanation in a strange sign they observe in the victims’ bodies: “that the strings of blood that they sucked out of the sicke bodies, were the strings wherewithal the invisible bullets were tied and cast.” These invisible bullets on “strings of blood” invite comparison to
Cupid’s invisible heart-arrows, or to the invisible powers of alteration possessed by an analogous bodily fluid: semen. Shot for the love of other men, in this instance they cause death rather than generation. The English are not the Algonkians’ ancestors here, but they may not be in any way their descendants—or anyone’s ancestors—either. The “more of our generation yet to come” may be asexually or homosexually generated, as these first English explorers seem to be. In one possible future hinted at in this prophecy, the replacement of one generation with another will be enacted not by heterosexual sex but by homoerotic murder, a queer fantasy (in the style of Leo Bersani or Lee Edelman—or Patricia Highsmith) of an end to hetero reproduc- tive futurism itself. If we read it literally, homoerotic annihilation and replacement will replace reproduction and descent as the new relation between generations. Such a queer mechanism of iteration would mirror the paradox of melancholia’s nonheterosexual directionality: its death-driven, self-destroying affects, its incorporation of the lost other, and the eerily self-perpetuating duration of its negativity. This next-order model of polymorphous proliferation—in which the very mechanism of reproduction is constantly remaking itself—also echoes postmodern narratives of capitalism and biopolitics, including posthuman models of artificial life. Read in this queer light, the cryptic fantasies of invisible destruction that Harriot records are not teleological predictions but rather unpredictable manifestations of a complicated melancholic vision, predicated on identification as well as difference, on annihilation as well as reproduction, on loss and impossible futurity, and on unnatural mechanisms of generation and twisted models of historical time.

“In Times Past as Sauvage”

When John White’s 1590 appendix to Theodor de Bry’s Folio edition of A Briefe and True Report, titled “True Pictures and Fashions of the People in That Part of America Now Called Virginia,” is mentioned in criticism, it tends to be framed as a set of illustrations corresponding to Harriot’s Report, which adds visual interest and novelty but makes no substantive claims of its own. Read on its own terms, however, it quickly becomes apparent that White’s images and descriptions
constitute a distinct, visual account of fantasmatic relations between the English and the Algonkians, which differs from Harriot’s in subtle but significant ways. The complex multitemporal, multimedia life of White’s images makes the “True Pictures” a key site of the 1590 folio’s construction of colonial fantasies wrought from homosocial currents of desire. Traces of the complex network of power relations that brought the 1590 edition into being are visible on the title page and in the dedication, which feature obsequies in the voice of the engraver and publisher, Theodor de Bry, to Raleigh, whose lauded status as the volume’s honorary patron effaces the three years John White unsuccessfully petitioned him for a relief voyage. De Bry’s address “To the gentle Reader” at the beginning of the “True Pictures” reveals that it was “Maister Richard Hakluyt of Oxford Minister of God’s Word” who, out of his own history with Harriot’s account and their shared affection for White’s images, “first Incouraged me to publish the Worke.”

De Bry credits White’s actual “Pictures” as being produced by way of Raleigh again (twice) and by himself: “Diligentlye collected and draowne by IHon White who was sent thither speciallye and for the same purpose by the said Sir Walter Ralegh the year abovesaid 1585. and also the year 1588. now cutt in copper and first published by Theodore de Bry att his wone charges.” This appendix thus condenses years of accumulated transactions of affection, money, texts, and images between men. As a made thing, it is a manifestation of the multilayered economies of service, instrumentality, debt, knowledge, pleasure, and capital around the colonial enterprise. These networks of desire are not only homosocial, but melancholic; by the time of its publication, it is a record of what has already been lost.

John White was on all of the Roanoke voyages, and led the last, aspirationally reproductive venture; he left to seek relief for the colony soon after landing. His drawings date from the second, 1585 Grenville expedition, for which he was the recording artist. They existed first as watercolors and drawings made from life in North America—over seventy of them, made during the year White spent in privation with the other men of the Grenville party before being picked up and returned to England by Francis Drake in 1586. The exhaustive attention to detail evident in the watercolors is a trace of the dilated, uncertain temporality of waiting, with no way to know if
or when relief was coming, amid a society that is utterly alien, and that White had no idea whether he would ever leave. They embody, first of all, White’s attempt to see something new—an intricate and prosperous urban and agricultural civilization to which he did not, and never could, belong, but in which he is inescapably implicated by virtue of his bodily presence and his recording gaze. White’s surviving watercolors also evince an attempt to put the new and specific people and things of Virginia into conversation with other contemporary colonial representations of difference. He copied several images and poses from the work of two fellow failed Protestant colonizers: Jacques Le Moyne in Florida in the 1560s, and Jean de Léry.109

The main body of the 1590 “True Pictures” maps a deliberate, encyclopedic set of American subjects, objects, and relations in twenty-one richly detailed portraits and descriptions of the people of Roanoke Island and of the cities of Secota, Pomeiooc, and Dasemonquepeuc on the mainland, including their dress, hunting techniques, foodways, and religious ceremonies. De Bry’s presentation of White’s work features men and women equally, with detailed information about their locality, age, and social station. These images are shot through with a curious mix of identification and alterity that undercuts many of Harriot’s stated claims about Virginia and its people. In contrast to the techniques for seeing and rendering bodily and cultural difference that John White developed on Roanoke, the figures in the 1590 folio edition have undergone a shift toward identification, inviting a European readership to see the familiar in their classical, humanist visual vocabulary. Theodor de Bry bears much of the credit for the identificatory erotics of these bodies. He altered White’s watercolors, moving the Algonkian figures into classical poses with Mannerist musculature, and Europeanizing their faces and bodily habitus.110 But De Bry’s classicized naked bodies are overlaid with each plate with White’s intricate representations of bodily fashions and cultural objects, among the most detailed of the entire colonial period, and meticulous written descriptions of what each plate shows. A “weroan or great Lorde of Virginia” is shown in a warrior’s pose with his bow and arrow; the caption details the exact architecture of the hairstyles, jewelry, feathers, face paint, and body paint of the “Princes of Virginia,” including their aesthetic choices.
within the parameters of custom: “They hange at their eares ether thickepearles, or somwhatels, as the clawe of some great birde, as cometh in to their fansye.” Subsequent plates give similar attention to the meanings of a priest’s hare-skin cloak, and of a “plate of copper hanging from a string” worn as a necklace “in token of authoritye, and honor” on the body of “a chieff Lorde of Roanoac.” The undeniable foreign civility of these socially ranked, gendered, and materially productive Algonkian bodies exposes Harriot’s insistence on Virginia’s emptiness as a delusional colonial fiction.

The “True Pictures” also subtly refuses to fix the Algonkians in a static, archaic past, by including material traces of the present in which Europeans and Native Americans have already begun to change and affect each other. “A chieff Ladye of Pomeiooc” holds one arm through a skein of beads folded about her neck and carries “a gourde full of some kind of pleasant liquor.” Her child, a girl of “7 or 8 yeares olde,” has her girdle “drawen under neath” between

Figure 5. “A weroan or great Lorde of Virginia. III,” in “The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in that Parte of America Now Called Virginia . . .,” appendix to A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (Frankfurt: J. Wechel for T. De Bry, 1590), A. RB 18531, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
her legs “to cover their priviliers withall.” De Bry gives the child a
generic American rattle, not shown in White’s original drawing, but
in the other hand she holds a European baby doll.\textsuperscript{113} This is the single
object in the “True Pictures” that brings the time of European colo-
nial invasion into collision with the quotidian indigenous temporality
flowing through the Algonkian scenes.\textsuperscript{114} The doll in the little girl’s
hand indexes the material and affective contacts that have already
taken place: “They are greatlye Deligted with puppetts, and babes
which wear brought oute of England.”\textsuperscript{115} But it also hints at how those
exchanges touch the Algonkian world these plates aspire to archive,
 invisibly but inexorably altering the relations of the \textit{weroans} to his
bow and arrow, the men to their boats, the women to their cooking
pots and food (some of which they are now giving to the English, who
are unable to feed themselves), and their god, “The Idol Kiwasa,” to
his worshippers.\textsuperscript{116}

But then, at the end of White’s “True Pictures” in the 1590
Report, there is a curious coda—unlisted in the table of contents—that presents “Some Picture of the Pictes which in the olde tyme did habite one part of the great Bretaine.” De Bry claims that he included these pictures, found “in an oolld English Cronicle,” at John White’s behest, “for to showe how that the Inhabitants of the great Bretannie have bin in times past as sauvage as those of Virginia.”

This move points to the past in order to prove the telos of colonial development—to turn Virginia into England. However, in overlaying a temporal difference onto a cultural one, it also disintegrates essential notions of English identity or fixed, eternal racial difference. It recasts “straight” temporality as something more occult: an uncanny coexistence, within a fractured and non-self-identical present, of two different temporalities warped or bridged together in a visual colonial encounter. The addition of the Picts transforms the colonial dyad into a three-way circuit of transtemporal connection, opening up new relational possibilities outside of linear, heteronormative history. It places the Englishmen into a nonpatrilineal, queer genealogy with their mythic pasts and their colonial others. After all, the connection between the vanished Picts and the present Englishmen is a roundabout, twisting, imagined one (the root of “queer,” -twerkw, yielding the Latin torquere, “to twist”). It is forged by a series of intra-European conquests in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and in early modern England’s colonial ambitions toward Celtic peoples, just as the connection between Shakespeare’s audience and the quasi-mythical history behind Macbeth is one of transhistorical identification with, and colonial appropriation of, the “unlineal” Scottish royal genealogy through Banquo, the ancestor of James VI and I.

John White’s Picts project a dream of futurity onto America, enabling the colonizing Englishmen to imagine themselves as men from the future race “yet to come” that the Native Americans ostensibly expect. But they also project the Englishmen’s mythical past—an inherently foreign past, tied up in twisting and contested narratives about where barbarism was located and who the ancestors of the English even were—onto America’s present. The Algonkians thus become like some sort of ancestors of the Englishmen, uncannily translated through history to meet their spectrally begotten queer
children in the space out of time of America. The voyage to America could equally be imagined as a voyage back in time or a voyage to the future, complicating a simple primitivist or futurist trajectory either way. If the Picts evoke a past where the “inhabitants of the great Bretannie” “have been in times past as sauvage,” then they open up possibilities for oblique identifications between the present Virginians and the only contingently less savage present inhabitants of Great Britain. This strange continuity is triangulated through the aestheticized coexistence of alterity and identification communicated in the engravings of the Picts’ bodies. The Pictish man’s naked body is intricately painted, his ceremonial rings, chains, and weapons anatomized in the caption just as those of the Algonkians are. But most strikingly, his pose with his spear echoes the classical posture of the weroance with his bow and arrow. Both figures are presented in settings of war, the weroance in front of a raging battle and the Pict with the severed heads of his enemies, thus highlighting that the fantastmatic continuities being forged here are immanently dependent on the violence of conquest.

Such hinted-at counterhistories and possible futures can be glimpsed by reading through and around the engravings’ illusory claim “to showe” any kind of ethnographic or historical truth. The model of history posited by the Picts connects ancestors and descendants (adding fictive linkages and confusing who plays which role) in relations that exceed the time of a natural human life, and across suprahistorical time spans that negate any attempt to inscribe patrilineal descent. Nor does it seem to have any basis in the heterosexual dyad, or in intercourse. It is a fantasy kinship relation forged between present, deterritorialized Englishmen and a queer array of lost past and future selves. Like Harriot’s ventriloquized apocalyptic visions, the Picts insinuate radical alternatives to the telos of reproductive futurity, enacting many possible, irreducible identifications and affinities across time.

Afterlife: The History that Will Not Be

As the whole of this book has endeavored to show, any act of reading a text is always saturated by the currents of history flowing between
its production and our present. The Roanoke text’s web of affects is inextricable from the larger web binding it and its readers—all of its readers—into the violent history of European colonialism. Consequently, any attempt to reckon with the melancholic desires archived in Harriot’s and White’s text must reckon with its narrative afterlives. John White returned to Roanoke in 1590 to find the settlement razed to the ground and the word “Croatoan” carved on a post. Harsh weather forced the Englishmen to give up the search, and they returned, bereft, to England—and into the ensuing epoch of colonial melancholia for, and mythologization of, the “lost colony.”120 This event has immediate effects on the reception of the Report. By the time anyone read De Bry’s 1590 book, the real, mortal English settlers—whom White’s mythical Picts are raised up out of an “oolld English Cronicle” to mobilize the money and political will to rescue—had already joined their fictive ancestors in the lost, apocryphal time of legend. A 1593 letter to Richard Hakluyt, the last trace of John White in the archive, continues in a register of failed Protestant colonial anxiety that is immediately recognizable from Jean de Léry: impotence, frustration, regret, and longing. It wearily recounts a litany of obstacles—never enough time, never enough money, promises made and broken by Raleigh and the merchants who owned the ships. Sentence after sentence follows in this mode of nested negation: “Nevertheless that order was not observed, neither was the bond taken according to the intention aforesaid,” and so on.121 White echoes Jean de Léry’s “if it had not been”: “Which evils and unfortunate events (as wel to their owne losse as to the hinderance of the planters in Virginia) had not chanced, if the order set downe by Sir Walter Ralegh had bene observed, or if my dayly and continuall petitions for performance of the same might have taken any place.”122 He ends the letter with an admission of defeat and insufficiency: “And wanting my wishes, I leave off from prosecuting that whereunto I would to God my wealth were answerable to my will.”123 There is no amount of wealth, though, that could bend space-time so as to grant John White his wish, which is merely, improbably, for everything to have gone another way.

Through the circulation of Harriot’s and White’s text in the wake of the colony’s disappearance, the English mood of colonial
anxiety takes a sudden melancholic turn before England has even a toehold on the American continent. Once Jamestown and Plymouth are established, however, this colonial melancholia is directly transmitted to the new colonies—and to the ensuing settler state, the United States of America—as an acutely mythologized, racialized nostalgia for the “lost colony.” The afterlife of Harriot’s and White’s Report in American culture provides a vexed and frightening study in how the history of a text’s reception can, over time, fundamentally alter its meanings. It is a dramatic example of the power of transhistorical readerly identification to magnetize and amplify affects in a text that cannot be known in advance. The English colonial melancholia encoded in this text has been kept alive, continually reanimated, through a reading practice that is itself melancholic: that of the white nationalist racial imaginary. One of the things we urgently need to know at the current political moment is how queer analysis can shed light on the formation and workings of racism. To that end, I now delve into the afterlives of the Roanoke story in order to acknowledge and account for the historical connections between queer colonial melancholia and the white racial melancholia embedded in the American myth of the lost colony.

Rumors of the disappeared settlers’ fates continued to circulate through the subsequent English settlements. They become ghosts whose absent presence haunts Jamestown in the form of ever-shifting stories about their death and/or survival. Stories of a place to the south of Jamestown where there were “houses walled as ours” and men “cloathed like me” tantalize Captain John Smith when he arrives in 1607. One source for these fragments is Smith’s storied conversation with Wahunsonacock, the Algonkian ruler of more than thirty nations under the Powhatan chiefdom, who famously held Smith captive in 1607. A 1608 map from the expedition Smith mounted to search for it notes the area—the two place-names that keep recurring are the Tuscarora villages of Ocanahonan and Pakerakanick, on what today are called the Roanoke and Neuse rivers—where rumors locate the men clothed like Englishmen: “Here remayneth 4 men clothed that came from Roonock to Ocanahowan.” But Smith’s men seem not to have come any closer than hearsay.
These fragmentary traces of the settlers’ survival coexist with the news, transmitted thirdhand through delayed and disparate channels, that Wahunsonacock also told of massacring the settlers from Roanoke after they had been living with and as Chesapeake people for years. This may have occurred as late as 1607, seventeen years after they fled Roanoke. The same place-names to the south were recorded in 1609, with the rumor that there were “foure of the englishe alive” who had escaped there after Wahunsonacock’s late attack, but “you shall never recover them.” Many years later in England, the prolific anthologizer, Samuel Purchas, discloses that John Smith recounted to him how the great chief described being present at the murder of the white settlers. A subsequent secretary of Jamestown, veteran colonizer William Strachey, learned from Wahunsonacock’s emissary, Machumps, that the English “men women and childrene” of Roanoke for “twenty and od yeares had peaceably lyved intermixt with those salvages,” until Wahunsonacock decided, via a prophecy, that the Chesapeake represented a threat to his empire, and so put to the sword the entire tribe, its wereoance, and everyone living under its protection. In Strachey’s narrative, Machumps cites the same two villages where “the people have howses built with stone walles, and one story above another,” and “breed up tame turkeis about their howses.” These artifacts of material life—clothes, houses, turkeys—are supposed to be the telltale signs of Englishness. In a desperate inversion of John White’s meticulously comparatist descriptions of Algonkian clothes and houses, these unseen, imagined artifacts are compared with the crudest, most sweeping similies (houses “walled as ours,” men “clothed like me”) in an attempt to make man-made materials stand in for the bodies of English people.

One of the ways in which this narrative acquires some of its force of historical melancholia is in the warping of geographical distance by time and technology. None of the villages to the south named in the rumors are far from Jamestown today—only one to two hundred miles. But from the perspective of the Jamestown colonists’ extremely limited local knowledge and mobility, they are as inaccessible as if on another planet. Again and again, from native informants who, as Michael Leroy Oberg notes, have their own various political motives, the colonists hear of the Roanoke survivors, somewhere out
there in the interior of the continent of which they have only the barest grasp; but they are completely unable to reach them. These anecdotes of impotence become central to white settler melancholia by being repeated again and again as industrial technologies accelerate and compress the space-time of travel.

Another Jamestown colonist, George Percy, in 1607 saw a boy of about ten with “a head of hair of a perfect yellow, and a reasonable white skin” on a river expedition in Powhatan territory, but he was unable to follow up—an anecdote that inaugurates the explicit discourse of whiteness as a thing that was lost with the colony, and may be found again. Percy’s glimpsed and lost boy also inaugurates the practice—which continues into the present day—of reading the bodies of Native American people in the area for signs of European descent. Phenotypical traces of white ancestry—embodied, biological remnants of the lost colony—have been sought in, attributed to, and claimed by modern native tribes, most notably the storied recurrence of gray, blue, or green eyes noted among the Hatteras Indians (constructed since the eighteenth century as the descendants of the Outer Banks Croatoan people) and the North Carolina Tuscarora. Descent from the Roanoke English has also been posited by and about other modern native tribes of North Carolina, including the Lumbee and the Coree or Cohari people, and deployed to political ends of both native sovereignty and white nationalist nostalgia. In recent times, the allure of genetic science has led to a concerted search for traces of this specific “lost” Englishness in the DNA of present Americans of white, Native American, and African ancestry.

Strachey also records that in another place, a copper-mining town called Ritanoe, seven English survivors, “fower men, two boyes, and one yonge mayde,” remain, beating copper for another weroance. This reference to a “mayde” has fueled centuries of racialized fantasy about the survival of the much heralded first English baby, Virginia Dare—a story that signals the gathering nostalgia around whiteness and the problem of reproduction in settler colonialism. From the start, Virginia Dare fits into a preexisting chain of allegorical meanings in the colonial romance, where the American continent is figured as both Virginia’s namesake, the bygone Virgin Queen, Elizabeth, and a pure and resistant, exoticized indigenous
female body. The lost white female child offers an irresistible way for white settlers to extend this virgin/Virginia/America imagery into the future, transposing it into a distinctly white feminine birth-right that is “lost,” and that thus must be aspirationally fought for and reattained. This mythology of Virginia Dare is cultivated over the nineteenth century in sentimental literature (mostly written by women) deploying all the conventional tropes of romance. Starting with a fictional treatment in 1840 by Cornelia L. Tuthill, this genre imagines her as a beautiful maiden who sanctifies the primeval Virginia woods (and converts natives to Christianity) with her pure white Englishness, and has star-crossed (chaste) love affairs with worthy native suitors. One of the recurring Elizabethan tropes in this lore casts Virginia Dare as the elusive and immortal “white doe” of Englishness. The white doe myth circulates at least from 1888, when it appears in a fanciful travel article in the *New York Times*, framed in the style of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a tale spun by a garrulous captain on an uncannily protracted sea voyage. It enters mass circulation as a faux Native American epic poem titled “The White Doe, or The Fate of Virginia Dare, an Indian Legend,” written in 1901 by Sallie Southall Cotten. In Cotten’s poem, a chaste and genteel Virginia Dare, living among friendly Algonkians as a half-assimilated (yet thoroughly white) princess, is transformed into an enchanted white deer by a curse from a native sorcerer whose advances she rejects. In an exoticized American twist on the triangulated love-lies-ableeding romance trope recognizable from Beaumont and Fletcher’s *Philaster*, the deer is shot while drinking from a stream by two men at the same instant. One of the men is her true love, whose enchanted arrow will break the curse, and the other is a striving young warrior. Virginia Dare becomes a maid again at the moment of her death, and a new vine of sweet red grapes (North Carolina scuppernongs) springs up where her blood has spilled. The claim to the land that Cotten’s poem posits through sacrificial white womanhood is materially continuous with the projected planting enterprises that Thomas Harriot imagines in his *Report*: Cotten was a bourgeois booster of both women’s rights and the wine industry, and “The White Doe,” with its agricultural origin myth, was written to market Virginia Dare–brand scuppernong wine to women.
The story becomes more fantastical over a proliferation of retellings, in print, on television, and, copiously, in the virtual space of the Internet. These retellings posit the “mystery” of the lost colony as a foundational uncanny tale, installing a kernel of the supernatural, weird, or unexplained at the origin of the English colonization of North America.\textsuperscript{143} Part of the allure of the uncanny version of the Roanoke story, with its combination of overwrought mystery (No one knows!) and fantastical speculation (Alien abduction? A massive royal conspiracy?) is that it elides the unforgiving reality: a group of people out of place, completely unable to provide for themselves, died of exposure or starvation, or were killed, or joined another society. Interjecting an element of the mysterious into the story is a tactic to explain this spectacular colonial failure as a glitch in an otherwise righteous and feasible agenda rather than confronting its essential folly.\textsuperscript{144} Beginning the story of a white Protestant presence on this continent with a founding uncanny mystery also lends it the patina of myth, throwing events of the late 1580s back into mythological time, or drawing the time of ancient wonders forward into the early modern and modern eras.\textsuperscript{145} A vast body of speculative literature and film in recent decades (including fiction by Philip José Farmer, Harlan Ellison, Michael Scott, and Neil Gaiman, and television by Stephen King and Ryan Murphy, most recently an entire season of \textit{American Horror Story}) imagines what became of Virginia Dare and the colonists, spinning out fantastical plots involving alien planets, time travel, spirit realms, immortality, vengeful gods and demons, vampirism, and human sacrifice.\textsuperscript{146} The lost girl-child has become a homegrown archetype who can be used to construct darker fantasy versions of American history, as part of the long tradition of engaging with the haunting echoes of colonial violence through speculative and gothic fiction.

What bears further interrogation when tracing the queer affective posterity of the Roanoke story is the dependence of so many of the melancholic offspring it has spawned on fantastical models of descent. This is not incidental. Michael Harkin, in one of the few scholarly interrogations of the Roanoke myth, notes how the telling and retelling of the lost colony narrative bends time and space to endow the white settler colony with legitimacy.\textsuperscript{147} But the myth bends, and
indeed queers, sex and reproduction as well, endlessly inventing asexually and mystically generative futures for Virginia Dare. As Harkin points out, the uncomfortable paradox of the Roanoke myth for white nationalists is that the melancholically longed-for white survival depends, inescapably, on interracial sex and reproduction. In any scenario in which Virginia Dare’s life or reproductive futurity may have continued, it was with and in a community of indigenous people. Subsequent white romanticizing narratives like Sallie Southall Cotten’s have then devised spiritual genealogies connecting Virginia Dare to later Native Americans, to cover over their discomfort with interracial sex as the prerequisite for descent. Yet Michael Leroy Oberg makes the point that any possible survival of the English from Roanoke, among the Chesapeake or Tuscarora or any other nation, could only have taken place through full adoption, a formal ritualized process for the making of kin in which people take on new identities, clans, and lineages—an alternative system to what Mark Rifkin calls white “settler sexuality,” with its heteronormativizing biological definition of kinship. Thus, ghosting all of these fantasies is the trace of a real historical practice of nonbiological, nonpatrilineal kin making, on which all of the imaginary, white-authored narratives unknowingly depend, even as they ignore it.

Along with Harkin, I reject efforts to “strip myth away” from this story, as if that were possible. The writing of history, as Hayden White and others have shown, is a performative process of myth making and narrative production. So too, as this book has demonstrated, is the act of reading. The supreme irony of the Roanoke myth lies in the contrast between reality and how it gets interpreted: that the successful indigenous defeat and/or absorption of a precarious settlement of incompetent white invaders has been mythologized as proof of the rightness, even foreordination, of an English settler state. This entire meaning-making complex is predicated on a desperate white settler wish: that the disappearance of the Roanoke colony has to mean something. The meanings made for it, then, have been conditioned by white nationalist ideology. Despite the longevity of their tale, the Roanoke settlers were by no means the only group of people lost in the longer story of this particular stretch of Atlantic coastline. The ship of Sir Francis Drake that rescued Ralph Lane and his
men from the Grenville voyage in 1586 had on board several hundred people—both enslaved and free, including indigenous people from South America, African people from the Guinea Coast, people of African descent from Cape Verde and Hispaniola (Santo Domingo), and some number of Turks and Moors—people from almost every continent, in other words. All but one hundred of these people were evidently left on Roanoke when Drake departed with Lane’s men, and their fate has merited none of the romantic mythologizing that has attended the disappearance of the white settlers. Their possible survival through adoption by native peoples of the area is another lost chapter in the story of North American race, irrecoverable except through a different kind of speculative melancholia, in which they introduce a foundational element of créolité on the continent, at a moment before the triumph of English racial schema. The storied lost colony was not even the only lost white colony. The fifteen English men that Richard Grenville left behind on Roanoke in a doomed attempt to hold the fort when he returned to find that Lane’s colony had departed with Drake also disappeared without a trace.

When we start counting Native American people among the lost, the company expands to include the peoples known as the Roanoke Indians, the Hatteras Indians, and the Chesapeake. All those lost to the “invisible bullets” of epidemics must have seemed uncannily spirited away en masse by their mysterious assailants. Individual native people experienced other dramatic losses and displacements. The fabled Algonkian interlocutors Manteo and Wanchese were lost to their people and their country, first when they were taken to England by the Amadas and Barlowe expedition in 1584 and brought to reside in Raleigh’s house, and further lost—loss compounded upon loss—when they traveled again to Roanoke as agents, guides, and translators for the English, their fates ultimately diverging as Wanchese returned to his people to oppose the English while Manteo appears to have shared the fate of the disappeared white settlers. Another Algonkian man who was taken back to England and named Raleigh by Richard Grenville died of illness in Devonshire. Just as Jean de Léry cannot directly mourn the impossibility of remaining with the Tupinamba, none of these losses can be directly mourned in the racial and sexual imaginary of the American settler state, because to
mourn them would entail acknowledging them, and to acknowledge them would require accepting the ragged, blood-soaked, perverse multiplicity of colonialism—and of race. It is only the reproductive lost colony, the one with the white baby girl, that gets installed as the melancholic object, precisely for the fantasies it incites.

The undercurrent of white racial nostalgia running through the romanticized Virginia Dare lore morphs into an uglier form in the late twentieth century. In 1999, an English-born journalist, himself an immigrant to the United States, founded the VDARE Foundation, under the sign of the white doe, as a media outlet and activist organization devoted to construing (nonwhite) immigration as an existential threat to American and Western culture, and promulgating eugenics-based alarms about racial degeneration. The name of Virginia Dare functions in this context as a rallying point for the belief that white Anglo-Saxon and Celtic people have a natural entitlement to the continent of North America (a claim ironically staked through a baby who was immediately lost). White supremacist political movements are broadly attracted to this period of history, which they invest in through the ideology of “the Renaissance,” not least because it marks the start of European colonial invasions in the Americas and Africa. One currently ascendant white supremacist group, Identity Evropa, uses Renaissance art, specifically Michelangelo’s *David*, on its posters and in its messaging (following in a long tradition of fascist deployments of classical European art) as shorthand for an imagined moment of generalized European triumph. Such white nationalist positions have gained new visibility in the current political moment in the United States, activating and giving voice to the feelings of white dispossession and white aggrievement that fueled the rise of Donald Trump. (Trump’s slogan, “Make America Great Again,” explicitly evokes an idea of American Renaissance—which is also the name of a white supremacist organization.) Activists who unabashedly appeal to white nationalism, including Steve Bannon (until 2018) and Stephen Miller (currently as I write this), have been elevated to advisory positions in the Trump administration, crafting policies—such as the 2017 travel ban on citizens of Muslim countries, and the policy of separating children from their families (including those
(legally seeking asylum) at the Mexican border—that seek to restrict the opportunities, benefits, and protections of American life to white people, tacitly defining real or rightful Americans as those of European descent. Meanwhile, the VDARE Foundation and its promoters are a regular presence at conservative political conventions, inveighing against the contaminating influence of “foreign” immigration and selling their publications, fevered screeds that embody the blatantly desire-fueled concatenation of evidence and fantasy, fact and myth that marks both early modern colonial writing and the political rhetoric of Trumpism.\textsuperscript{158}

The deployment of the myth of the lost colony to white nationalist political ends, specifically through the figure of the lost white female child, is a part of the erotic legacy of the Roanoke venture that cannot be ignored. The same libidinal currents that fuel Thomas Harriot’s text and John White’s drawings continue to animate its afterlives. There is an affective through line here that extends from Jean de Léry’s and Thomas Harriot’s florid descriptive fantasies; to White’s queer Picts, resurrected from an ancient chronicle; to John Smith’s and George Percy’s and James Strachey’s thwarted chasing after traces of Englishness in the wilderness. It then extends from the Renaissance to our own time, through Sallie Southall Cotten’s sacrificial white doe; to Virginia Dare imagined as the immortal time-traveling witch of science fiction; to the VDARE Foundation’s installation of John White’s lost granddaughter as the rightful white Eve of the North American continent. The affect that knits these figures together is colonial melancholia, the unmournable loss of something one could never have had in the first place, because what one has lost is not the thing in its own right, but the ideational part of oneself represented in the thing.\textsuperscript{159} To be explicit, it is the unmournable, still-disavowed loss of the fantasy that white Europeans are the rightful and natural inhabitants of North America. In the white nationalist imaginary, the refutation of this fantasy cannot be assimilated, only transmuted into various fantastical forms. That this is a queer form of colonial desire does not mean that its political consequences are subversive or liberatory. Queer desires can be violent, appropriating, annihilating, racist, fascist; and violent desires can be queer.
What I have endeavored to show by tracing these stories is how queer colonial melancholia is structured by—and implicated with—racial melancholia.

Ann Anlin Cheng describes the constitutive melancholia at the heart of race as a mechanism of neither transparent identification nor alterity, because these are not pure or opposite poles, but rather one of dissimulation: “What if colonial desire itself is melancholic, and longs clandestinely to mime the ‘foreigner’ inside? What if we recast the failure of mimicry (in Bhabha’s terms), as instead an allowance for dissimulation? And what if dissimulation—the other that is me—provides the very structure of identification?” Both Harriot’s ventriloquized theories of murderous future air-lovers and the yearning genealogical image-magic retroactively performed by John White’s drawings of the Picts can be read as artifacts of dissimulation. They betray clandestine identifications that work in both directions, for a displaced subject that is both itself and other to itself. Jean de Léry, too, imagines a self from another time, neither straightforwardly American nor European, neither past nor future, but combining elements of both. Dissimulation holds back and encrypts the dangerous and powerful secret parts of the self; as such, it is intimately implicated with queer desire, with shameful feelings that are at once disavowed and assiduously cultivated. In fact, these same affective currents of impossible identification and unspeakable love, as traced by Cheng, Bhabha, Fanon, Sharon Patricia Holland, Siobhan Somerville, and others, have been the shaping conditions for the inextricably entwined historical development of race and sexuality.

Judith Butler’s account of melancholia resonates with the colonial longings I have unpacked and sets up the final point I want to make: that the overwrought affective outpourings of renunciation, loss, obsession, projection, and delusion that I have spent the fore-going pages describing as queer in affect, as queer moods and modes of expression, are intrinsically, at every level—structurally, psychically, topically, and historically—part of the omnipresent, polymorphous discursive regime of sexuality. The melancholias at the heart of whiteness, heterosexuality, and binary gender work by an interrelated mechanism. To recall Eve Sedgwick’s observation about paranoia and homophobia, this is just “how the world works.” To posit
a corollary to Sedgwick’s and Guy Hocquenghem’s point that gays have been construed as paranoid because paranoia is how homophobia works: queers are not uniquely melancholy; melancholia is the structure by which sexual identity is violently formed. We live in “a culture of gender melancholy,” Butler says, “in which masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and un-grievable love.” When a prohibition—say, against a same-sex love object—is ritualized and repeated throughout the culture, identity in that culture is then formed in response to the unmournable, unspeakable loss of that interdicted love object. Yet not only the object but also the loss itself—any trace of grief or mourning or acknowledgment of ever having loved—must also be disavowed. What we call heterosexuality comes into being through these incorporated disavowals, and gender is then “formed and consolidated through identifications that are composed in part of disavowed grief.” This grief is not only for the unmournable loss of the same-gendered love object, though; it is also for the unmournable loss of the other-gendered self. “If one is a girl to the extent that one does not want a girl,” then becoming a girl not only entails, as Butler notes, giving up the girl as love object; it also means giving up the ideation of oneself as a boy—a boy being, of course, the kind of creature who could want, and have, a girl. This is what I see in Léry’s, Harriot’s, and White’s registers of colonial writing: longing for impossible transformation into something they can never be, in order to have something they can never have.

Butler makes the point that this impossible wanting need not be for another human being: “The ‘other’ may be an ideal, a country, a concept of liberty” that haunts the conscience as an internalized ideality. “An other or an ideal may be ‘lost’ by being rendered unspeakable,” she says, “impossible to declare,” but it is guaranteed to escape, somehow, in affect, “emerging in the indirection of complaint and the heightened judgments of conscience.” I think of Jean de Léry’s complaints and “heightened judgments of conscience” about the relative savagery of his own countrymen versus the inhabitants of Brazil—complaints that founded, through his bond of friendship with Montaigne, an incipient future discourse insisting on native peoples’ humanity in, even because of, their difference. The gory fantasias and identificatory ravishments recorded by these three would-be
colonists are indelibly about violence, about the historical and psychic processes by which so many people, things, possessions, lands, loves, and affiliations were, and are, forcibly lost. But they are also invitations, which I want to heed, to reconsider the very meanings of identification, alterity, and interpretation. Like the gaze of Richard Brome’s delusional pseudotraveler Peregrine in *The Antipodes*, the gazes of these melancholic voyagers offer themselves as lenses for gazing at the larger concern of this book: the problem of reading. The European invaders’ narratives reveal more about them than about the Americans they describe—as, I contend, our critical approaches to early modern texts, as readers in the present (for what else could we be?), do about us. But these documents of failure also contain new imaginings of how time and generation and descent might work, in light of the new dimensions of desire and death engendered by colonial contact. In other words, they perform a kind of queer theory, rethinking relationality and pleasure and empathy in a world fractured and turned upside down.